

MCRRC Intervals

January 2021

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

Featured Runners Series

MCRRC's Inclusion and Equity Committee is proud to present a quarterly series of virtual events with representatives of the diverse running community! If you missed our members-only event with Meb Keflezighi last month, details are inside. You can also find the video recording on the MCRRC website: <https://mcrrc.org/special-events/>

Be on the lookout for announcements of upcoming Featured Runners. Our next guest (tentative) will be Carolyn Su, creator of the Diverse We Run account on Instagram and a Runners Alliance ambassador with *Runners' World*.

Board Meetings

Board Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month.

Stone Mill 50-Mile Run



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Dan Lee gives the race two thumbs up



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Meg Ryan and Michelle Miller make their way to a 1-2 finish



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Dave Eubanks tackles his eighth consecutive SM50



Aspirations and Inspirations

by Amy Lin

It's 2021! Many of us anticipated the new year for months, if only to get away from 2020. Despite a grueling year that halted nearly all MCRRC events, the Club continues to move forward, and things are looking rosier.

Like many MCRRC members, I was thrilled to participate in our inaugural Featured Runners virtual event last month, thanks to the efforts of Inclusion and Equity (I&E) advocates Kelyn Soong and Yvette Murphy. Our guest, Meb Keflezighi, has long been a tireless ambassador of our sport and a generous supporter of runners at all levels all over the world.

Case in point: Philadelphia Marathon 2019. It was dreary, rainy, windy, and chilly, and although I felt okay physically, I wasn't having much fun. At Mile 14 I was puzzled to see a random guy, wearing a winter hat, coat, and gloves, standing in the middle of the course and high-fiving runners. I ran past, and three seconds later, my brain processed who he was and yelled at me, "IT'S MEB!" So of course I went back—I just *had* to get a high-five from him. Meb's simple gesture gave me a giant boost of energy and put an enormous smile on my face. It's the only time I've ever backtracked in a marathon (well, except for when I got lost, but that's another story).

This issue of Intervals is all about aspirations and inspirations at every pace. Ken Earley kicks off the year with a summary of what went right in 2020 and what the Club will carry into 2021 and beyond, Kelyn Soong provides more details on MCRRC's evening with Meb, and Marc Villa writes of his path to becoming a walker surrounded by runners.

For those of us considering ultras or trail running (or both), Barry Hauptman recaps the pandemic edition of Stone Mill 50M. Our Runner Profile features the indefatigable Andy Steinfeld, who has worn many Club hats over the years and has encouraged and inspired countless runners along the way. And, fittingly, on our back page, Terri Scadron launches Coaches' Corner in print (after its move from *Ins & Outs*) with a paean to the back of the pack.

Here's to all those who will motivate us to achieve new goals this year.

Cheers, MCRRC!

Meb

continued from page 3

daughters, has remained involved in the sport, sharing his joy of running whenever he can. He often runs alongside amateurs, including as a pacer at the Cherry Blossom Ten-Mile Run, and is a regular presence at race expos and clinics.

Last year, Keflezighi began to use his platform to speak out against racism and shared his own experiences as a Black man in America. The killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, among others, led to nationwide protests against police brutality and anti-Black racism.

Keflezighi still remembers all the times he's been stopped and questioned by police officers. Once, the first question a policeman asked after pulling Keflezighi over was "Do you have a gun?" Another time, an officer stopped Keflezighi and asked him whose car he was driving. More recently, in Jacksonville, Florida, Keflezighi was running with an African-American friend, and an officer approached to give them a warning for running on a trail near an old railroad and would not allow them to return the way they came.

Sometimes, at VIP events, he notices that he's the only Black person in attendance.

But Keflezighi, known for his positivity and energetic personality, hopes his story can continue to inspire. Running and races, he believes, can make communities more inclusive.

"We can do a better job to educate people," Keflezighi said. "We see exclusive areas doing road races, but we can maybe do other things and go through the neighborhoods to be able to be part of the culture, just like New York City Marathon, you go to the five boroughs, you see the different cultures ... So whatever it takes, I think if we can do positive thinking and positive reinforcement, I think it's always a great idea."

