



# OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

*For the members of the Omaha Running Club \* Vol. 54\* Spring 2025*

## Two new Hall-of-Famers saluted

The Feb. 2 ORC Chiller Challenge was blessed with temperatures nearing 60 degrees, which might explain the high turnout for the annual meeting that followed the three morning races. There were 89 finishers in the 8K run, 26 in the 2-mile race (ranging in age from 5 to 85) and five in the kids' fun run.

The annual meeting kicked off after lunch — which was provided by Orsi's Italian Bakery & Pizzeria — with ORC vice president Daren Konda giving an overview of races for 2025. He then turned over the microphone to president Tom Whitaker, who started the brief annual meeting.

The highlight, as always, was the announcement of the new inductees into the ORC Hall of Fame, Jodi Semonell and Mike Huggenberger. Alan Higley, HOF coordinator, first saluted Konda and other Board members for their hard work putting together various ORC events — including the now-named Omaha Marathon. Higley also singled out Whitaker for leading the marathon planning committee.

“That event couldn't survive without some of the people behind the scenes,” Higley said. “We need sponsorships and thrive on registrations for that.”

Before revealing the two inductees, Higley called on John Thomas (Class of 2004) to make a special recognition announcement. Thomas introduced another 2004 Hall-of-Famer, Nancy McCormick, his friend who was preparing to attempt a world indoor rowing record for her (90-94) age group. (See more on Page 4.)

Higley then asked the first 2024 inductee, Semonell, to step forward. She was honored as an accomplished ultra-marathoner who took up running later in life.

“I wasn't always a runner,” she told the crowd. “I remember 15 or 20 years ago running down the street, and I would see people running up and down the street and thought they looked like they were having fun. I wished I could do something like that.”

Semonell's wish came true as she has run numerous mara-



**The Feb. 2 Chiller Challenge and annual meeting drew a large crowd at Papillion Landing.**

thons, including Boston, Chicago and New York. She expanded her horizons to the ultra-marathon level and proved highly successful at that distance as well.

Huggenberger was recognized for his many years as a competitor, starting in 1980, and as a race volunteer. During his remarks, he recalled one of his favorite training runs.

“It was a 10-mile run on a hot day,” Huggenberger said, “and I followed it up with three cold beers. It didn't get any better than that.”

With the two newest inductees, the Hall has grown to 53 individuals and one group (the Bean Team in 2020).

The Club president said the turnout for this year's Chiller was the largest he can recall since the event moved to Papillion. And he was pleased with the results of the HOF voting.

“We keep looking every year for those who have done something important in the running world or been beneficial to the Club,” Whitaker said. “Both of them are just incredible.”

### **Hall of Fame inductees put in miles**

The two newest members of the ORC Hall of Fame share their running experiences. **Page 2.**

### **Clinic for youngsters winding down**

Pam Car directs the ORC's first clinic for youngsters, and participation is gratifyingly high. **Page 6.**

# HOF inductees get most of running

## Semonell grieved and then ran

It took a family tragedy from 14 years ago to change Jodi Semonell's life in more ways than one. Following the death of her father on Christmas Day 2011, she gave up smoking and took up running. She had no preconceived notion at the time that she would someday be inducted into the Omaha Running Club Hall of Fame.



**Jodi Semonell**

But that's exactly what happened at the Feb. 2 Chiller Challenge ceremony that took place at Papillion Landing. She was clearly humbled by the honor.

After the award, Semonell looked back on how she was able to turn tragedy into triumph.

"After my dad died, I signed up for my first marathon," she said. "It was 13 years ago, and it wasn't fast, but it was so much fun. I had the time of my life."

*See Semonell, Page 3*

## Huggenberger piled up miles

Mike Huggenberger suspected something was up when many of his friends attended the Feb. 2 Chiller Challenge. Then it happened: He was called to the front of the Papillion Landing stage to collect his plaque as the 53rd member of the ORC Hall of Fame, nodding to his friends.



