



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

*For the members of the Omaha Running Club * Vol. 52 * Fall 2023*



The field takes off at the start of the half-marathon, which was captured by Bryant England (pictured at the far right wearing bib No. 2113). The 37-year-old Omaha resident ran the 13.1-mile course in 1:16:00. (Photos by Justin Barnes Photography.)

Heartland keeps getting better

The 2023 Heartland Marathon's ninth edition was once again blessed with ideal weather, and that, perhaps, was responsible for a record number of finishers. The full, half and 10K races brought a combined 723 runners across the finish line.

The course and the event won praises from participants who took advantage of the flat route for some impressive times. Take the men's champion, for example. Robert Nizzi of Omaha was timed in 2:38:40, which qualified him



Kristina Krajicek won the women's marathon.

for the prestigious Boston Marathon. The women's fastest finisher, Kristina Krajicek of Omaha, was clocked in a speedy 3:14:06. The two winners' times failed to set course records, but they didn't miss by much.

Half-marathon champion was Bryant England of Omaha, timed in 1:16:00, and the first female finisher was Payton Birkel of O'Neill, Neb., in 1:26:12.

Winner of the 10K race, which had 127 finishers, was Emily Scarcello of Omaha. Her time of 41:23 was 90 seconds faster than runner-up Mike Grace of Omaha.

See Heartland, Page 3

Youth takes over men's marathon

Robert Nizzi, at age 19, becomes the youngest male champion of the Heartland Marathon. **Page 2.**

Friends bond during training clinic

Ashley Sams and Sarah Ward credit preparation for an enjoyable Go Girl Run over Labor Day Weekend. **Page 7.**

Heartland becomes family affair

Not only did Robert Nizzi become the youngest Heartland Marathon champion on Sept. 24, he qualified for the Boston Marathon. His mother, Dawn, wasn't able to see him finish, but she had a good reason: She was still on the course, working her way toward the finish line of the half-marathon.

Robert, 19, burned the 26.2-mile course in 2:38:40, which was less than 90 seconds off the record set in 2021 by Kory Cool of Manhattan, Kan. Nizzi did, however, qualify for Boston, every runner's dream.



Robert Nizzi's winning time of 2:38:40 qualified him for Boston. (Justin Barnes Photography photo.)

Winning the Heartland came in just Nizzi's second full marathon. His first took place last May at the Lincoln Marathon, where he came in 10th overall in 2:42:45.

"When I finished the Lincoln Marathon, I wanted to run another one," Nizzi said. "I looked up Omaha marathons, and (the Heartland) came up."

Asked to compare the Lincoln and Omaha courses, the former Omaha Creighton Prep cross country runner said they definitely had differences.

"I liked Lincoln, because you didn't go out and back twice," he said. "But I found the Omaha course prettier. You got to run through the fields of wild flowers. I thought it was really pretty. Lincoln was run through downtown and the more residential areas."

Nizzi said conditions were ripe for a good finish.

"The weather was perfect," he said. "I had a perfect day for it. Everything played out pretty well. I didn't run on Saturday, and I felt really good. It couldn't have gone any better."

He appreciated the support and how the Heartland was managed.

"I thought it went extremely smooth," Nizzi said. "Everything was easy. There were more people on the Iowa side than I thought there would be. That was fun to see."

Choosing to pick up running in high school was easy for Nizzi. His first love was football, but then he changed his thinking just before starting high school.

"The plan was to play football my whole life," he said. "Then I got to seventh or eighth grade and started running a little bit,



Robert Nizzi celebrates with his mother, Dawn. (Justin Barnes Photography photo.)

not much training but just racing. So I chose cross country, and that's where it all started."

He was on the Creighton Prep team that twice qualified for the Class A state cross country meet.

Running is a family affair in the Nizzi household, although Robert's mother insists she now is more of a "serious walker." Dawn had many half-marathons under her belt, but as time went on, she elected to scale back a bit.

