



OMAHA RUNNING CLUB NEWSLETTER

For the members of the Omaha Running Club * Vol. 55* Spring 2026

History made at the ORC's top

For more than 20 years, election results announced at the Omaha Running Club's Annual Meeting produced little – if any – surprises. That all changed Feb. 1 at the Chiller Challenge held at a nearly packed Papillion Landing gym, home of the event for the past several years.

After the votes were tallied came the announcement: Marty Ertz was elected to replace Tom Whitaker as the next Club president. It ended Whitaker's 22 years at the helm, by far the longest tenure of any ORC president.

The program, as usual, followed the morning runs (8K, 2-mile and kids' run) that drew more than 150 participants. After lunch, again featuring Orsi's Pizza, the two newest ORC Hall of Fame inductees were introduced.

Hilary Catron was honored as both a volunteer and competitor. The other inductee was Dave Johnston, who was a standout high school and UNL distance runner. Johnston, who lives in Texas, was unable to attend.

Catron has been highly visible within the Club and as a solid runner. She was clearly surprised when called to the podium.

"This means a lot," she said. "We talk a lot about volunteering, and the comment I made to someone is that time is probably our greatest commodity, and when you have someone willing to give you their time, their effort and their expertise, that's the greatest compliment you can give as an individual."

Catron continued: "I think we all know when we're out there on a course at mile 22 and how bad it hurts and someone gives you words of encouragement to finish, that's what it all means. I think being able to give back and be able to experience the thrill and awesome community of the Omaha Running Club is what I appreciate the most."

Following the HOF induction ceremony, age-group awards were handed out. Then came the election results.

Whitaker took the microphone and stated: "When I took over the Club about 24 years ago, I had a lot of really, really, really good help. A lot of great people stepped forward and did an awful lot to make this organization grow. Quite a few of them are here in this room today. This is not a one-man job. I cer-



Incoming ORC President Marty Ertz speaks after being introduced as successor to Tom Whitaker.

tainly appreciate getting all the credit, but believe me, it certainly wasn't all me. With that, I congratulate Marty."

Ertz quickly praised Whitaker for his devotion to the Club.

"It goes without saying, to say that Tom does a lot is a massive understatement," he said. "These are massive shoes to fill. I just look forward to bringing in the new directors on the Board to bring new energy. It's a tangible thing that we can focus on within the Omaha Running Club, and the future is very bright."

Alan Higley has worked hand-in-hand with Whitaker for his entire term as president. He saluted the outgoing leader for making a difference and helping the Club continue to grow.

"As president, Tom has managed the ORC budget responsibly, ensuring that expenditures were within budget and the funds were used for the benefits of the ORC members," Higley said. "Tom treats everyone with dignity and respect. While soft-spoken, he delivers his messages clearly and concisely. No showmanship. He was detailed and, if given the opportunity, found details that may have been overlooked."

New inductees humbled by honor

Hilary Catron and Dave Johnston share their thoughts about joining the Hall of Fame. **Page 2.**

A look back at the life of Gary Julin

One of the top runners in Omaha history still remembered as a unique individual. **Page 6.**

Newest HOF inductees humbled

Catron taken by surprise

A ruse was needed to get Hilary Catron to Papillion Landing that February afternoon. Busy working toward her PhD, she originally hadn't planned on attending but was under the impression she would be making the Hall of Fame introduction. Then came the announcement: "Would Hilary Catron come forward?"

"I had no clue," Catron said. "I was very surprised."

She joined the Club about 18 years ago with the hope that she could get some training advice for her first half-marathon. She was pointed to Peak Performance, where she met Ken Juhl at a Yoga class.

"Ken was running the distance clinic at the time, and they ran afterwards," she said. "He introduced me to the running club. And I started running every Wednesday night running with them. I consider him my first coach."

Catron continued: "I was going to finish the half-marathon and be done, and here I am 18 years later."

She was far from done. In fact, she was just getting started. She soon became the leader of the clinic and did an outstanding job

See Catron, Page 3

Johnston starred at UNL

Dave Johnston showed his running ability early, at age 9, as a fourth-grader at Hillside Elementary School near Creighton Prep. He ran competitively in middle school, high school, college and post-collegiately.

Before college, he placed ninth at the 1972 state cross country meet, and he was part of the gold medal winning 2-mile relay (4 x 880 yard) team at the 1972 state track meet. He earned a scholarship at UNL, competing in 1975 and 1976, scoring points for Nebraska in all 11 cross country meets he ran.