**Mike Huggenberger**

"I'm thankful that they were here," Huggenberger said moments after being honored. "Who knows how much longer we're going to be able to get together?"

The Omahan has been making friends from a running career that started when he led a group that used to gather at the Downtown YMCA over the lunch hour in the early 1980s. The runs would range from 3 to 9 miles. Many in the group were coworkers of Mike at Northwestern Bell.

*See Huggenberger, Page 3*

# Omaha Running Club Hall of Fame Members

<u>Name</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Year</u>
Frank Perrone	2004	Bea Sides	2009	Nancy Sutton Moss	2018
Jill Garlock	2004	Cliff Karthaus	2009	Christy Nielsen	2018
John Petersen	2004	Lou Soukup	2009	Tom Cody	2019
John Thomas	2004	John Hawkins	2010	Jon Eggers	2019
Karlene (Erickson) Herrell	2004	Stan Shirk	2010	Glen Moss	2019
Mick Freeman	2004	Greg Carlberg	2011	Anne Medeiros	2020
Nancy McCormick	2004	Jimmy Hall	2011	Ann Ringlein	2020
Bob Garcia	2005	Ronn Baker	2012	The Bean Team	2020
Chuck Cooper	2005	Erin Sullivan	2012	John Hall	2021
Craig Christians	2005	Gary Wasserman	2013	John Fey	2021
Mike Ewoldt	2006	Jim McMahon	2013	Derek Fey	2021
Tim Hendricks	2006	Ron Olsen	2014	Sheri Kucera	2022
Todd Nott	2006	Roxi Erickson	2014	Anna Fisher	2022
Dick Burrows	2007	Daren Konda	2015	Kaci Lickteig	2023
Gary Julin	2007	Tom Whitaker	2015	Pat Lawlor	2023
Leonard Vavra	2007	Jose Badillo	2016	Jodi Semonell	2024
Alan Higley	2008	Harvey Kunz	2017	Mike Huggenberger	2024
Gary Meyer	2008	Tony Jones	2017		

# Semonell: Crossing the finish line is still always emotional

*Continued from Page 2*

She remembers being quite nervous for that 2012 Lincoln Marathon.

“The most I ran before that, I think, was maybe 18 miles,” she said. “I didn’t know what to expect.”

She had one thought at the halfway mark of the marathon.

“I wondered if I made a really bad decision” Semonell said. “Did I make a mistake? There’s nothing better than the feeling you get at the finish line.”

Semonell estimated that she has run more than 50 marathons, and the experience is almost always exhilarating.

“It’s emotional,” she said. “No matter the race, when I cross the finish line I tear up. It’s a complete adrenaline rush.”

Not content to stick to “just” marathons, Semonell extended the challenge of even longer-distance races. Ten years ago, she completed the Hitchcock 100. Since then, she has run 23 100-mile or longer races, including two in California — The Western States 100-mile Endurance Run and the grueling Badwater 135 Ultra-marathon.



**Jodi Semonell enjoys races of all distances.**

Over the past 14 years, she’s transformed from a neophyte to competitive runner. Semonell placed second among all females at the MOAB 240 Ultra-marathon in Utah, fifth at Badwater and twice was in the top 10 at Arizona’s Cocodona 250 Trail Ultra-marathon. In 2020, she was winner of the Across the Years 200-mile race.

Tragedy struck again three years ago when her son died of carbon monoxide poisoning. She dedicated a 500-mile run across Nebraska to honor her son’s memory and to raise awareness of carbon monoxide danger.

Among her favorite races, Semonell said, was the Chicago Marathon.

“It’s a lot of fun,” she said. “It’s a 26.2-mile party. There’s people lining the whole course.”

She doesn’t plan on slowing down anytime soon. On her 2025 calendar is the Tahoe 200 in September. A return to Chicago is in her plans as well. She can’t wait.

