

MCRRC Intervals

March 2021

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

On the Horizon

Please join us for our annual meeting on Sunday, March 28, held virtually via Zoom. Board elections will take place at the meeting. The agenda includes the presentation of the Club's first Values Statement and proposed changes to the MCRRC constitution and by-laws. Further details to be announced.

Due to the pandemic, we are still working to secure permits for the races we hope to hold this year. Please check our website for the most up-to-date information:
<https://mcrrc.org/calendar/category/race/list/>

Board Meetings

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

MCRRC Winter Programs March On



Photo: Chris Clarke

Speed Development participant Heather Fisher-Clarke runs in Dogwood Park during a recent snowfall.



Photo: Azure McFarlane

Azure McFarlane and Tony Hwang are happy to have conquered a Speed Development workout at Lake Needwood.



Photo: Jamin Bartolomeo

Ricky Hofbauer, Kenny Hamilton, Ally Rogers, Genna Hamilton, and Jamin Bartolomeo of the Winter Trail program enjoy the Gold Mine Trail.



The Long Haul

by Amy Lin

So. Who else thought the pandemic would magically disappear as soon as the calendar hit January 1? Those of us who have done marathons know the feeling of reaching the Mile 20 marker and realizing the finish line is still quite a bit farther than we'd like. We're in this thing for the long haul, and sometimes it feels as though we're hitting the wall with every step.

Many of us are used to registering for races months or even years in advance, using that shiny medal or possible PR as the carrot at the end of the stick. (I confess, I can easily while away hours shopping for races to put on my to-run list.) Around the country, in-person races are gradually starting to reappear on the radar, and they seem tantalizingly close.

However, MCRRC remains in a holding pattern due to county health metrics and restrictions—our 2021 race permits have not been granted yet—so we Club members need to dig deep to find or even reimagine our finish lines. We can focus more on the journey than the destination, and we can embrace the rest and recovery days as much as the go-hard-or-go-home workout days. Virtual races, distance challenges, exercise streaks, and other goals without set dates allow us to be flexible with our training schedules and to take some time to work on mental health, too.

This issue of Intervals takes a look at pandemic training and racing—past, present, and future. Ken Earley bids the Club adieu and expresses thanks after his two-year term as MCRRC President. Karen Kincer reminds us to assess our current fitness when transitioning into post-pandemic training or racing, and Noam Neusner recaps various Club members' experiences with virtual races.

As we continue to anticipate in-person races, Jane Heinrichs updates us on the MCRRC Race Committee's work during its first year in existence and

what procedures it has implemented for Club races to come. For our Runner Profile, Lisa Levin spotlights bodybuilder, registered nurse, ultrarunner, and all-around inspiration Adeline Ntam. In our Coaches' Corner, Lauren Kline offers her thoughts on staying motivated to reach a virtual finish line.

We'll get there, MCRRC. Sooner or later, virtually or in person, we'll get there.

Running Where We Are

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than with my daughter, and with my husband at a still slower pace, but in pandemic times, I think that qualifies as a date, so it's definitely worth it. I've been a bit all over pace-wise and in the end, my LSD pace is probably a little slower coming out of the pandemic than when I went in.

There's no absolute "right" way to train through a pandemic. If you've gotten through healthy and sane, you've had great success. Now the important thing is to stay healthy so that we can get back to our running friends, training groups, and races. Being honest with yourself about your current running fitness and not pushing too hard, too fast will help you to stay injury-free. And since most of us have a renewed sense of gratitude for the company of others, staying injury-free will allow us to take advantage of the good things I hope are coming.

—Karen Kincer joined MCRRC in 1996. She is the co-director of the Winter Half-Marathon program and the race director of Pike's Peek 10K and Suds & Soles 5K.

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

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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.



So Long, Farewell, and Thanks

by Ken Earley

Here it is, my last column as MCCRRC President. It has been an interesting two years, to say the least. Back in March 2019 I, along with the rest of the world, had no idea what was in store. On a global, national, and local level we have endured (and continue to endure) some pretty bad stuff.

The last year has been hard for the Club, with lost revenue, lost visibility, lost membership, and lost opportunity. We have done what we could to mitigate the damage, such as reducing expenses and finding new ways to engage runners and raise revenue.

And speaking of revenue, I would like to thank Don Shulman, Mike Acuña, Karen Kincer, and Jean Arthur for all their hard work on the successful Capital Campaign. Nobody asked them to do this: as former presidents, they saw a need and just did the work. Thank you! I am grateful to them and the other previous board members who ensured we had reserves to survive.