"I lost track of how many half-marathons I've done," she said. "They're a good motivator. They make you question your life decisions at the 8-mile mark, for me at least."

Her goal for half-marathons was to finish in under 3 hours, and she just missed that at this year's Lincoln Marathon (3:04:19). The weather, unfortunately, did not cooperate.

"It got just wicked hot," she said. "I cramped up so bad."

She chopped 4 minutes off her Lincoln time at the Heartland and placed ninth in her (60-64) age group.

Dawn has enjoyed watching her son do so well in just his first two marathons.

"It's been fun to see him embrace the sport and feel some success," Dawn said. "He has his sights set on qualifying for the Olympic Trials in the next four years."

Heartland marked her 50th state

Josie Burton had just one state left – Nebraska – to check off on her quest to finish a road race in all 50 states. So one day she did an internet search, and what should pop up but the Heartland Marathon. Once registered for the 10K, she rounded up her personal cheering squad of 16 to make the drive from Granite City, Ill., a suburb northeast of St. Louis.

“I just found it online,” Burton said by phone after returning home. “It sounded good. Everything about Omaha sounded fine, so I thought this would work.”

It would become the first Omaha visit for her and the friends and relatives cheering her on and also participating.

“We knew about the zoo and a couple of the museums,” Burton said. “We love baseball in our family, and we knew about the College World Series and saw where that took place. We were really impressed.”

She continued: “We went to dinner on Saturday night, and when we got out, it was about 8:30. The whole downtown was fun. Everything was open, and people were everywhere. That doesn’t happen in St. Louis.”

The race itself, Burton said, was enjoyable.

“I thought it was good,” she said. “It was fun crossing the bridge. I thought it was cool being in two states, one foot in one and one in the other. There was plenty of room. We were nice and spread out, so I never felt crowded. I always felt safe, and all the crossings were good.”

Asked which states stood out among the 50 she can now claim to have completed, Hawaii, as you’d expect, would be at the top.

“I didn’t pick any distance that I had to do,” she said. “I just wanted to pick ones that were fun in the state. I actually did a



Josie Burton, center, enjoys the 10K finish. Escorting her were friend Katie Upton and son Andrew. (Photo by Justin Barnes Photography.)

marathon in Honolulu. It was a good one.”

Her 49th state was Alaska, a race called the Anchorage Runfest. It was good, Burton said, but the Heartland was better.

“Everything was great,” she said. “There were plenty of water stops — even for a 10K. You had plenty of room to grab your Gatorade or water. At all the traffic crossings, everybody was paying attention, so it was all good.”

With 50 states in the vault, Burton doesn’t plan on quitting. She’s eyeing a race in Savannah, Ga., in December. Then she’ll return home for the Hot Chocolate Run in St. Louis.

Heartland: California marathon next for Omahan

Continued from Page 1

Krajicek won the women’s full in her first attempt at the Heartland. She was happy with how her sixth overall 26.2-mile race went.

“I really liked it,” she said. “I was surprised that I liked the course. I was a little skeptical looking at it at first, but I really loved the course going back and forth and seeing all the runners.”

Krajicek’s last marathon was the ultimate — Boston — in 2017.

“It was so much fun,” she said. “It was harder to run because there are so many people, and everything is blocked off. You have to stay within the barricades. But the joy of Boston is so much fun.”

She’s glad she picked the Heartland as her first marathon since

Boston.

“It proved I can still do it,” she said. “I’m going to run one in California for my 40th birthday in December. That’s why I picked the Heartland. I wanted to run one when I was 39 and one at 40.”

The Heartland course, Krajicek said, for the most part was ideal.

“The hardest part is going over the pedestrian bridge at the end,” she said, “because you’re tired, you’re almost done and it’s uphill. But the rest of it is pretty flat.”

The event was well-executed, she said.

“I thought it was great,” she said. “I thought it was well-organized and ran well. The crowd support was pretty good for 7 a.m. in Omaha, Nebraska.”