# Huggenberger: Group runs became a ‘great social activity’

*Continued from Page 2*

“We still have a core group of 10 of us who have been running together since then,” he said, “and we’ve had the good fortune in that we haven’t lost anybody. We still get together — not all of us — but on any given Sunday there might be upwards of eight or nine attending to either walk or run.”

He continued: “It’s a great social activity. In the greater Omaha community, I know a lot of those people.”

When the group first assembled, Huggenberger had his first marathon, the 1980 Lincoln Marathon, under his belt. After finishing in 3:27, he remembers declaring that would be his first — and last — marathon.

“I remember how bad I was hurting,” he said, “and I thought I was going to die. I never started out with a goal of getting 100 (marathons).”

Well, five years ago, he returned to Lincoln to complete his

100th marathon. But then came COVID-19, and the race was canceled. Huggenberger’s daughter traveled from Ohio, so they decided to run 26 miles on the Wabash trail.

He hasn’t limited his races to just Nebraska, having run six Boston Marathons and three New York Marathons. Huggenberger took his training to a new level by competing in four Ironman-distance triathlons.

In 2010, he crashed his bicycle, crushing his hip, and was told by his doctor to stop running.

“I didn’t stop running,” he said, “but I stopped running marathons for four and a half years.”

But he did resume his marathon running with the idea of completing 100 of them. Two years ago, he completed the 2023 Good Life Halfsy in 2:13:30.01 — at the age of 73.

He’s learned one thing: You don’t have to succumb to the aging process, but you have to respect it.

Now those are words to live by.



# McCormick rows to more records

For Omaha Running Club Hall-of-Famer Nancy McCormick, age is just a number — even if it's the big 9-0. You'd be hard-pressed to find many 90-year-olds who are as active as she is. For proof, you need not look any further than what she pulled off Feb. 8.

McCormick set a world record at the Creighton University rowing team's 10th annual rowing challenge. Already the rowing record-holder for the 1,000 meters in the 85-89 age group, she rowed the equivalent of 1,000 meters in 5:01, easily topping the U.S. record (5:56.09) and the world record (5:27.01).

She accomplished the feat with her children, grandchildren and friends lending support. Obviously, McCormick was thrilled.

"This year, I thought, I'm going for both (records)," she said. "And I got them. It's kind of fun to have a world record at 90."

McCormick began running in her 40s and immediately got hooked. In her first competitive race, she finished ahead of several men and thought, "This is fun. I found out I was a jock."

She continued running into her mid-60s before all the miles took a toll. She eventually had both knees replaced, which ended her running days.

"So I looked into rowing," she said, "and found it uses 84 percent of your muscles."

Her first home rowing machine was a gift from her late husband, Peter Brodkey. She uses it to this day. Years ago, she learned that Creighton's rowing team had an annual fundraising event that she found enjoyable. That's when she discovered there were records kept for indoor rowing.

McCormick enlisted the help of a coach from Creighton to pursue her dream of setting the records. But she also spent a lot of time at home with her rowing machine.

"I pull it out and watch Perry Mason for an hour, and I row," she said. "When the commercials come on, I do intervals."