My fellow board members, the program directors, the race directors, the volunteers, and the members have worked really hard these past two years, and I truly appreciate the contributions and support of every one of you. You are all reminders of what is great about the running community and the community at large.

I have to take time to thank Ashley Zuraf, our Director of Operations, for all she has done the past two years, and the past year in particular. I have often joked that shutting down a running club turns out to be more work than running one. That isn't true, of course, but it certainly involved an entirely different set of tools, and Ashley has answered the call. Whether it was the virtual race series, the virtual programs, or the in-person races, Ashley has been fighting hard to help the rest of us ensure success for our new projects. She has worked diligently with Jennifer Smith, our treasurer, to acquire loans and grants to keep the Club above

water. And for two years I have read every email and every comment and answered every phone call with the same thought: "I'd better talk to Ashley about this." Thank you, Ashley!

I think anyone leaving an office or position must wonder if they are leaving things better or worse than they found them. I don't think there's any question I've failed on this one! But it speaks to the power of the other Club leaders and members that we have an organization that could be injured but not killed by this catastrophe. Instead, we will come back stronger and more agile, with new ideas for a new



normal. Let the next board and you, the membership, make MCCRRC what poet Seamus Heaney called "a shooting star going back up the darkness."

So this is the end. Thanks to all of you for the trust you placed in me, and I hope to see you in person on a road or trail someday soon.

—Ken Earley has been with MCCRRC since 2004 and previously served as secretary, vice president, and Nominating Committee member and chair. He coached in the Experienced Marathon program for ten years and now co-directs the Winter Half-Marathon program.

Running Where We Are

by Karen Kincer

It's been a long year since Friday, March 13, 2020, when essentially the world as we knew it shut down. We all scurried home to our houses that day, not quite realizing that a year later many of us still would not be back to our offices, our classrooms, the gym, the coffee shop, and so many other places. As runners, in many ways we are the lucky ones, able to lace up our sneakers and head out the door to a comfortable, familiar respite that feels normal. But as we (I hope) head back into true normal over the next few months, it's important that we step back and take stock of where each of us are with our running.

As we are able to meet up with friends again, and maybe even start running in groups, or—if dreams come true—in races in the future, we need to be careful that we get back out there using common sense, running at the pace we are now, which may or may not be the pace we were before the lockdown.

Some people have run harder during the pandemic. Running is great stress relief and some have had more time, or more flexible schedules, or fewer late nights, and all of that has led to more or better training. Maybe you've gotten faster.

Others have taken the cleared racing calendar as an opportunity to take a break from hard training, still taking advantage of the stress relief that running provides but maybe running less mileage or just running easy with no speedwork. Your body probably feels refreshed but you might not be as fast as you once were or have the mileage base you did before.

If you're like me, you may have done a bit of both. I've run with no training plan except when I've run workouts with my sixteen-year-old daughter for virtual track and cross-country. Otherwise, I ran with a couple of close friends, thankfully a bit slower

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A Boom in Virtual Racing

by Noam Neusner

For MCRRC members stuck without a goal race due to COVID, it's been all about going virtual—running a race distance alone, or with a handful of friends who agree to do it safely separated.

Quite a few Club members participated in summer distance challenges, such as the Great Virtual Race Across Tennessee 1000K, during which runners and walkers logged daily miles and tried to complete the race within four months while being chased by virtual buzzards. Some did the crossing two or even three times.

Tom Hu, who has done the Disney Dopey Challenge (a 5K, 10K, half marathon, and full marathon in four consecutive days) every year since it began in 2014, completed the task largely on his own but with some support—for his marathon he was joined by Cameron Jackson, Ruby Chang, and Donald Chung, and then he walked the last two miles with his mom.

Several runners who had been training for the Boston Marathon gathered over a single weekend in Lake Needwood Park to do a half-marathon loop twice, and they finished under a banner emblazoned with the Boston Athletic Association's famous unicorn.

Ken Trombatore is a Club mainstay at Boston, and whether he's wearing a lobsterman outfit at the runner's village or drinking beer with bikers along the course, he's known for turning the experience into a zany and immersive Hunter Thompson-esque bender. So, it's no surprise that he ran his virtual Boston as another experiment in craziness.

Telling no one—including his wife—until the day before, he designed a course that would connect Montgomery County's four major farm breweries, and hid three sealed metal water bottles along the course. At 1 a.m., he grabbed his flashlight, water bottle, Noxgear, and phone, slipped out of his house, and started running.

