

RUNNING SHORTS

Record number of Huntsville-area runners gearing up for Houston races

By Ken Johnson

This is the first in a series of bi-weekly columns about the sport of running. Niki Swearingen and I will alternate in writing the column. She and I have different perspectives. I am 65 and slow and I do not enjoy running; Niki, 20, is a fast and competitive runner and loves to run. Even though she and I probably run for different reasons, we both derive benefits from the sport and want to encourage others to take up running as a means of achieving and maintaining physical fitness.

Running is a convenient exercise. No expensive equipment is required; you only need a pair of running shoes. You can run alone or with a partner on the streets, sidewalks, at a track or even on a treadmill. For those who desire competition, there are many races held in Huntsville and the surrounding area, mostly 5K's (3.1 miles). While there will be competitive runners at these races, there will also be non-competitive runners, who are running or walk/running at their own pace.

In our columns, we will cover many aspects of running, to include training, motivation, where to run, upcoming races in the Huntsville area, race results and individual accomplishments.

The 17th annual Sunmart Texas Trail Endurance Run was held at the Huntsville State Park on December 9. The race distances were 50 miles and 50K. This is the largest race in the U. S. over a marathon in distance (26.2 miles) and draws about 1,000 runners from almost every state and several foreign countries. This year, two Huntsville runners completed the 50-mile race, both for the first time. Niki Swearingen ran it in 9:11: 27 and Gerald Peters in 11:30:04. Niki was the youngest runner in the race and describes it as "an amazing experience." Completing the 50K (31 miles) race were J. C. Guzman, Robert Duncan, Juan Melchor, Christopher Wilson and Ken Johnson of Huntsville and Jan Parks of Point Blank.

The 35th Annual Chevron Houston Marathon will be held on the streets of Houston on January 14. Accompanying the marathon is the Aramco Half Marathon (13.1 miles). Participation in the marathon and half marathon is capped at a total of 15,000 runners. This cap was met weeks ago and registration is now closed. A record number of Huntsville area runners will be participating, including Toast Vinson, 34, from Trinity. Toast has Type I diabetes, hypothyroidism, Addison's Disease, hypertension and osteoporosis. While any one of these conditions may keep some people from participating in strenuous or endurance exercises, Toast has already completed 13 marathons. While running a marathon, he is hooked up to an insulin pump and carries a blood sugar monitor, blood sugar test strips, a finger pricker, and a tube of instant glucose. He says that every mile, he walks one minute and does a blood test to measure his blood sugar level. Based on the results, he decides what to do: drink a sports drink, inject insulin via his insulin pump, drink water or do nothing and just keep going. He

says that sometimes he feels like a human pharmacology experiment. Toast uses his annual Houston Marathon run to raise money for the Texas Lions Camp in Kerrville.

Melvin Neely, 50, of Huntsville will also be running the Houston Marathon. This will be his 8th Houston Marathon, to go along with 5 in other cities. Melvin reports that he is motivated to run Houston because of the flat and fast course and the thousands of spectators lining the course and cheering on the runners. Melvin adds, "It's that crowd that keeps you going those last few miles when you are so exhausted."

One of the oldest runners in the Half Marathon will be 80 year old Wendell Londeen of Huntsville. Last year, he ran the Half Marathon in 2:48:14 and this was his first race of any distance.

This year, the following 11 Huntsville area runners will be competing in the Houston Marathon: Kevin Andrews, 43, Point Blank, Ken Johnson, 65, Huntsville, Luis Larios, 21, New Waverly, Melvin Neely, 50, Huntsville, Willard Oliver, 39, Huntsville, John Pulvino, 21, Trinity, Auburn Rose, 34, Madisonville, Niki Swearingen, 20, Huntsville, Toast Vinson, 34, Trinity, Russ Walker, 49, Trinity, and Nicole Zersen, 21, Huntsville.

Seventeen will be running the Half Marathon, including these 16 runners from Huntsville: Elizabeth Brown, 21, Ross Carrie, 41, Garrett Craddock, 28, Irma Dowden, 41, Erin Ivison, 22, Lauren Keith, 21, Katy Lampson, 21, Wendell Londeen, 80, Patty Marler, 41, Kathy Miller, 33, Larry Miller, 49, Courtney North, 24, Ruby Rushing, 55, Candis Smith, 24, Dene Swearingen, 52 and Nathan Winkelmann, 24. The only other Huntsville area runner entered in the Half Marathon is Donald Keith of Trinity. Good luck to all in Houston on January 14.

For information about upcoming races in the area, visit the Seven Hills Running Club web site at <http://www.7hills.us>. Click on the latest Newsletter.