After college, he was a regular participant in the summer evening runs in the 1970s, where Omaha-area high school and college runners would meet every summer evening at "the big tree" in Omaha's Elmwood Park, and then go on long runs together from there.

Johnston won several local road races, including the 1978 Buffalo Run and Gateway Getaway 10K in Lincoln; the 1978 Bellevue-Offutt Kiwanis 15K, 1978 CUES 6.45 mile at

See Johnston, 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 McMahan	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	Hilary Catron	2025
				Dave Johnston	2025

Catron: Taekwondo injury propelled her to try the ironman

Continued from Page 2

maintaining the viability of the clinic during the COVID-19 pandemic years.

She also coordinated off-season ORC distance runs for many years and recorded a commendable record of accomplishment in races from the marathon to many other race distances. She also is a triathlete, having completed the full ironman distance and six half ironman events. She received the Ironman All-World Athlete Bronze level award in 2022 and has qualified for the USA Triathlon National Championships in both Sprint and Olympic distances since 2018.

Part of her training included taking up taekwondo, during which she suffered a leg injury. That caused her to do more cross training, which led to her entry into triathlons. She completed a full Ironman triathlon in Maryland.

“That was amazing,” she said. “The training was harder than the race. The community was really, really awesome. I had a fantastic race. I came in around 13 hours.”

Additionally, Catron has been a part of the Cornhusker State Games for more than three decades — first as a fierce taekwondo competitor and now as a multi-sport athlete, mentor and long-time sport director. From earning medals in taekwondo, open water swimming, and triathlon to guiding athletes through coaching, nutrition education, and community self-defense programs.

Over the years, Catron continued her role as distance clinic director.



Daren Konda, ORC vice president, hands Hilary Catron her HOF plaque.

“We made it through COVID somehow,” she said. “I never thought of myself as a runner. It shows that being a good leader means you don’t have to be the best, you just have to know who the best people are.”

The reward through it all, she said, is watching clinic participants reach their goals.

“It’s really fun to see them be successful,” Catron said, “because people then go out and tell other people to do this. That’s the best compliment you can have. It’s about mutual support.”

Johnston: After college, he became one of the area’s fastest

Continued from Page 2

Fort Omaha; the 1979 Don Childs Memorial Road Race in Kearney, the 1979 Septemberfest Labor Day Road 10K in Omaha and the 1979 DeCosta Sporting Goods Deep Freeze 6 Mile in Omaha.

He finished first in the 1976 AAU Region VII 5,000 meters on the track and finished in the top three at several other local races in the late 70s and early 80s. He finished 10th at the 1979 Road Runners Club of America National Championship Marathon in a time of 2:22:52.

Johnston was an active member of the Plains Track Club from its inception. He assisted John Hawkins and Jim McMahon with various club tasks such as course set-up and measuring, T-shirt printing, and race day support when he was not competing. He also was the PTC newsletter editor for several years. He was the store manager at the Athlete’s Foot at the Omaha Westroads shopping center from 1979 to 1983 (assistant man-

ager in 1978). The Athlete’s Foot was one of the first running apparel stores in Nebraska and supported the local running community however/whenever they could.

He co-created (along with Jim Carter of Z-92 Radio) and co-sponsored (the Athlete’s Foot along with Z-92) the Trick-r-Treat Trot. The race ran for several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, on or around Halloween. The race was run in and around Omaha’s Memorial Park.

Johnston, who lives in the Dallas area, was unable to attend the HOF ceremony. But he did send a message of regret and thanks for the honor.

“I am truly grateful and thankful to be given this award,” he wrote. “It means a lot. I have always tried to keep up with what is happening in Omaha running circles, including high school, college and road races.”

He had this advice for the Club: “Please keep up the good work you are doing, both as participants and as volunteers.”

2026 ORC Board Officers and Board Members

Officers

President, Marty Ertz

VP & Marketing, Daren Konda

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Nazima Aripova

Julie Borer

Jeff Brune

Pam Car, RRCA State Rep.

Connie Garro, Distance Clinic
Co-Coordinator

Matt Hoppe

Derek Loseke

ORC Advisors

Connie Garro & Kent Blobaum
Distance Training Clinic

Alan Higley, Hall of Fame
Coordinator

Pam Car, Director Step into
Running

Gary Meyer, Equipment Coordinator

Kelli Sweet, Design Consultant

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

Follow the Club on
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President's Message

THANK YOU AND FAREWELL!