"I was injured, and I didn't want to bother anybody by making them wait for me if things went south. I was pretty sure I'd spend most of the night walking and munching pretzels," he said. "Surprisingly, I was actually able to run the whole thing. In the middle of the night there was zero traffic so I ran in the middle of two-lane roads. There was a full moon to light areas that weren't tree-covered, and I had my flashlight for areas that were. I started out with podcasts, including the interview

between MCRRC's very own Eric Melby, Julie Sapper, and Lisa Levin which had the timely advice 'My race, my rules.' Later on, I switched to my playlist to keep me entertained and motivated. In the end, the experience was personal, unique, and serene." Ken documented his run with short selfie videos and returned home in one piece.

Hai Nguyen, a regular in several MCRRC programs, wanted to run his age in miles when he turned 29 in 2012. So naturally, this past January, he decided to do it again, at age 38. "My lifetime pacer, [wife] Tricia, was very supportive, so I couldn't back out anymore. I started at 6:04 a.m. from Ken-Gar, ran south toward the stable, and seven hours, ten minutes, and thirty-five seconds



Photo: Amy Lin

With cowbell in hand, Alexandra Lungu greets her father, Codrin Lungu, as he finishes his virtual marathon.

later, the pain stopped. Tricia joined me for twenty-three miles. Maybe I'll do it again in another decade or so." The course was a ten-mile out-and-back, repeated twice; Hai said "the second loop wasn't as fun." It never is.

Codrin Lungu ran twenty-six one-mile loops (plus another 0.2-mile stretch) to complete the virtual Wineglass Marathon in his neighborhood. He had settled on the one-mile loop with what seemed like a small hill because it guaranteed a predictable course with reliable support. "After a couple of trial runs (the longest about fourteen

miles), I figured it would hurt as much to do it this way as in any other setting, so why not?" he said. The first ten loops went fine, thanks to the Broadway cast recording of *Hamilton*. "Afterwards I made little games for myself: Will that gentleman be done mowing his front yard by the time I loop back? Will that fluffy puppy get back to his house from the walk before I return? Is the Fermi paradox solvable with classic mathematical methods? What is the meaning of life?"

Later, the questions became more visceral. "Will this knee hurt more, or less, by the time I hit this hill again? Why am I doing this???"

Various friends joined Codrin for a few loops, and his family cheered him on at his homemade aid station. His two-year-old daughter met him at the finish line—"the cherry on my mixed-taste cake of my many-looped marathon."

Like her husband, Ondina Lungu signed up for the Wineglass Marathon and was getting into race-ready shape as COVID hit. As telework and child-care responsibilities piled up, the training started to trail off, and the injuries set in. Still, "I needed to prove to myself that I can still run a marathon after pregnancy," she said. With a walk-run plan and a very relaxed pace, she took a Friday off in October and "went for it."

"I did not have a plan in mind other than to just run various loops around my neighborhood, anywhere from half a mile to a mile each, as many times as my mental fortitude would allow," she said. She listened to a murder mystery, *All the Devils Are Here*, by Louise Penny, and managed through the first ten or so miles. That's when the plantar fasciitis kicked in. "I had to stop, as I was limping. I took my shoe off and stretched, was all ready to go home, but then decided to keep listening to the book and keep going. It was unbearably slow, painful, and boring," she said. "All I can say is that the book was good."

—Noam Neusner has been an MCRRC member for about a decade, when he hasn't been suspended for running recklessly in a banana suit. When he's not running, he annoys people on Facebook.

How to Host a Race During a Pandemic

by Jane Heinrichs

As the U.S. marks one year since the first COVID-19 case, the pandemic and its lasting impact on the running community is still with us. As members of a running club, we are used to running with friends, racing in groups, and volunteering. With the Club's races and programs all but suspended, these activities seem like a distant and fond memory.

MCRRC's Race Committee (Jim Farkas, Karen Kincer, Brian Murphy, and Danny Talmage), which came together last year, has taken on an especially important role since the passing of George Tarrico, a beloved MCRRC member and the "Godfather of Races." With COVID-19 vaccines becoming more available, the committee is working hard to bring back more in-person events in a safe, responsible, and fun way. Since the start of the pandemic, the Club has hosted two in-person races, the Germantown 5 Miler and the Stone Mill 50-Mile Run. At both of these events, the committee, in partnership with the race directors, successfully implemented COVID-19 precautionary measures that will likely become standards for future MCRRC races. Below is a summary of those measures.