—Kelyn Soong has been an MCRRC member since 2014. He is the sports editor at the Washington City Paper and has also written for RunWashington and the Washington Post.

MCRRC Intervals

Newsletter of the montgomery county road runners club

Board of Directors

President

Ken Earley

Vice President

Brad Stewart

Secretary

Brian Murphy

Treasurer

Jennifer Smith

Member-at-Large

Carol Braun

Member-at-Large

Peter Haack

Member-at-Large

Jefferson Lunsford

Member-at-Large

Yvette G. Murphy

Member-at-Large

Kristen Serafin

Staff

Director of Operations

Ashley Zuraf

Intervals

Publisher

Ken Earley

Managing Editor

Freddi Carlip

Editor

Amy Lin

Production Designer

Bob DiIorio

Contributors

Ken Earley
Barry Hauptman
Lisa Levin
Terri Scadron
Kelyn Soong
Marc Villa

Have comments or questions? Or want to help? Contact us at Intervals@mcrrc.org.

Intervals is a publication of the Montgomery County Road Runners Club. All Rights Reserved. For an electronic version see www.mcrrc.org.

All material herein is fully protected and may not be reproduced in any manner without the permission of the publisher. ©2020. Views expressed herein are those of the authors exclusively.

Intervals is published bimonthly by the Montgomery County Road Runners, P.O. Box 1703, Rockville MD 20849.

MCRRC is a non-profit, educational organization which promotes personal health and fitness through the sport of running. The club conducts regular running activities, including training sessions races, seminars, and social events.



Bouncing Forward

by Ken Earley

Happy New Year! Let's hope 2021 is a bit better than 2020. While it was a terrible year on a global stage, it was also quite bad for MCRRC. We lost nearly all our races, we missed training together in our usual programs, and we plain missed each other's company. What for many of us is our friendship, fellowship, and therapy was missing at a time when it was perhaps most needed.

Still, let's look at the positives that came out of 2020, even at the risk of doing what my great-grandpappy, Sherpadiah Snoddington Earley, would call putting lipstick on a pig.

We have a new focus on inclusion and equity, thanks to Yvette Murphy and Jeff Lunsford. While overdue, it's never too late to do the right thing, and we've made our start. Our communications have been vastly improved thanks to the hard work of Pete Haack, among others. We also saw the peaceful transition of power at Intervals from Scott Brown to Amy Lin.

While many of our races were canceled, we were still able to have races! The hard work of our race directors and their volunteers allowed us to reinvent how we can run a race in these times. That shouldn't be diminished.

To the outside world, a race is a simple thing: We start at A, run to B to C to D (grabbing a cup of lukewarm water between B and C), then back to A, and then eat a green banana. How hard can that be to organize? Race directors know better. That alone is an undertaking, and our RDs went above and beyond to have wave starts, distancing, and all the other components needed to convince our local government officials to turn "no" into "yes."

Likewise, our program directors turned our training from the social events of the year into safe and effective virtual training. And on a dime. They embraced technologies to engage our runners in ways that go far past "All you need is a good pair of shoes." We even had a virtual race series, thanks to our Race Committee.

Karen Kincer returned from a running event and told us she heard that we won't bounce back; we'll bounce forward. I really like that and have tried to remember it when we address the new now. So what does our future look like? Here are some ideas.

Our virtual and hybrid programs have

a future even when we can get together in large groups. They extend the Club's ability to provide top-notch training to runners regardless of geographical area. New technologies (well, leveraging existing technologies in a way that is new for us) and new attitudes allow us to be at the forefront among running clubs when it comes to expanding our outreach.

We also have room for a virtual race series, not in place of the existing series, but in addition to it. Groups like Park Run have



runners from all over the world comparing race results, and while this may not be the same as the head-to-head competition we all love, we aren't limited to one flavor.

What does the future hold for MCRRC? I don't know, and I leave it to the next and future Club boards to make that determination. But I am looking forward, with hope, to what we can become.

—Ken Earley is the President of MCRRC. He can be reached at president@mcrrc.org.