My 22-year tenure as president of the Omaha Running Club ended with the election of Marty Ertz as president at the Annual Meeting of Members on Feb. 1, 2026. I just reread that and can't believe what I read.

Hard to believe I have been able to keep track of something as complicated as a running club for that long, but the records say it is true. Other thoughts? A sense of relief perhaps; a little worry about the future of an organization that I have devoted so much time to; and occasionally second guessing on so many levels but satisfied that I did what I thought was right for the time period and conditions involved.

But I am not entirely saying so long yet. I will be on the Board at least this year and will perform race timing and doing anything else I can to help. I have overwhelming confidence that Marty and the ORC Board, especially our newest members, have the technical training and expertise to lead this organization into the future. Already plans are afoot for the adoption of new processes that will greatly improve the operation of the organization and improve our ability to fulfill our mission to serve the Omaha running and walking community.

I am particularly pleased by the current status of our Club running events and runner support efforts. Our Distance Clinic and Step Into Running programs are in very talented and dedicated hands, and Tuesday Night Track, Omaha Correctional Center and the Children's Programs are growing and prospering. I have wanted a Children's Program for years, but it takes knowhow, patience and dedication to pull that off, and Pam Car provides all of that and more.

Now to the thank you part. Our Club has seen a lot of progress and changes during

my time in office. We've seen the Omaha Marathon leave town and return last year to local leadership and dedication. We witnessed the impact that COVID-19 had on organized running, which is finally loosening its grip, but which the Club was able work with and set standards for safety while continuing to do what it does best, provide quality racing opportunities.

Did I do all that? Heavens no. This is my huge THANK YOU to hundreds and hundreds of talented and dedicated past Board members and volunteers who have always provided the ideas, the willpower and just plain hard labor to make our organization special. So I say farewell with the conviction that the Omaha Running Club is in

good hands and will continue to grow and prosper well into the future.

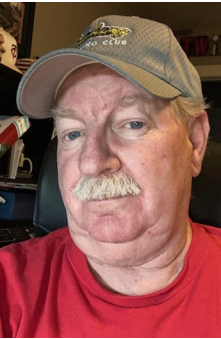


Tom Whitaker



Newly elected president Marty Ertz, left, and Tom Whitaker spoke following the election results.

Serving as editor was enjoyable



John Fey

With the announcement of new leadership at the Omaha Running Club that came as a result of the voting for president at the Feb. 1 Chiller Challenge/ORC Annual Meeting comes my own announcement: This will be the final newsletter produced by me as editor. After handling this task for nearly two decades, it's time for me to step aside.

I can't exactly recall the precise date (or even year) when my relationship with the ORC began as "just" a member. I was a runner — certainly nowhere near the class of the area's elite — who picked up the sport around 1980 to relieve job stress and try to maintain some semblance of a healthy lifestyle.

Folks who know me even a little bit know my story. I was a baseball player in high school and, in 1974, during my final year of my Army enlistment. The farthest I had to run in that sport was 360 feet — and that was after hitting a home run, which meant a slow jog around the bases and not a sprint.

But, like many runners, I became hooked on the sport to the point where I actually talked myself into running a road race — a 10K. (I had to ask an experienced runner how far that was.) The next thing I knew, I was convinced to take it to the next level: a half-marathon. By then, I knew we were talking about 13.1 miles, which was certainly a challenge I wasn't sure I could concur.

While working at Kutak Rock at 17th and Farnam (1979-87), I made friends with some of the attorneys who ran during lunch hour. One of the lawyers, Steve Amen, talked me into running the 1983 Lincoln Marathon with him. I don't know what possessed me to agree, but I do look back on it as one of the most incredible athletic moments of my life — only because I finished and literally cried at the end.

Not satisfied with the fact I had to walk large portions of my first marathon (yet still finishing in 3:29), I talked myself into running the 1984 Lincoln. Once again, though, I found myself forced to walk part of the race but managed to trim 2 minutes off the previous year's clocking.

The highlight of my running career (which ended with knee surgery in 2004) came at the 1984 Omaha Marathon. I slowed down only at the water stations and was timed in 3:19:13. Not bad for a former chubby baseball player.

While I'm not sure when I joined the ORC, I'm guessing it likely was in the late 1990s when I began purchasing shoes and gear from Peak Performance. I do have my files of old newsletters that shows me taking over as editor in 2008.