Record is set for total finishers

This year's ninth Heartland Marathon benefited from outstanding weather, and perhaps that explains how a record number of runners crossed the finish line of the three races — 10K, half and full marathon. The past three Heartlands showed a trend of increased participation.

Numbers for the 10K and half this year were similar — both within two of each other — compared to 2022, but a record 207 completed the full marathon, topping last year's previous high of 179. In all, 723 finishers were recorded, topping the 695 from a year ago.

A near-record was set in the full when 19-year-old Robert Nizzi was clocked in 2:38:40. He just missed topping the 2021 time of 2:37:24 by Kory Cool of Manhattan, Kan.

RRCA Nebraska state champions

The Heartland also served as the Nebraska State Road Runners Club of America Marathon Championship event. This year's honors went to:

»**Female Open:** Kristina Krajicek, Omaha, 39, 3:14:19.

»**Female Master (40-99):** Carie Maguire, Omaha, 46, 3:30:30.

»**Female Grand Master (50-99):** Nguyen Webster, Portland, Ore., 52, 4:08:11.

»**Female Grand Master (60-99):** Missy Orr, Holly Springs, N.C., 60, 4:56:53.

»**Male Open:** Robert Nizzi, Omaha, 19, 2:38:40.

Heartland Finishers

Year	10K	Half	Full	Total
2015	84	290	97	471
2016	107	253	89	449
2017	103	262	98	463
2018	97	248	117	462
2019	Canceled (weather)			
2020	59	150	126	335
2021	110	270	129	509
2022	129	387	179	695
2023	127	389	207	723

»**Male Master (40-99):** Will Lippert, Chandler, Ariz., 45, 3:13:51.

»**Male Grand Master (50-99):** Filippo Imperiali, New York, N.Y., 59, 3:23:27.

»**Male Senior Grand Master (60-99):** Todd Rose, York, Pa., 62, 3:58:07.

Runners came from near and far away

As the Heartland grows in popularity, so has the number of states represented. And participants came from long distances as well.

All told, 39 states and the District of Columbia were listed on the official results. Two runners came from Fairbanks, Alaska, and one traveled from Great Britain.

Heartland Marathon photos



Photos by Justin Barnes Photography.

2023 ORC Board Officers and Board Members

Officers

President, Tom Whitaker
lorraineandtom@cox.net

VP & Marketing, Daren Konda
darenkonda@hotmail.com

Secretary, Mandy Kennedy
mandykennedy@hotmail.com

Treasurer, Tim Lens
tmlens@yahoo.com

Directors

Jill Banaszak, Go Girl Run
jillmbanaszak@gmail.com

Pam Car, RRCA State Rep.
pacar@cox.net

Marty Ertz, Volunteer Coordinator
martin.ertz@gmail.com

Kim Kanellis
kimkanellis@gmail.com

ORC Advisors

John Fey, Newsletter
jmfey1952@gmail.com

Alan Higley, Event Scoring/Hall-of-
Fame Coordinator
alanhigley@hotmail.com

Pam Car, Director Step into
Running
pacar@cox.net

Gary Meyer, Equipment Coordinator
gfmeyer.gm@gmail.com

Kelli Sweet, Design Consultant
sweetkelli@cox.net

Vanessa Urbach, Trail Cleanup Dir.
vcherko@gmail.com

ORC email address:
omaharun@gmail.com

For more on the ORC, go
to: omaharun.org

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President's Message

I am writing this just a couple days after the conclusion of Omaha's Heartland Marathon for 2023, and I hardly know where to start to comment on this year's event. I am grateful for the beautiful weather and the increase in participation we experienced this year.

But what I consider to be a very important factor — and the one for which I express deep appreciation and gratitude — is our tremendous volunteers who I believe everyone will agree are the single most important contributors to the success we experienced.

We received many compliments from our participants on the enthusiasm and support everyone provided. I am deeply grateful for all the hard work and dedication everyone so freely gave to the cause. Thank you one and all. You have provided continuing elevation of our reputation to a level that will surely help our local event grow and prosper in the future.