A Virtual Visit with Meb

by Kelyn Soong

When Meb Keflezighi lived in San Diego, one of his workouts involved running a 7.5-mile loop by a golf course three times. He loved the trail, the wood chips, the scenery—all of it made for a great run. But he would rarely go alone. He often went with a White friend, knowing that if he ran by himself, he would likely get stopped by security.

"I would go with friends that I have there just because sometimes I don't feel safe," Keflezighi said during a wide-ranging conversation hosted by MCRRC's Inclusion and Equity Committee on December 1.

Keflezighi, 45, an Olympic silver medalist, a Boston Marathon and New York City Marathon champion, and one of the most celebrated distance runners in the world, spoke to more than a hundred Club members via Zoom for nearly ninety minutes about his passion for running, his childhood without running water or electricity, his memories from the 2004 Athens Olympics, and his experiences with racism as a Black man in America.

Known simply as "Meb" in the running community, Keflezighi and his family emigrated from war-torn Eritrea when he was twelve, first to Italy and then to the United States. Running wasn't on his radar then. He didn't even know what the Olympics were. Instead, the young Keflezighi loved soccer, even if it required some ingenuity and imagination to play.

"In Eritrea, we didn't have soccer balls," he explained. "So we made a makeshift soccer ball where you have to stuff the long-

sleeve arm of a sweater when it gets old. Stuff it with plastic as hard as you can, make it try to be as round as you can. And then you sew the ... arm sleeves and then you have your soccer ball."

It wasn't until seventh grade in San Diego that Keflezighi started running in an official capacity. His P.E. teacher told the students that anyone who ran a mile in 6:15 or faster would receive an A and a school T-shirt. Keflezighi finished in 5:20.

"And he goes, 'You're going to go to the Olympics,'" Keflezighi said.

He eventually took his talents to UCLA, where he won four NCAA championships, then graduated with a degree in mass communications and business in 1999, a year after he became an American citizen. That's when the Olympics started to become more of a reality for him. In 2000, he qualified for the Sydney Olympics in the 10,000 meters and finished twelfth at the Games. Before he left the stadium, he made a goal for himself: Win an Olympic medal for the United States.

Four years later, he did—even surviving a dog attack while training in Crete just days before the race. Keflezighi's silver medal in Athens was the first Olympic medal won by an American in the men's marathon since 1972.

He qualified for two more Olympic Games, won NYC in 2009 and Boston in 2014, and in November 2017 retired from competitive running. But Keflezighi, who now lives in Tampa with his wife and three

continued on page 2

I Don't Run

by Marc Villa

I don't run. If that statement wasn't true earlier in my life, it most certainly was after May 2002 when, at the tender age of twenty-nine, I had major spinal surgery for bulging discs in my lower back. I've been virtually pain-free since then, but the spinal fusion it entailed will prevent me from engaging in high-impact physical activity for the rest of my life. Running is high on the list of inadvisable activities. That didn't matter to me back then, because I was not a physically active person and wasn't interested in running anyway.

Flash forward to 2019. I turned forty-six, and while I was in generally good health, my rising cholesterol levels had me concerned. My father had had quadruple-bypass surgery less than three years earlier, and I wasn't eager to follow in his footsteps. I needed to start an exercise program of some sort, and walking seemed the most logical option: It's low-impact and it doesn't require any special equipment other than a decent pair of shoes. So, I started walking casually that summer—maybe thirty minutes every day or every other day after work, or first thing in the morning. It wasn't necessarily the most thrilling activity for me, but I accepted it for what it was: exercise and a tiny little dopamine hit.

That fall I started paying close attention to two important people in my life who happen to be avid runners. The first was my friend and then-coworker Emily. She's a trail runner and would often speak of the races she had run with a local trail-running organization. I always admired the dedication, persistence, and enjoyment that seemed to surround her running, not to mention the fun and fellowship of her races. But as much as I admired her, I also envied that this simple activity that granted her so much satisfaction and so many health benefits was something I couldn't do. Because I don't run.