At the time, Tom Cody was newsletter editor along with Lexi

Dendrinelis. Tom didn't have to twist my arm too much when he asked if I would take over the newsletter. After all, I was into my 20th — and final — year with the World-Herald, and among the sports I enjoyed writing about was, of course, running. The paper gave good play to running stories, particularly the announcement of each year's inductees into the ORC Hall of Fame.

By taking on the newsletter, I quickly got to know President Tom Whitaker, who years later asked me to join the Board. Tom, over his two-plus decades as president, put his heart and soul into leading the Club. He was truly a hands-on president, visible at every Club event — especially the Heartland Marathon. The Heartland took a lot of effort to pull off, and it likely couldn't have happened without Tom being the driving force behind the idea.

Tom also took the lead on restoring the Omaha Marathon brand back to the Club. Not only did he provide the manpower to return the brand, he donated out of his own pocket for the cost of the naming rights.

Thirteen years ago, Tom informed me that he was going to nominate the Club's newsletter in a contest run by the Road Runners Club of America in the online category. I was surprised to learn the newsletter was named the 2013 outstanding e-newsletter in the nation. Tom accepted the award at its annual meeting. I look at it each morning while sitting in my den inside our home at Plattsmouth's Buccaneer Bay.

The ultimate honor for me — and our son Derek — came at the 2022 annual meeting when we were named as new inductees into the ORC Hall of Fame. It was a tremendous recognition for both of us.

I've stated many times that among the benefits of joining the Club is meeting people and making new friends. That's certainly happened to me.

If you're still reading this, you might be wondering why I'm stepping away as editor. Turning 74 this October, I want to focus my time and energy on my monthly neighborhood newsletter and pursue more book projects.

I join Tom Whitaker in wishing incoming President Marty Ertz the best in taking over at the top of the Club.



In 2013, the newsletter was selected as the nation's best e-newsletter by the RRCA.

Notes

Chiller's champ cooked course

The Feb. 1 weather wasn't exactly balmy (around 26 degrees), but it appeared ideal for the winner of Chiller Challenge 8K race. Omahan Daniel Goudie, 29, ran without a shirt with a winning time of 27:10. There were 117 finishers in the longest of the three races that morning. There was also a 2-mile race and a kids' fun run.

The first female finisher in the 8K was Saskia Pingpank, 27, of Omaha. She was fifth overall in 29:47. The 2-mile champion was Wyatt Cain, 17, of Council Bluffs in 16:17. The first female finisher was Susan Sutton, 56, of Omaha in 20:43.

The first of the 10 youngsters in the fun run was Grand Madler, 12, of Papillion. He was clocked in 1:50.

In all more than 150 participated in the three races.

Step Into Running update

The Club's Step Into Running program continues to grow, and this year's version sold out in a flash. But on March 6 a few more spots opened.

The Club's beginning friendly running 5K training program for females, which is directed by Pam Car, begins Tuesday, June 2 and runs through Tuesday, Sept. 1, at the Peak Performance 78th and Cass store.

The 14-week progressive program is a great way for females of all ages to prepare for their first 5K. It all culminates with the Sept. 1 Go Girl Run.

If the program is full, interested females should email stepin2running@gmail.com to be added to the waiting list.

RRCA Kids Run the Nation launched

Another returning program offers kids ages 6 to 9 a chance to get into running. A large group of youngster attended the March 1 opening meeting.

"Today was the first day of ORC's Kids Run the Nation Program," Pam Car wrote on Facebook. "We have about 25 kids enrolled — 10 more than last year. Thanks to my wonderful leadership team. You are appreciated!"

Another branch of the program will involve 9- to 12-year olds in April.

Jim McMahon meet set for June 14

The eighth annual ORC Jim McMahon Open Track meet is scheduled for June 14 at Westside High School. The track meet is open to all ages and features races from 100 to 5,000 meters. The meet also features field events including long jump and javelin. Once again, Derek Fey will serve as meet director.



Daniel Goudie was the overall 8K champion at the Feb. 1 Chiller Challenge. He appears to be having a good time. (Photo courtesy of Gerald Kubiak.)

The track meet is held in honor of one of the Omaha Running Club's founding members, Jim McMahon. McMahon was a former longtime Midland Lutheran College cross country and track coach. He was an athlete, graduate assistant and then coached at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. While he was at UNO, McMahon formed the Elmwood Park Striders with two other runners — which would become the Omaha Running Club.

