

# MCRRC Intervals

July 2021

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

## On the Horizon

**Friday, July 9, 7:00 pm**

Midsummer Night's Mile  
Gaithersburg High School Track  
Gaithersburg, MD

**Saturday, August 7, 6:45 pm**

Going Green Track Meet  
Gaithersburg High School Track  
Gaithersburg, MD

**Saturday, August 14, 8:00 am**

\*Groovin' Woodstock XC 7K  
Dickerson, MD

**Saturday, August 21, 7:30 am**

\*Eastern County 8K  
Silver Spring, MD

**Sunday, September 26, 6:45 am**

Parks Half Marathon  
Rockville to Bethesda, MD  
[www.parkshalfmarathon.com](http://www.parkshalfmarathon.com)

Races with asterisks are permit pending.

Keep an eye out for the announcement of our next Featured Runners guest this month!

For the most updated information, please visit [www.mcrrc.org](http://www.mcrrc.org)

## Board Meetings

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

## Happy Faces at MCRRC Races



Photo: Kim Nonato

Haydar Bulut smiles for the camera during Little Bennett 10K.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Grace Shen kicks to the finish at Run Aware 5K.



Photo: Adrian Spencer

Katie Wagner and Leslie Itsara conquer the original course of Riley's Rumble's Half Marathon.



# Once More Unto the Breach, Dear Friends

by Amy Lin

The heat and humidity are here, and we're getting outside in full force. We've put those virtual challenges to rest and are ready to be together *together* instead of together apart. Those of us who have runners in our households still like running with them (we hope) but are ready to run with our MCRRC friends, many of whom we haven't seen face-to-face in more than a year.

If I had to guess, I would say most—if not all—MCRRC members are high achievers in many aspects of life. I'd never have thought being "normal" would make us happy, but after everything that's happened since last March, it's safe to say most of us are downright ecstatic to go back to plain ol' normal. With many of us fully vaccinated, several favorite Club races coming back, and summer training programs kicking off, we've taken the next big step toward post-pandemic life.

The constantly changing health metrics and related government regulations are still wreaking havoc with race permitting, but it's heartening to see more Club members racing, running in groups, and just generally enjoying each other's company (and faces!). We join a running club because we want to participate in our sport with other people who love it as much as we do, and finally we get to do that again.

This issue of Intervals highlights some of the togetherness that makes MCRRC so special. Brad Stewart

gives some much deserved gratitude to our merry band of volunteers, the backbone of our Club and all its fantastic races and programs. Brian Belonia invites like-minded members to participate in the 4x4x48 Challenge. Dan DiFonzo writes of the myriad benefits of bonding with a running group, including "pavement therapy," while Lauren Kline recaps MCRRC's efforts to support a long-standing and beloved member of our running family during a difficult time.

For July's Runner Profile, Lisa Levin interviews John Way, another longtime Club member, who has run more than a thousand races in his career and shows no signs of stopping. In our Coaches' Corner, Mary Travaglini looks at how faster runners can get a solid workout with a slower running partner—there's no need to let pace stand in the way of a run with a good friend.

Here's to running family, old and new. Wishing you a normal summer together!



## MCRRC Intervals

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**Have comments or questions? Or want to help?**

Contact us at [Intervals@mcrcc.org](mailto:Intervals@mcrcc.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.



# Happy Summer

by Brad Stewart

**W**e welcome the return of long summer days full of heat, humidity, running, racing, and (hopefully disappearing) cicadas.

It has been wonderful to see so many of you back running together again. The summer training programs (FTM, SHM, and XMP) are already welcoming large groups of enthusiastic participants for in-person workouts. We are excited to see you out there running once again with friends—new and old—while getting prepared for your fall goal races. Our training programs remain one of our strongest member benefits. The fact that so many of you have decided to come out and train with us speaks to the value that our programs add to MCRRC.