Obtaining Permits and Capping Participation

Like all of you, the committee is carefully watching the situation with COVID-19 and monitoring guidance from the CDC and state and local authorities as it pertains to events and large gatherings. And of course, as with any MCRRC event, the status of a race will be determined by the Club's ability to obtain permits. But even with a permit, there are government-mandated participation limits. For example, the COVID-19 plan for each race capped participation at 250 individuals. To ensure the event stayed safely within the CDC and Montgomery County outdoor event gathering limits, the 250 included not only runners, but also volunteers at the Germantown 5 Miler. The cap will

obviously vary (and change over time) based on state and county limits, as well as venue restrictions.

Staggered Starts

To allow for maximum social distancing, the club implemented staggered starts, where runners crossed the starting line alone or with just a few other racers, every 1–5 minutes depending on the COVID-19 plan and race venue. The start was chip-timed so there was no penalty for starting later (many of the Club's championship races traditionally use only gun times). The club also restricted access to the race staging area (start/finish lines) by asking runners to stay in or near their cars until 5–10 minutes before their assigned start time. As an added benefit of a longer start window, runners did not feel the pressure to start when the horn went off.

Investments in Personal Protective Equipment

As part of MCRRC's commitment to keep runners safe, it has invested in vast amounts of PPE. This includes cleaning supplies, masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and hand-washing stations. For both events, masks were required for all participants while not in the act of running, and COVID-19 signage was clearly displayed to serve as a friendly reminder to practice social distancing. The club also anticipates the possibility of renting additional portajohns, as venues such as schools and senior centers can no longer be used as staging areas for many of the club's races.

Limiting Spectators

In a pre-pandemic world, MCRRC would normally welcome as many spectators as possible. To keep within the cap, the Club banned spectators from the race staging areas and discouraged spectators from congregating along the race courses.

Eliminating High-Contact Points

1. Pre- and Post-Race Food
Love the MCRRC's cookies, bagels, and fruit? Me too, but not during a

pandemic. Plan accordingly and bring your own food.

2. Aid Stations

For the Germantown 5 Miler, the COVID-19 plan eliminated water stations on the course and encouraged runners to carry their own hydration and fuel. For the much longer Stone Mill 50-Mile Run, the MCRRC offered the standard number of aid stations; volunteers wore PPE, followed social distancing guidelines, and offered contactless food and beverage options.

3. Packet Pick-Up

As yet another social distancing measure, the Germantown 5 Miler used long tables with prepacked clear bags containing runner's bibs, chips, and shirts. For Stone Mill, runners picked up their race essentials and other goodies from their car the day before the race. For MCRRC's low-key races in 2021, members will reuse their 2020 bibs and chips to keep large groups from forming at the start of a race.

4. No Race-Day Registration

At both events, the COVID-19 plans eliminated race-day registration—again, to avoid a high-touch point.

Lean Staff

The club managed both races with minimal volunteers to limit the number of people present at the event. Volunteers were required to wear masks at all times.

Despite these limitations, the committee understands that races are a valued piece of Club membership and that in-person (even socially distanced) racing retains an allure that on-your-own, virtual racing is unable to match. To this end, the committee is targeting the next in-person race for this month. Stay tuned, and keep running!

—Jane Heinrichs joined MCRRC in 2011. She loves the trails closest to her house (Beach Drive and the Rock Creek Trail) and running with her XMP friends.

Adeline Ntam



by Lisa Levin

If you've participated in any MCRRC training programs or races, you probably already know Adeline (Adey) Ntam. It's likely you've met her, or at least recognize her, from supporting fellow runners as a pace coach, as the co-captain of volunteer coordination for Pike's Peek 10K, as a finish line medical volunteer at Parks Half Marathon, pre- and post-race at Stone Mill 50-Mile Run and Seneca Creek Greenway Trail 50K, or simply from cheering runners along on the course. While the list of Adey's volunteer commitments to the Club alone sound exhausting, Adey is also an accomplished ultra-distance runner and busy registered nurse in oncology/hematology, and she's had to juggle her stressful work life with running and training during the pandemic. A recent injury brought new perspective to Adey, who has been a member of MCRRC for nearly ten years and lives in Silver Spring.

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

My parents encouraged me and my siblings to be active at a very young age. They loved sports and the outdoors, and wanted us to do the same. I was not a fan of running but loved organized sports. I played basketball, field hockey, and soccer in high school, and also ran track and field. I continued field hockey, lacrosse, and track and field in college.