McMahon moved on to Midland, where he spent nearly 40 years as an instructor and coach. During his tenure at Midland, he coached the women's indoor track and field team to the 1989 NAIA National Championship. He was inducted into the Midland University Hall of Fame and the NAIA Track and Field Hall of Fame. In 2013, McMahon was inducted into the Omaha Running Club Hall of Fame as one of the pioneers of organized running in the city.

In 2006, McMahon was diagnosed with cancer and until that point in his life had run everyday. Sadly, McMahon passed away in December 2016. Each year, McMahon's children and grandchildren participate in the event, helping to carry on his legacy.

The McMahon meet is one of many staged and managed by the Club. One of the relatively new events is the Rove the Grove cross country series. The five dates are:

- May 30, Walnut Grove
- June 13, Boys Town
- June 27, Mt. Michael
- July 11, Skutt Catholic High School
- July 25, Walnut Grove Park

Honoring past ORC Hall of Famers

Gary Julin was a marathon man

Editor's Note: This is the latest in a series of stories on ORC Hall of Famers. The story on Gary Julin (HOF class of 2007) comes from newsletter editor John Fey, who wrote this story for the Omaha World-Herald in 2004, 11 years before he died.

Gary Julin is running against Father Time. And, as the Omaha marathoner extraordinaire heads toward his 60th birthday, he's keeping a good pace.

How many other runners have racked up nearly 60,000 miles on foot in 30 years? And who can match Julin's feat of having run 1,007 road races — including 156 marathons?

"I have a lot of enthusiasm for running," he said, stating the more than obvious.

Perhaps obsession might better describe this 56-year-old.

Exhibit A: He hasn't missed a day of running in nearly 20 years. Exhibit B: He ran 50 miles the day he turned 50. Exhibit C: He completed one marathon a month over a 4½-year span, all under three hours.

Julin has built a noteworthy career since he started running 31 years ago. And it began, strangely enough, with a round of golf in 1973.

"My buddy and I wrapped up our golf game, and we were parked at an apartment complex," Julin said. "We decided to run from the apartment parking lot over to the clubhouse, maybe an eighth of a mile. We were running side by side, and about halfway over there, all of a sudden, I just found another gear and jetted away from him. He comes into the parking lot, he's huffing and puffing. I'm not even breathing hard."

That was the day Julin realized "I was in the wrong game."

"Running not only made me feel good," he said, "but I was good at it."

He ran his 1,000th road race in Bellevue two months ago (2004). He has finished first overall in 111 of those races and has won his age group 750 times. He has run 112 of his 156 marathons in less than three hours (or better than a 6:52 pace).

His personal-best times at various distances aren't world class but are highly respectable. He has run a 2:38:29 marathon, a 1:17:20 half-marathon, a 55:12 10-miler, a 33:40 10K and a 16:45 5K.

"I basically have been blessed," said Julin, who is 6-foot-2 and 140 pounds. "Being thin is a very positive thing, because it's easier on your joints, easier on your knees. There's nothing better than being thin and standing in a buffet line."

Julin stays trim because he's more active than people half his age.



Three ORC Hall of Famers pose from a long-ago photo. From left are Ron Olsen (2014), Ronn Baker (2012) and Gary Julin (2007).

"I love working out," he said. "I've always been addicted to it."

He starts his day with at least 100 abdominal crunches and 30 pushups. And, of course, he gets in daily runs of four miles or more. During his streak of 6,785 straight days, he has averaged more than seven miles per day.

"Running is all about persevering, hanging in there and working through problems," Julin said. "That's probably what I'm good at."

Julin, a retired General Electric service technician, works part-time at Peak Performance selling running shoes.

"I love my job," he said. "I'm in my element. I'm around runners and shoes."

Even in his 50s, Julin still punishes those in his age division at road races.

"My motto is, 'Train slow, race fast,'" Julin said. "I always had that adrenaline boost while I was racing. I could beat guys in a race that I couldn't beat in training."

Julin, who is single, has reached two of his three goals he established long ago: 100 marathons and 1,000 total races. He admits the third goal, surpassing 100,000 total miles, won't be easy.

"I'm sitting on about 59,000 right now," he said. "I'm going to have to run into my 80s. But I don't really care if I make that goal. It's just something to work for. I just live day to day and am thankful for what the next day brings. One day at a time, as they say."

Julin died April 27, 2015, from Lewy body dementia.

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