The other person whose running exploits I began to follow closely was our very own Intervals editor, Amy Lin,

who also happens to be my sister-in-law. Those of you who know her are already aware of her fifty-states marathon quest and a long and fruitful relationship with MCRRC, including several stints as a coach. I've always been awed by her abilities and discipline. On the same weekend I was in Baltimore for a comic-book convention that October, Amy was there to do the marathon. We met up briefly at the convention center the day before the race and explored the running expo. As I observed the other attendees milling about, I couldn't help but notice how they exuded excite-



Photo: Alex Reichmann

Marc Villa spots the paparazzi at Turkey Burnoff 2019

ment and confidence. It was as if they each radiated an aura of invincibility. I felt even more of that energy in the air walking through the crowd to find Amy after the race the next day. It was just so palpable, and I found myself wishing to be a part of it somehow. But once again I reminded myself: I don't run.

Inspired as I was by Emily's and Amy's examples, I was convinced that there was no way I could participate in their sport... until I came to a realization: *I may not be able to run their*

race, but I can walk my own. There was absolutely no reason I couldn't embrace walking with the same vigor and passion with which they embraced running. And at 6'3"—most of it leg—I could probably post some impressive walking times if I worked at it. I started walking intensely four to five times a week on the Capital Crescent Trail or in my neighborhood, often getting up early and arming myself with a flashlight and a reflective sash to brave the cold, dark mornings of late fall and winter. I downloaded a fitness tracker on my phone to monitor my progress, and it wasn't long before I was able to average a mile in under fifteen minutes. Over the months I grew stronger and felt my endurance and stamina increasing. I knew I was making progress that winter when I noticed I could jog up the long flight of steps at work without feeling winded! Walking has become a fixture in my life—something as necessary to me as eating, breathing or sleeping. If I don't do it at least three times a week, I feel cagey and incomplete. And when I do walk, I feel invigorated.

As I'm sure many of you have felt with running, walking has been one of my lifelines to sanity since the COVID-19 pandemic started. It improves my health, clears my mind, and gets me out of the house in a safe and productive manner. Most of my races in 2020 have been virtual, but even so, I started to walk longer distances in those races (8K, 10K). This year I began to power-hike trails, and I'm now doing some of the same races that Emily does, and posting faster times than a surprising number of runners! Perhaps the biggest gain I've made since I started walking is the sense of accomplishment I feel now, and every time I go out. For the first time in my life I've set a fitness goal, and I'm achieving it. No, I don't run. I walk. And I love it.

—Marc Villa joined MCRRC in November 2019. He loves comics and Star Trek, and co-hosts a podcast about Marvel movies (with Emily)!

Stone Mill 50-Mile Run Breaks Red Tape

by Barry Hauptman, Stone Mill Race Director

As 2020 began, we were excited to host the RRCA National Ultra Championship at Stone Mill. We didn't plan to change much compared to past races, as we wanted to hold the event in the manner that had earned us the RRCA recognition. By May, when registration normally opens, it was readily apparent that "normal" wouldn't be possible.

MCRRC President Ken Earley, MCRRC Secretary Brian Murphy, and I decided the fairest thing to do was to create a wait list, and to charge participants only if we were able to secure all our permits.

From filling the wait list to the excitement on social media, it was obvious the trail running community would support us. Over the summer, small ultramarathons took place throughout the U.S., and our Stone Mill health team (Stephanie Fonda, Gail Jones, and I) started researching protocols. We created a COVID plan and submitted it to Montgomery County. I was almost in shock when our plan was accepted.

The plan included a staggered, seeded start, hands-free aid stations, limited volunteers, a reduced field (250 slots instead of the usual 400), no crew, no pacers, and no spectators. Once we shared this with our wait list, quite a few opted out, but others eagerly grabbed the open spots.

It was time to secure permits. Knowing we wouldn't be allowed indoors anywhere, we requested and received permission to use a high school parking lot for race staging. Trail permits for county, state, and national parks depended on the Department of Transportation (DOT) permit and the county not revoking our health plan. Initially the DOT denied our request, stating they couldn't allow events of

more than ten people. We appealed; we lost. MCRRC Operations Director Ashley Zuraf would not give up; we reappealed and were granted a permit to cross the roads (even though it's a trail race, we need permission to cross roads). We were set... or so we thought. The week of the race, both Governor Hogan and County Executive Mark Elrich tightened restrictions, but fortunately our plan was set up so that the tighter restrictions were still fully respected. Then came a new obstacle—



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Michele Jacoby masks up to enter an aid station

after three inches of rain fell in the three days before race day, Montgomery County Parks closed all trails. On Friday, November 13, less than twenty-four hours before start time, the county said go. After a six-month struggle, it was game on.