When and why did you start running?

All the sports I played required a lot of running. My lacrosse coach in college, Eric Day, was the person that encouraged me to start long-distance running. I started to get into my

groove for long-distance running my sophomore year, in the fall of 1999.

What was your first road race? What do you remember most about it?

I would never encourage this because of the risks and liabilities involved that I now understand, but I ran the 2000 Chicago Marathon with a friend's bib. She was injured and offered her bib to me. She and my best friend offered me aid throughout the race and met me at all the checkpoints. I ran in a cotton

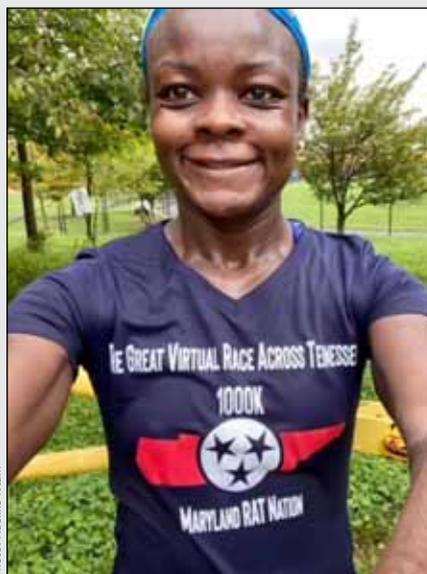


Photo: Adeline Ntam

Adeline Ntam after completing her third virtual crossing of Tennessee last summer

T-shirt and shorts and a pair of old New Balance shoes that belonged to another roommate! It was an amazing feeling to be part of such a big crowd and race. I had never understood the magnitude of the Chicago Marathon before, and I got a greater appreciation of it that day. What I remembered most was the crowd and all the cheers, and the post-race soreness—OMG.

How long after you started running did you decide to tackle an ultra race?

I did the Winter Trail Program in 2012 and took about a year to decide to do the Seneca Creek Greenway Trail 50K in 2013. My curiosity, love, and passion for ultra-racing and trail running came from reading the book *Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Super Athletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen*, by Christopher McDougall. The book changed my life and perspective on trail and long-distance running.

What was the last in-person race you were able to do in 2020?

The Capital Backyard Ultra "Last Person Standing" on August 1 in Bethesda. The race was originally set for the end of May, but had to be postponed based on Montgomery County's COVID regulations at the time. The rescheduled race was well organized and followed all county health rules and regulations to make sure it was executed safely. This was also my most challenging race. Runners have to complete a 4.167-mile loop every hour on the hour until only one runner is left. A runner who is not back in the start corral when the next loop/hour starts is disqualified. This goes on until only one runner is left, which can take days. It's a race of will, patience, extensive planning, and grit. [Editor's Note: Adey finished first woman and fourth overall with a total of seventy-five miles over eighteen loops/hours.]

You have had to balance training for ultra-distance races with your job as a nurse. How do you balance work and training, especially as a busy

front-line worker during the pandemic?

I run very early in the morning before work. My job is emotionally taxing, and I like to take get out and connect with God, the Earth, and my mental well-being before interacting with my patients. I have to be in the right state of mind for their sake and the support that they need and deserve. Getting fresh air and exercise early helps to calm my soul and helps with my anxiety. It also helps me to approach the day with a calm heart and mind. I do the longer training runs on the weekend, but still like to start early when most of the world is sleeping and it is just me and my thoughts.

What is your favorite race?

Stone Mill 50-Mile Run. It is extremely well-organized, it is local, the price is right, the race director is an amazing person, the volunteers are top notch, and it is one of our Club races.

Do you have a favorite running route?

No, I usually lace up my shoes and go. Safety is usually my guiding factor, especially since I run really early in the morning. I like to change my routes and to run where it's well lit. I make sure that I'm visible with lights, reflective wear, and brightly colored clothing.

What is one piece of must-have running gear that you own?

I love my XOSKIN running gear. Their line of clothing, especially their socks, has been a game changer for my ultra races. I love the brand so much that I'm an ambassador.

If you could go back to when you first started running, what advice would you give yourself?

Have fun and don't take it too seriously. Be patient, embrace the suck, and fuel properly.

Have you had to deal with any injuries throughout your running career?