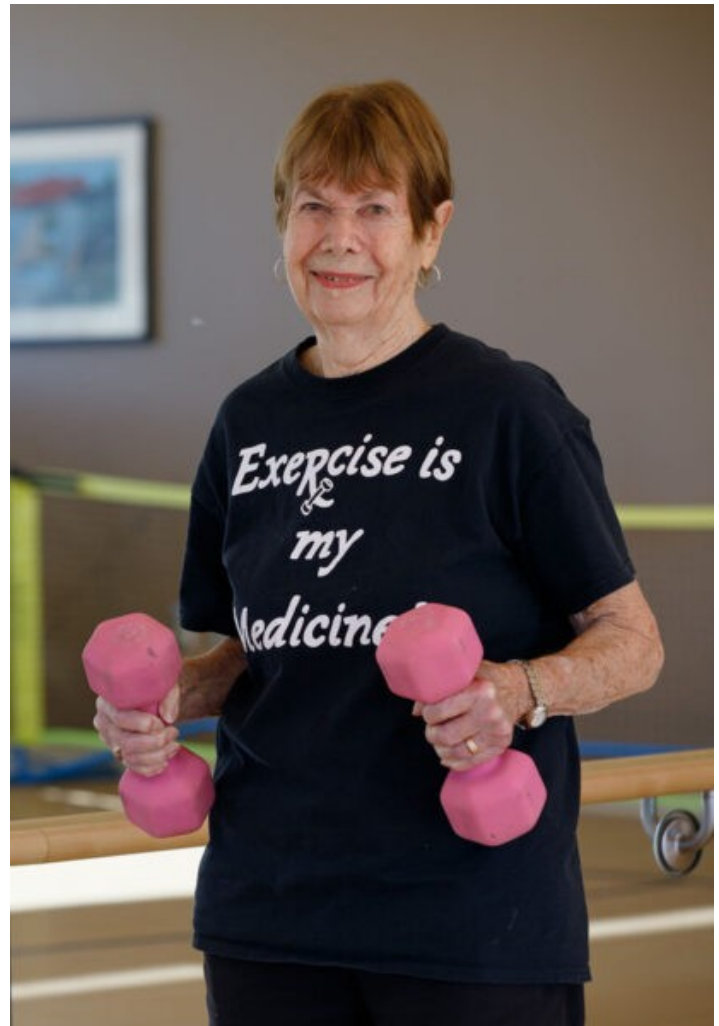
She often visits the Engage Wellness Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center two to three days a week.

"It's an absolutely wonderful facility," she said. "There are not many facilities that focus on balance, and they focus on balance. It's important to work on that for older people, because (balance) tends to go."

The 2004 ORC Hall-of-Fame inductee said rowing as much as she does has many benefits — aside from the obvious of keeping her in shape.

"I don't take any medicine," she said. "I'm pretty healthy, and I think it's because of 50 years of exercise. It pays off. It's wonderful to be fit at 90."

Those who have known McCormick are amazed — but not surprised — at what she's accomplished into her 80s and beyond.



**Nancy McCormick smiles while working out at UNMC's Engagement Wellness Center. (Photo courtesy of UNMC.)**

"Most people have no idea the skill and effort it takes to row 1,000 meters in 5 minutes on a Concept 2 rowing machine at any age," newest ORC Hall-of-Famer Mike Huggenberger said. "And this woman, in her 10th decade of life, just killed it."

Another HOF member, Bob Garcia (2005) credits McCormick for reviving his running career many decades ago.

"I had been out of running for about a year and a half," Garcia wrote on Facebook. "A buddy was trying to get me back into running and had a workout of 20 quarters planned. We got to the track, and I was apprehensive. He pointed out that Nancy was there and that she was going to do the same workout."

Continued Garcia: "I marveled as she did the workout while I was suffering through it on the other side of the track. That day kept returning to my mind, and a few months later I returned to running and never quit."

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# President's Message

The March blizzard is fresh in my memory as this is written with the hope that winter is done so we can look forward to some good weather as spring unfolds to promote a great offering of Club events for the upcoming months.

Among a great lineup of programs and events this summer are the marathon training program led by Connie Garro and Kent Blobaum, our new Kids Run the Nation program and the women's training program led by Pam Car that provide great opportunities to enjoy some dedicated and talented guidance and coaching for a variety of participants.

Our program directors will once again be working their special brands of magic in supporting and training all levels of ability. And the many races and Club fun runs throughout the summer give great chances to apply lessons learned, enjoy the company of other runners and perhaps go home with a little hardware as well.

As this year's racing season kicks off, I would like to say a few words about supporting local events, particularly the Omaha Marathon, Half Marathon and 5K that the ORC is bringing back. Here are just some of the activities your local running club provides during a given year to support the running community:

- Two holiday-themed fun runs this year, with the possibility of adding one or two more. These are free to members and the general public alike; just show up and participate. Our fun run coordinator, Daren Konda, always has door prizes and often refreshments for everyone who attends.

