

RUNNING SHORTS

Huntsville Steppers hit their stride

By Darren Grant

The Item has done a good job covering the Huntsville Steppers this year. While many sports take the summer off, this team of young track athletes practices through late July, four days a week.

I have followed the Steppers' progress for years. They are truly part of Walker County. Their strengths are our strengths. Three of these are worth pointing out.

The first is persistence. Around here, we rarely have the money or the people to build something overnight. It takes time and lots of hard work. And this is what the Steppers have done over the five years they have existed.

I first ran across them a few years ago, while they were training at the middle school one hot summer afternoon. Their numbers were still growing. Since then they have doubled in size, to nearly forty runners. And, courtesy of the school district, they now practice at the very nice HHS track. They have become quite an operation.

No wonder Coach David Straughter told me recently that this year was "the best ever."

The second is the focus on the whole person. The Steppers use running to build that person. Team organizer Dominica McKibbins puts it well: "We are a track team but our emphasis is on education, dedication, and good attitudes."

And the third is community. The Steppers aren't just a team—they have become a community.

I could feel this sense of community on the evening I went out to visit them a few weeks ago. It was breezy, and some clouds were hiding the sun. The track teemed with life, as the kids and coaches settled into practice. Meanwhile, the parents gathered at a table under some pine trees and visited. It was a glorious time to be outside, to be running, to be together.

You too can be a part of this community. If you are a youngster or a parent of one, come join them—contact me, and I'll hook you up. There is also a Facebook page you can follow—just search for "Huntsville Steppers." You can also support their fundraisers, which generate the funds needed to travel to track meets.

Coach George McKibbins says, "I would like for the community to follow us. I wish people had a chance to see us run. I think it'd be a real treat." I have seen them run, and I completely agree.

(Ken Johnson compiles the "Recent Race Results" section of this column. Please send your race results to him at 1941runner@sbcglobal.net. Contact Darren Grant at dpgrant06@yahoo.com.)

Recent race results:

Sand Crab 5K Night Beach Run, Galveston, Aug. 12

Brandon Harrison, 30 20:24

Morgan Ashworth, 29 43:43

Run The Woodlands 5K, The Woodlands, Aug. 12

Steve Bickford, 56	24:48
Ken Johnson, 76	41:08
Cathy Bickford, 55	49:47

Sunday Night 5K, The Woodlands, Aug. 6

Brandon Harrison, 30	19:16
Ken Johnson, 76	39:18

21K (13.05 Miles) Life Miles, San Salvador, Aug. 6

Jose Moreno, 56	1:57:14
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Southern Star Brewing 5K, Conroe, Aug. 5

Brandon Harrison, 30	19:01
Dan Byrne, 58	19:16
Jason Wallace, 42	19:47
Forest Lane	24:26
Jill Blake, 38	31:05
Ken Johnson, 76	39:48
Mckenzie Blue	53:48

Upcoming races in Huntsville:

August 19 – Heat Wave 5K & 1-Mile, Waterwood Sub-division

September 4 – Labor Day 10K, 5K, 1-Mile, Spring Lake Sub-division

September 24 – Texas 10 Series, 10 Miles, 5 Miles, 1-Mile Kids Run, SHSU campus

October 28 – Huntsville Half & Quarter Marathon & 5K, SHSU campus. NOTE: Sign up now!

The entry fee increases on September 1.

For more information about these races and others in the area, visit the Seven Hills Running Club website at <http://www.7hills.us> and click on Race Schedule.