A special thank you must also go to our Race Committee and Board for the leadership and just plain hard work that went into presenting our event. We are convinced that we did a good job, but the real proof of how we did is in the feedback from our participants. So I would like to take the liberty of quoting below a couple we received:

"What an amazing race today, so grateful to be a part of it."

"First of all, thank you and the Omaha Running Club for putting together a great event. Visiting Omaha (from California) was an impulse decision, but I'm glad to have visited the city and participated in the race. Everything was well-organized, from the communication to the execution."

"I love the race and will be back next year."

"Thank you for a great race."

Special recognition and appreciation are

due for our sponsors who have demonstrated their belief in us by providing financial support. Our Supporting Sponsors:

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» Justin Barnes, Photographer

We also say thank you for the support provided by these fine groups:

» Think Whole Person Healthcare (A big shout-out to Dr. Bill Weeks and staff at the medical tent.)

» Root Cos Marketing Group

And the following volunteers:

» Omaha Running Club's own Bean Team, led by Diane Garza, handling finish-line food service.

» Boy Scouts Troop 331 presenting the Color Guard and finish-line medal and water



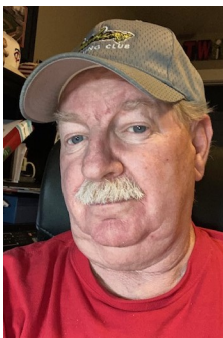
Tom Whitaker

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Heartland's hard work pays off

Another Heartland Marathon is in the books, and it just keeps on growing. Can it really be that next year will be the Omaha Running Club's 10th signature event? What went from just an idea a decade ago has become a destination marathon for runners from all over the country. Heck, one even traveled from Great Britain. (No, there was no sighting of the Queen.)

Participants I've interviewed over the years have marveled at how well the Heartland is managed, and that certainly was the case again last month. From the staging area, the course and support for the runners, the praise overflows — as well it should be.



Having assisted with many races over the years — nothing on the scale of a marathon — I have a clear understanding of the work it takes to make a road race successful and a pleasant experience for the participants. Most runners don't fully comprehend the massive behind-the-scenes planning that takes place for any race, but a full — or even half — marathon is monumental to say the least.

As Club president Tom Whitaker rightfully notes each year in his post-Heartland remarks, the event could never succeed without the support of our volunteers. Yes, countless hours are spent months in advance on what's needed on the course and in the staging area, but the top priority of the race committee is lining up helpers around the start-finish line and, of course, on the course.

I clearly remember my four full marathons, starting in 1983 with the Lincoln Marathon. There weren't that many water stations on the course that back then took runners around the Lincoln airport. That all changed when Lincoln officials changed the course to keep runners closer to downtown.

Fast-forward to my last marathon, which I ran 21 years ago with our oldest son in Baltimore. There was a water station no more than 2 miles apart over the 26.2-mile, out-and-back course. I was amazed by the support from the volunteers and spectators lining the course. It helped (sort of) take my mind off the pain surging through my 50-year-old body.

I returned to Baltimore 10 years later (2012) to run/walk the half-marathon. We were taken aback again at the support — which included bands along the way over that same course (complete with all the rolling hills). (My favorite memory was spotting a card table with small Dixie cups filled with shots of beer, which, of course, we slammed down for the final push toward downtown.)

Not to be forgotten on top of all the work our race committee puts in for the Heartland is that a portion of the proceeds from the event benefit charity. Checks have been presented to the Council Bluffs Police Department, the Omaha Police Foundation and the Heartland Ready communications group.

Again, hats off to the race committee, the Club's Board and all the volunteers who made the Heartland a hit. If you've never participated in our event, please give it some thought. It's a great feeling when you make it a fun happening for all.

Message: Runners from more than 30 states came

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handouts.