Membership is once again growing, and we look forward to welcoming all our new members to our programs, our races, and our community. While we have an extremely loyal membership base, one focus of the board and staff in the coming months will be working to grow and sustain our membership for the foreseeable future.

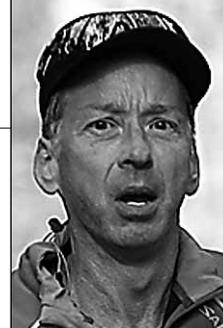
Our race calendar is boasting an almost full list of events for the months ahead. Registration opened for the Parks Half Marathon, and twenty-five percent of the bibs sold out in just two days. Also, our first two track meets are open for registration: Midsummer Night's Mile (July 9) and Going Green Track Meet (August 7). Thank you to Gaithersburg High School (GHS) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) for their willingness to allow us to use their track for these events.

We are thankful for the dedication and hard work of our volunteers who are behind each and every club event—program directors and pace coaches, race volunteers, weekly workout leaders, photographers, and medical personnel. So, welcome back, volunteers! We cannot do any of this without you.

Are you a new member receiving this

newsletter for the first time? Come out and volunteer. There is no better way to learn how the Club works, meet new people, and learn the inner workings of putting on a race, than to be there and see it for yourself.

I close this column with a very special thanks to an incredibly special set of volunteers. During the pandemic, they were willing to volunteer in any capacity necessary to serve our running



community, ensuring you had every opportunity to race. Please join me in thanking them when you get the opportunity: Karen Craney, Bonnie Gitlin, Jeff Gitlin, Leonard Lee, Danny Talmadge, and Dan Reichmann. Thank you!

—Brad Stewart is the President of MCRRC. He can be reached at [president@mcrrc.org](mailto:president@mcrrc.org).

## Runner Seeks Challenge

by Brian Belonia

**L**ike many of you, I found solace in running and perusing the internet during the pandemic to pass the time. The two activities frequently intersected, particularly around ways to improve my running technique, looking for reviews on the hottest gear, and vlogging experiences from people across the country. These experiences ran the gamut, from finding motivation without a particular race goal, to arranging and rearranging your playlist, to gimmick races.

Ah, gimmick races. Now that's a well to get lost in for days. Can't run a marathon? Run it in your backyard! Got a treadmill in your garage? See how much elevation you can get over a distance of 10K. Got a Strava account? See who the best GPS artist in your group is. The internet never ceases to amaze.

Out of all of these, one rose to test endurance and will: the 4x4x48, developed by David Goggins, a retired Navy SEAL, known for his unbridled, military-regiment style as a motivational speaker. He frequently posts snippets of his training regiment with direct, and often profanity-laden, statements to keep his viewers focused on their fitness goals. If you are or have served in the military, I'm sure none of this is

surprising. However, for the rest of us, this may seem jarring and maybe even offensive.

This brings me to his 4x4x48 challenge. Every four hours, the participant runs four miles, over the course of 48 consecutive hours. Does this sound insane and crazy? Absolutely. Do I want to do this? Uh, yeah. I'm a runner; it's in my nature. Why else would I willingly want to run 26.2 miles? Why do any of us wake up at the crack of dawn to run? Why do we do speed development workouts? If you find yourself scoffing at the obviousness of the answers to the questions, then you know why.

And that sentiment echoed among the various runners vlogging their own individual experiences as they took up the challenge. People organize their kits, food intake, and sleep regiment as much as they can during those 48 hours. Enthusiasm rules the early part of the challenge, but fatigue sets in as the sun set on the first day. By mid-day on the second day, delirium sets in and turns into a zombie-like state. The most brutal time is the second night where everything hurts but the will to finish overcomes all adversity. Then

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# A Healthy Dose of Pavement Therapy

by Dan DiFonzo

It's no secret that runners tend to develop deep relationships with the people they run with regularly. It could be the hours spent together on the trails, the unplugged time away from our phones, or the peace of mind that comes with knowing that we won't be interrupted by a needy child. We tend to forge strong bonds, and in some instances, everlasting relationships, by virtue of the time and experiences we share with those we grow close to on our runs.