- Fifteen Club races this year that are fee-supported and timed. Any proceeds left over after contributions to charities are used to support the activities of the Club. All Club officers and race officials are uncompensated volunteers; we all do this be-

cause we want to carry out our Club mission and support our local runners.

- Maintaining a website that provides a free event calendar where any local, non-profit organization putting on a race can post their event without charge.

- Providing valuable information on our website for organizing and putting on events that is available free of charge.

- \* Providing equipment rental services that makes time clocks and finish line equipment available to events at a reasonable rental rate. Although we may make some money doing this, there is a substantial investment involved. Finish-line clocks and tripods alone cost close to \$2,500 each.

- Providing race result services to local events for a reasonable price. Publishing a quality newsletter that has won the Road Runners Club of America national award for large club newsletters.

- Offering the Step into Running program, a beginning training program for women currently led by certified running coach Pam Car who has gotten hundreds of ladies over the years off the couch and into a healthy life style. And we do it for the cost of a Club membership.

- Offering a Distance Training Program that focuses on the Omaha Marathon and Half Marathon but provides professional coaching, educational speakers and encouragement for anyone interested in training for a marathon or half marathon. This program is a little more expensive but provides 20 weeks of training and more encouragement than you can possibly imagine. Did I mention a one-year Club membership and a 15 percent discount on any Omaha Marathon event are included as well?



Tom Whitaker

*See Message, Page 6*

# First kids' training program a hit

The inaugural Omaha Running Club-directed RRCA Kids Run the Nation series kicked off March 9 at the 78th and Cass Peak Performance store. The hour-long Sunday sessions, directed by Pam Car, are designed for all kids in grades 1 through 3.

Said Pam: "Thanks to a grant from the Road Runners Club of America and trained volunteers, the RRCA's kids run the nation program allows participants in the five-week course with a short race at the end. They've learned important running fundamentals and sportsmanship."

In addition to the valuable training sessions, participants receive a shirt, snacks and RRCA swag.

ORC president Tom Whitaker said the series is a great way to introduce young people to running, and he hopes it will lead to a growth in ORC membership.

"Young people tend to not get into belonging to things like a running club," Whitaker said. "We try to make ours worthwhile. One of the things I'm very, very happy about is this children's program. That's really one of the keys to the future."

He continued: "You've got to have somebody who wants to do it and is good at doing it. Having Pam Car very interested in doing this children's program, I'm just extremely pleased about



**Young participants of the clinic pay close attention at one of the March sessions. (Photo courtesy of Pam Car.)**

that. I think that's one of the best things that's happened to the Club over the last couple of years."

The clinic culminates with a race on April 13. Car is already looking forward to taking the clinic to the next level.

"We plan a multi-week class for kids grades 4 to 6," she said. "We hope to make kids running programs a regular part of the ORC's training courses. All the volunteers completed safe sport act training. As a certified youth coach I was honored to bring this program to Omaha."

Kudos go out to Pam and her helpers.

## Message: Strong volunteer effort makes Club events work

*Continued from Page 5*

- Offering the Kids Run the Nation program sponsored by the Road Runners Club of America that started this year under the guidance of Pam Car. This is a special running clinic just for kids to learn proper form, practice increasing and improving running skills through practice, run-walking, drills and games.

The Omaha Running Club is a volunteer organization with a mission to support the Omaha running and walking community. We do our best to try to support that mission to the extent that everyone's available personal resources permit. There are a number of national events these days that serve a purpose by putting on challenging and unique events that are not necessarily staged locally.

But I would urge everyone to keep in mind that although these may be worthy events, they come to town, utilize local resources and leave town with the proceeds. Other than providing an event in which to participate, they do little to support

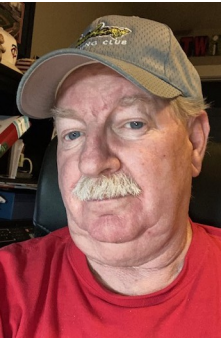
our local community. Please keep our local events in mind as you plan your racing season.

