

RUNNING SHORTS

Running offers all kinds of healthy benefits

By Ken Johnson

There is no time like now to start running as a means of achieving and maintaining physical fitness. Of course, check with your doctor first. My own running career began at age 43 when my doctor told me that my cholesterol was over 300 and that I could reduce it by 20% by running. He was right. And, we all know that running improves the cardiovascular system. The benefits go beyond just better health. Running on a regular basis, accompanied by a healthy diet, contributes to a healthy life style, which, in turn, contributes to increased confidence and self-esteem and improved personal appearance. Running is a convenient exercise; you can run alone, with a group of friends and if you want, participate in one of the many races in the area. Running alone provides an opportunity to relax, think, reflect and plan. Running with a group provides for social interaction, as well as the peer pressure you may need to get out and run when you would much rather stay home on the couch. If you enjoy competition, running in races may be what you need. While races satisfy the need for competition for some, most runners participating in races are doing so to achieve personal goals. Many runners sign up for a race early and then use that race as a training goal. Do not wait for the perfect day to get started running and reaping the benefits; do it now!

Congratulations to Curtis Barton, 27, for winning the Frost Your Fanny 5K (3.1 miles) race in Huntsville on January 27. His time was 26:45. Other finishers from Huntsville were Phillip Clark, True Cousins, Christopher Wilson and John Cook.

One of the best races around is the Ramp Romp 5K, which will be held on February 24 at Kyle Field in College Station. Most of the course is up and down all three sets of ramps at the stadium, with a finish on the stadium track. If you are accustomed to running the hills in Huntsville, the ramps are no problem. The entry fee is only \$12 and you get a race T-shirt and refreshments. Awards are presented to the winners and there is a drawing for door prizes. For more information and an entry form, go to the Seven Hills Running Club web site, <http://www.7hills.us>, and click on Race Schedule.

If you cannot make the Ramp Romp, try the Sweetheart 5K Run or Walk on February 25 in Huntsville. The race starts at 2 p.m. in the Bowers Stadium parking lot. For more information, visit the Race Schedule page of the web site.

The annual Rocky Raccoon Trail Run was held at the Huntsville State Park this past weekend. The event, which draws the best long distance runners from all over the U.S. and many foreign countries, includes two races, 100 miles and 50 miles. The 100-mile event is the longest race in Texas. Nearly 300 ran the 100-mile race and about 150 ran the 50-mile race. The races began at 6 a.m. on Saturday and the last runners finished shortly before noon on Sunday (Yes, they carry flashlights and run through the night). Congratulations to Gerald Peters, 36, the first runner from Huntsville to ever participate in the 100-mile race. The longest race Peters had ever completed was 50 miles. A knee injury during the race prevented him from completing the entire 100 miles. However, he made it 80 miles and this by itself is a significant achievement.

The Seven Hills Running Club of Huntsville operated an aid station at the race. Thanks to all the Huntsville area volunteers who provided support to the runners at the aid station. These were: Phillip Clark, Jan Parks, True Cousins, Sara Seale, John Cook,

Beth Caillouet, Niki Swearingen, Kelli Kallus, Curtis Barton, Deanna Krusensterna, Robert Duncan, Ben Johnson, Kim Moorhouse and Marilyn Johnson.

There are actually five different trail races held at the Huntsville State Park each year, including the Sunmart Texas Trail 50K and 50-Mile Endurance Run each December. With a thousand runners, this is the largest race in the U.S. over a marathon in distance. So many out of town and out of state runners have remarked to me about how lucky we are to have the Huntsville State Park and its miles of trails. Those trails are great for running or hiking. Try it. Exercise in a quiet and clean environment and enjoy nature at its best.