We sent out detailed runner instructions, and everyone followed them to perfection. The drive-through

packet pickup went smoothly. Race morning, every runner showed up when asked, masked, dropped bags, and entered the start corral at their assigned times. Once off, they were asked to be masked upon entering each of our eleven aid stations. The weather and trail conditions turned out to be ideal, and runners were respectful, gracious, and ecstatic. I've never before felt so much gladness from a race community after providing just one normal day.

The men's race unfolded with course record-holder Paul Jacobs taking a lead he would never relinquish. Through the run down to the Potomac River, Patrick Blair was in second, with MCRRC top runner Nicolas Crouzier in third. Blair, new to both trail running and the fifty-mile distance, struggled through the final miles. Both Jacobs and Crouzier broke the 6:49 all-time, all-course record with 6:41 and 6:46, respectively, to finish first and second.

The ladies' race had a group of five head to the front. MCRRC teammates Meg Ryan and Michelle Miller pulled ahead at Mile 5. The three remaining leaders, including our defending champion, Kristen Serafin, were unable to continue for various reasons. Ryan opened up her lead at Mile 34 and claimed victory in her first fifty-miler with an 8:24. Miller took second in 8:45.

Stone Mill's RRCA National Championship designation has been deferred to 2021, when we look forward to holding a more normal event.

—Barry Hauptman has been an MCRRC member since 2003. This is his seventh year directing Stone Mill 50M. He previously directed the Summer Half Marathon program and co-created and directed the Winter Trail program.

Andy Steinfeld



by Lisa Levin

During the pandemic, with group runs, training programs, and races off the calendar, many of us have had to dig deep to find our “why,” our internal motivation for running. Andy Steinfeld, an MCRRC member for two decades, personifies that “why” through a pure love of the sport and enriching our community through running. After a disappointing attempt to qualify for Boston in 2003, Andy decided to shift his focus from his own running to helping others, signing on to coach with the First-Time Marathon (FTM) program. Inspired by his coach, Mike Broderick, Andy has helped hundreds of runners train toward their goals, first through FTM, which he eventually co-directed for five years, then as co-director of the 10K program and the Running Beyond Cancer program. Along the way, Andy tackled the ultra (50-mile) distance and qualified for Boston, but never lost sight of the bigger powers of running, founding and co-directing the Run for the Stripes in honor and memory of his running partner of fifteen years, Jan Eisner. The race, which is 100% volunteer-based, has grown from fewer than 300 participants to more than 1,400 participants and has raised \$422,500 to fund neuroendocrine tumor research. Andy, who turned fifty-eight at the end of December, lives with his wife, Dawn, and famous pug, Josie, in Silver Spring, and is the father of two grown daughters, Samantha and Anna.

Did you run or participate in sports when you were younger?

I had always run, but for me a run was a three-mile outing a couple of times a week. I was never consistent until I joined MCRRC. It's cliché, but it was a game changer for my running and social connections, and increased my overall happiness.

What was your first marathon? What do you remember most about it?

My first marathon was Marine Corps in 2001, led by my coach, the late Mike Broderick. This was right after 9/11. We were in our flag shorts, and the chants of “USA!” in the tunnel by the Pentagon were chilling. I ran with Mike and three others from our pace group from start to finish.

When and why did you do your first ultra-distance race?

Once again, it was the Mike Broderick influence. I was his crew chief for his first ultra at the JFK 50 Mile in 2001,



Photo: Ken Trombatore

Andy Steinfeld is all smiles in Marine Corps Marathon 2011

and I thought, “I can do this!” In 2003 I took on the challenge and loved it.

What is it about the longer/ultra-distances that is appealing to you?

I like that the goal is to finish, rather than a focus on time. Since race strategy includes walking, that took away a lot of self-imposed pressure to run the entire race. There is also a different vibe to ultra races. While the

running community in general is very supportive, you feel the camaraderie even more intensely in an ultra trail race.