We especially hope you will go to [omahamarathon.org](http://omahamarathon.org) as soon as you can after you read this message and sign up for one of our Omaha Marathon events. Not ready for a marathon or the half? The Omaha Marathon 5K is available. Not ready to run at all? You can still be a valuable part of this event by volunteering. We are going to need A LOT of volunteers to make this a success. We will have volunteer opportunities listed soon, so check out [omahamarathon.org/volunteering](http://omahamarathon.org/volunteering) and sign up. You will be providing a very important service to the Club and our local running community.

My point with the foregoing is to emphasize that your support for your Club by running or volunteering for local events is important. Remember, any money raised stays right here in Omaha to support you, the local runner, the very reason for our existence.



# Catching up with a Hall-of-Famer



**John Fey**

As a baseball fan, I always look forward to March, when Major League Baseball spring training wraps up and the regular season begins. I like to size up the players on my favorite team, the Minnesota Twins, before they begin the games that count. But there's more to my Florida trips than baseball.

For the past four years, I've visited The Villages — about 60 miles northwest of Orlando — on the way to the Fort Myers area. That's where ORC Hall-of-Famer

Lou Soukup has lived going on 15 years.

It's always fun hooking up with Lou and his wife, Connie, two very busy people in a community that's all about activities. Those who live in the Villages (with a population approaching 100,000) can choose from golf, dancing, cycling, softball, crafts and card games. Lou and Connie engage in many of those — for Lou, especially golf. There are plenty of live music and dining options at the various village squares, and that's where our group met for dinner the first night of our two-day stay.

On our lone full day there, Lou and I played golf with two others in our traveling party, Al Miller and Andy Hunter. Andy is the son of former Major Leaguer Buddy Hunter, who played briefly for the Boston Red Sox and spent 11 seasons in the Boston organization.

Before we left for our rental home, Lou handed me a clipping of a front-page article that was written about him that appeared in The Villages Daily Sun in February. The feature centered on his long running career that began in 1983 with his first marathon and continues today in Florida.

"I enjoyed my first marathon and decided that I wanted to run another one," Lou said in the article. "Since that second one, I haven't looked back."

Lou, 73 years young, has competed in an amazing 2,175 races, from 5Ks to full marathons. He has "slowed down" by limiting his events to mostly 5Ks. He guesses that since moving to The Villages he has completed around 600 races in the area.

"I estimate that I have run around 70,000 miles in that frame," he said, "and I've won 1,813 medals with 900 of them being gold. Never in a million years did I think I would be still running today. It's pretty amazing to think that I'm still physically capable of running at my age."

When he's not golfing or cycling, Lou finds time to get in about 20 miles a week on many of The Villages' trails.

"Biking is another exercise that helps me burn calories," Lou said, "and it sort of gives me a boost when it's race time. Being on a regimented training routine keeps me in shape and fo-



**Lou Soukup runs down the street of his Villages neighborhood. (Photo by Rachel Govola/The Villages Daily Sun.)**

cused."

Connie often lends support when Lou runs, and they often go out for walks.

"I'm very proud of Lou," Connie said. "I totally support what he's doing."

In nearly all his races, Lou likes to start up front to get the jump on the pack. The competition is harder than you might think, even for someone in Lou's condition. In a January 5K, he placed third in the 70-74 age group in 25:41.8.

"I love racing," he said. "I get a kick out of it. And the races in The Villages are pretty intense. There's a lot of competition — I love that part. I love going up against some of the best talent in my age group."

Lou told the Daily Sun reporter he's not planning to hang up his running shoes anytime soon.

"If you stay motivated and focused," he said, "anything is possible. Having goals and sticking to them no matter what is the key to having success in any career."

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**OMAHA RUNNING CLUB**

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