I had a few falls and twists and turns here and there, but nothing too serious, especially since I'm a firm believer in the value of cross-training. When COVID started spreading and the gyms closed, I stopped cross-training and was just running, averaging about 150–165 miles a week. I knew the jump in distance was a bit much, but with the anxiety that came with the start of the pandemic, I needed that outlet to clear my mind, and as a result, the runs got longer and earlier. Without the cross-training, I was pounding the pavement, engaging in the same movement every day. I experienced my first major injury at the end of August after I stepped on uneven pavement and my knee buckled about four miles into a planned solo 50K. I shook it off and ran through the discomfort, and by the time I completed my run I was in severe pain and my knee was swollen. I saw a specialist a few days later, and an MRI showed my right knee had extensive damage that required surgery. I had the surgery at the end of October, so at the moment, I'm taking the surgeon's orders, doing physical therapy, walking, stretching, doing isometric knee exercises, and daily elevation, along with ice therapy.

Running is often a source of stress relief, especially during the past year. How have you maintained a positive outlook through not only COVID, but your recent injury?

I have gained a greater appreciation for walking, which I can do while I recover.

Walking has helped me to better connect with the world around me and to find a calmness I didn't experience before. When I was only running, I was so focused on how many miles I could fit in during the run that I did not pay attention to my surroundings. Walking, I've been able to take in the sunrise, the various flowers, insects, and wildlife around me. I take many moments to take it all in and be grateful. My goal each day is to make my steps less painful and more worthwhile, to capture nature at its finest that day, and to see the beauty in my surroundings and to share it with the world.

With respect to running, what do you miss most from the pre-COVID world?

I miss volunteering and seeing and hugging my running friends.

When you are not working or running, what else do you enjoy doing?

Spending time with my family and friends, doing whatever that day calls for. Simply being around people that I love and appreciate gives me much joy.

What are your goals for 2021?

I have so many goals but the simplest and truest to form is to stay healthy, heal from my knee surgery, spread cheer, and continue to be a kind human.

—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 Lauren Kline

We're two months into 2021, and MCRRC continues to provide unique opportunities to take steps together. As runners and walkers, how do we keep motivated during the cold, dark months of winter? Why should we get out there and push through those miles when there's no finish line in sight? Our training programs and races are virtual; what's the point if nobody's around to cheer for us and witness our accomplishments?

I have to admit, I was a little skeptical of virtual training. I was comfortable on my couch, huddled under blankets, wishing COVID was behind us. However, MCRRC had a different idea: Let's coach virtually! *That's nuts! How can I possibly motivate anyone else to go for a run when I can't get my own body to move right now?* That's when I realized we're still heading toward a finish line, even if it's a virtual one for now. When the pandemic is over, do we really want to start from scratch, as if we've never run a step in our lives? No, we want to have a base that we can build upon. We need to bolster our mental and physical well-being, especially now, to keep COVID at bay.

Most of the other physical activities I love, from tennis to swimming to dancing, have been literally shut down until the pandemic is under control. So what can I do? I truly dislike running alone, and I make no secret of it. I'm more positive, energetic, and enthusiastic when

I'm coaching my runners on the track, or on a beautiful and serene path. How can I possibly motivate others virtually?

It starts with that very first step! From there, each small step leads us closer to the finish line. As we're learning in quarantine, it's incredibly difficult to function when we feel disconnected from



Photo: Vanessa Chang

Footprints decorate fresh snow on Sligo Creek Trail.

others. We're stronger together; we thrive when we're all working toward a common goal. MCRRC's virtual programs provide structure and use technology tools to help

our runners and walkers succeed. I can still cheer for my folks, congratulate them on their mileage, and provide advice and guidance.

I love leading a group of people who might never have run in their lives, in training for our goal race, usually 5K. Many of them don't believe they'll ever be able to run three miles. It seems daunting, but they take the steps with me. They follow the training plan, and after a few weeks, they're able to run one mile. A few weeks later, they're able to run two miles. By the end of the program, they're running three miles—all of a sudden, what seemed impossible has become *real*. At our goal race, my runners cross the finish line beaming with pride, accomplishment, and awe. What I enjoy most is motivating others to take the steps with me, and they often end up in front of me as they gain confidence and speed.

I can't wait to meet you in person, but until then, take that first step with me virtually—get out there, soak in the sunshine, move your body at whatever pace you can, and know that we'll be stronger, healthier, and happier with every mile we travel together. Thanks for motivating me, MCRRC. We've got this!

—Lauren Kline has been training with various MCRRC programs for more than fifteen years and currently coaches in the 5K and 8K programs.