Do you have a favorite race?

I would include the Boston Marathon, Parks Half Marathon, Pike's Peek, Philadelphia Marathon, and most recently the Seneca Greenway Marathon/50K on my list of favorites. I resisted trail running for many years but now really love being out in the woods.

What are your favorite training routes?

Point-to-point from Bethesda to Union Station. Also Lake Needwood, both the paved hiker/biker trail as well as the run around the lake.

Do you have any particularly memorable race experiences that stick out in your mind?

The first Boston I qualified for, in Chicago. I saw my wife and daughters at Mile 18 and yelled, “Call the airlines! We are headed to Boston.” Samantha jumped up and started running after me. Anna made me a bracelet with inspirational messages to read every 5K. Another memorable race was when I requalified for Boston at Marine Corps Marathon, where MCRRC friends Caroline Chamoun, Teah Devan, and Jenny Trombatore took shifts making sure I stayed on pace to qualify. I will never forget Jenny telling me, “No one fails on my watch!” I was terrified as she brought me through the last six miles of that race. I'd have to also include leading my 10:40 pace group to their first marathon finish at Marine Corps in 2017. We stayed close together the entire race, and their joy crossing the finish line could not have made me prouder. I've never seen a tighter

group of runners in my coaching career. A very personal moment was at the Parks Half Marathon in 2017, just three days after my running partner, Jan, had passed away. The support and emotion on the course that day was beyond anything I've ever experienced in my running life. Don Shulman and Mike Acuña were waiting for me at the finish line to give me my medal. Don put the medal around my neck, and then Mike put another one on me and said, "This one is for Jan." It symbolized the support and friendships that MCRRC has brought me.

Pre-COVID, what did your racing schedule typically look like?

I would do the Winter Trail program, leading to the Greenway 50K, then run Pike's Peek as a pacer, and either a fall marathon or ultra, as well as a bike century (100-mile) ride.

What races (virtual or challenges) did you undertake during the pandemic? Which was the most challenging for you?

I signed up for the Great Virtual Run Across Tennessee (GVRAT), Ring Around Kerry Ireland, and Bike/Run Across Maryland. The GVRAT was the toughest, as I've never run for more than four days a week on a consistent basis, and it required five days a week and forty-mile weeks over the typical hot and humid DC summer. Since I was also biking on one of the other days, I felt exhausted toward the end of the challenge.

How do you avoid injury while training and racing at such high mileage?

The most critical thing I have learned and applied is that hard workouts cannot be done on consecutive days, and your true hard miles should represent less than ten percent of your

total weekly miles. I embraced the long slow distance pace, and I think starting out slowly on my runs naturally loosened me up. I don't do a lot of stretching, but it hasn't been an issue. I know that's not true for everyone. Although if you see how I get up from the couch, one may argue I should be doing more stretching.

What have you missed most during the pandemic shutdowns/restrictions?

I have missed seeing the larger groups out on the trails. But a silver lining is that now, when I happen to come across a friend on the trails, each of us quickly stops our watches, spaces properly, and takes some time to chat and catch up. Ordinarily, pre-COVID, people tended to stay focused on their training and continue running, so it's been nice to see people wanting to stop and talk.

As a coach, you've helped so many runners achieve their goals. Do any particular experiences stand out as having shaped you as a coach?

The FTM group I coached with Aki Noguchi Giron and Sara Sadaie Hoy had a big impact on my coaching philosophy. Initially, I thought that coaching runners to do their best meant the best time they could achieve, but this group taught me that there is pure joy just finishing your first marathon. The smiles, laughter, and fun they had while out on the course stuck with me. I took that lesson with me when taking over the 10K program. I had some fast runners who wanted to focus on time, so I assigned a coach for that group that could help them achieve those goals, but for the rest, I tried to set a more laid-back tone. One of the best compliments I received was when a back-of-the-packer said, "He cares as much about us as the fast runners."

What have you learned about your own running from your experiences as a coach?