- »United States Marines
- »Creighton University Alpha Phi Omega
- »College of St. Mary
- »Mercy volleyball team
- »Omaha Central High School Athletics
- »Heather Lammars-Nelson, pacer coordinator, along with our pace team
- »Bike support group led by Kim Kanellis

And where would we be without runners? Thank you to all who supported our events and trusted us to put on races they could

enjoy, particularly those who came from 37 states other than Nebraska and Iowa to be with us.

We believe we are indeed successful because we are an event put on by runners, for runners. Our local presence year-round provides familiarity with the local running community. Our number one priority is putting on a good event to support our local and out-of-town running guests, and we believe comments such as those above support our position.

We are already at work planning next year's races set to take place Sept. 22, 2024. Stay tuned for further details.

In the meantime, registration is open for our Halloween-themed run, The Bones Run, at Standing Bear Lake on Oct. 27 at 7 p.m. This always-fun event is followed by a great after-party and awards ceremony. Sign up today!

Next ORC event:
What: The Bones Run
Date: Oct. 27, 7 p.m.

Go Girl 5K gives friendship a lift

Ashley Sams and Sarah Ward were friends before they registered for the Step Into Running program that began in June. That added more fun into crossing the finish line of the Sept. 4 Go Girl Run, the climax of the summer training clinic.

Both Omaha residents credited the training program for making the 5K race on the Keystone Trail more enjoyable.

"I probably would not have been nearly as successful without it," Ashley said shortly after catching her breath. "I am almost nine months pregnant, so I really needed accountability. I needed consistency. I needed something that was manageable."

While Ashley was a "veteran" 5K runner, not so with Sarah. Go Girl was her first. She admitted to being "a little bit" nervous but was confident that finishing wasn't going to be a problem.

"I practiced (before the event), and I did some really slow 5Ks," Sarah said. "It was comfortable and I knew that I could do this, but I was worried about the time (she finished in 33:45)."

Sarah's motivation for signing up for the training clinic was an invitation to run a half-marathon with her sister-in-law.

"I hadn't done anything really physically challenging in a while," she said, "so why not? And then I realized I needed to train for it, because I'm not a runner."

The training clinic, headed by Jeremy Kaliff, was a blessing, Sarah said.

"It gave me some good structure," she said. "I really like having a structured routine. I'm a teacher, so it just fit perfectly into my schedule and then just having the accountability of the people show up with me."

Ashley credited Jeremy for helping her prepare for the Labor Day Weekend race.

"She was a great resource for nutrition and hydration," Ashley said. "She was a great motivator. She would say it doesn't have



Pals Sarah Ward, left, and Ashley Sams look fresh after completing the Go Girl Run.

to be perfect, because as long as you don't give up you're doing good."

Sarah agreed, saying, "Jeremy was always encouraging and always so authentically herself. She made everybody feel welcome. The group just flowed naturally."

Sarah said the training clinic inspired her to have a good first 5K.

"It built up my confidence," she said, "and it was really exciting to see what I could do with the effort and time put in."

It's no wonder why they were all smiles at the finish line.

Baton passed to new leader of Step Into Running

The Sept. 4 running of the Go Girl Run marked the end of Jeremy Kaliff's eight-year connection to the Step Into Running program, including five as director. She's passing the torch to new ORC Board member Pam Car.

"It was hard work," Jeremy said, "but it was awesome to watch the girls progress and be able to accomplish what they set out to do at the beginning of the program. Watching them achieve their goals and being able to be a part of that was amazing."

She enjoyed leading the last of the five training groups.

"We had a larger group of participants than previous



Pam Car will be taking over the Step Into Running program next spring.

years, and it included several mothers and daughters, which was very exciting," Jeremy said.

Pam said she knows she has big shoes to fill but looks forward to taking over.

"I'm going to do what we can," she said, "and we'll have some interesting and fun changes."

ORC president Tom Whitaker lauded Jeremy's work, saying: "She has done an absolutely fantastic job. We're sorry to see her have to give it up."

OMAHA RUNNING CLUB

P.O. BOX 34602 OMAHA, NE 68134-0602

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