I have passed the days of setting PRs and I am running slower at what feels like an exponential rate. There's a time to let that go and reset. A friend once told me that a PR now means a "paradigm reset." My reset is to accept the slowness and embrace the social joy and benefits of just being out there running. I haven't mastered this fully yet but I am getting there. I never thought my new goals would be trying to make cutoffs, but that goal is no less of an accomplishment than qualifying for Boston. I learned this concept seeing runners I coached who were thrilled when accomplishing their own personal goals, and I also saw this in the Running Beyond Cancer program that Don and I co-directed.

What are your goals for 2021?

I have unfinished business with the Patapsco 50K, as I missed the ten-hour cutoff by fifteen minutes. I have analyzed my run and know the adjustments that need to take place to get an official finisher's time. I find unfinished business the best motivator for performance. I also will be recovering from surgery for two tears in my right shoulder. I would like to be running comfortably by the start of spring. Finally, my last three marathons I struggled in the final six miles, so I would like to run a marathon where I am smiling and chatting up the spectators from start to finish.

—Lisa Levin has been with MCRRC for more than a decade. She is a member of the Competitive Racing team and co-founder of Run Farther & Faster.

Coaches' Corner

by Terri Scadron

On a brisk November day in 2019, I round the final bend of the Rosaryville 50K, trying not to trip and fall, because I can't spare the seconds it'd take to get back on my feet. I have exactly two minutes to finish within the eight-hour time limit. I haven't seen anyone else in the race for miles and wonder if I'm dead last. When I clear the woods, lo and behold, at the top of a grassy hill, the race director is wildly cheering—presumably for me, because no one else is in sight. I muster what I can for a finish-line surge and am elated when he hands me my medal. I may be slow, but I just covered the same thirty-one miles as everyone else. That's worth celebrating.

MCRRC prides itself on having “a place for every pace,” from the gazelles on the Competitive Racing Team to the back-of-the-pack (BOP) runners like me. Runners may be slow for a host of reasons, including age, health issues, and less favorable genetics. But speed isn't the only relevant metric for runners. For many of us—both fast and slow—the social connections we make through running are just as important as running prowess. During the COVID-19 pandemic we've all learned how important these connections are, as we've been forced to cull our running tribes down to a few close friends.

The BOP is often considered the “party” end of MCRRC programs, and sometimes we reinforce that notion ourselves. For example, my Experienced Marathon Program (XMP) pace group, “12:00s and beyond,” calls itself the Mulletts—all business up front and party in the back. In truth, though, most BOP runners take the sport seriously. I've coached in multiple Club programs and can say with authority that BOP runners are as committed to the sport as our speedier counterparts. (And we all know of fast runners who've raced in banana suits and hotdog outfits!)

BOP runners are also indistinguishable from other runners in terms of work ethic and spirit. In every program I've coached, BOP runners are routinely the last runners to leave on track night. My groups joke that we used to close the bars and now we close the track. But jokes aside, we finish every repeat in the workout. On long-run days, BOP groups are the last to return to freeze pops in summer and warm cars in winter. We don't skimp on mileage.

At bottom, we're all real runners. Some in the BOP aspire to get faster, and some ultimately do. All of us keep coming back for more, out of our sheer love of running and the close friendships we've formed through

it. To be sure, there are a few things that are especially important for the BOP. The most obvious are safety concerns. Because BOP runners take longer to complete runs, it's imperative that MCRRC programs adequately support them with water stops and safety checks. My groups take more than four hours to finish a twenty-mile run and, as a result, face a higher risk of heat exhaustion in summer and hypothermia in winter. Program directors need to make sure these runners have enough fluids and nutrition and that they all make it back to base camp safely.

How else can the Club support the BOP? The single most important thing is to foster respect. Recognize BOP achievements, even if they don't translate to age-group placements or Boston-qualifying times. It's a big deal for a BOP runner to move from a 13:00 to a 12:00 minute pace, and it means everything to have that acknowledged. Cheer for the BOP, as we do for those who break the tapes, and we truly will be one club united in our common pursuit of endorphin highs!

—Terri Scadron has been a member of MCRRC since 2008. She has coached in the Advanced Marathon Training, Experienced Marathon, and Winter Trail programs.