During the pandemic, runners had to figure out how to adapt to the new reality of how to run safely with others in order to get that prescribed dose of "pavement therapy."

For the solo runners among us, things didn't change all that much. In fact, running proved to be a respite from the chaos in a time of uncertainty and confusion. It was a rare chance to forget about COVID for an hour at a time, often getting a cold slap of reality when we noticed a person in the distance heading in our direction wearing a mask, more than a few stepping off the trail to get away from the gasping, sweating vector of potential disease coming at them like the Grim Reaper.

For the social runner—the one who almost always runs with others—the change was harder to handle. Those runners had to adapt. The social runners figured out quickly that they could shrink their running circle down to a small, trusted "pod" of regular partners—an extended family, if you will—who were equally committed and disciplined enough to exclusively run with the same three or four pod members.

This provided runners with the social fix they so desperately needed, while simultaneously distancing them from the virus that was lurking around the corner, and doing it with a very limited posse of like-minded and like-paced running partners. A simple solution, not without risk, but for some, worth undertaking in order to fill the social void and get in those much needed miles with others.

For many, that socially connected run became so much more. It became an escape, a therapy session, a bonding opportunity, and a place to listen and be heard.

Deirdre Gallagher has been an MCRRC member for nearly thirty years. She says having that pod of morning running buddies to look forward to seeing each day took on a whole new meaning.

"Especially in the midst of the pandemic I think running with others took on so much more importance. That became my contact with the outside world," Gallagher said. "It also provided a sense of inspiration. It [got] me out there for my morning run."

"For me it's one of the reasons I love running. It's the sense of community. If I look back on my life, all of my strongest connections are through running, and when I see my running partners, even though we've been doing this for years, there's always a little bit of excitement. Every day!"

Running with a group provides many of the same benefits as a therapy session with a mental health professional. Crucial among them is the sharing that takes place in a safe and trusted space. Trust is the foundation of any relationship and the key factor runners consider when sharing deeply personal



Photo: Joe Nah

**Joe Nah (front) takes a selfie with his running family: Holly Wittsack, Carol Braun, the late Fred Trachtman, Royanna Herbert, Erica Rubenstein, Caroline Chamoun, and Joel Wakeberg.**

thoughts and concerns.

"There's an implied, unspoken trust that you're not going to go and repeat to other people stories that you are hearing on your runs, because they don't belong to you," said Club member Caroline Chamoun. "You're there as a sounding board, you're there as a social support. But you're not there to go and share it. That's how gossip begins.

"You learn a lot about people during your runs. When I'm running with my friends it's very refreshing and it is like therapy. It just makes me feel good. If I don't have a great day and I run with people and we start laughing about things, it cheers me up and I'm already back in a better mood."

A physiological component could contribute to sharing during a run. "I think you grow bonds when you are suffering with others, when you share in that suffering experience," explains MCRRC member Alyssa Soumoff, a psychiatrist at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Soumoff hypothesizes that more strenuous running may also help lower inhibitions—like consuming alcohol does—which may facilitate sharing. Stresses to the body, such as extreme temperatures, dehydration, or being nutritionally challenged, may contribute to the free exchange of thoughts and feelings.

She also believes that the lack of eye contact when running may help certain individuals share more when they run.

"When you're running with people, you're not looking at them. You're not seeing their facial expressions. It mimics classical psychodynamic psychotherapy where the therapist is outside of your view and is helping to direct the free association of thoughts and feelings," she says. That free association without distraction can benefit some runners.

For some, the importance of the group runs in some ways has transcended the competitive nature of racing.

"As I get older, running fast is less important [than] the connections are," Gallagher said, "because this is my community and I've run with them for so long. We've gone through so much together, and there is just a trust that is unbreakable. I know if I'm sharing something positive or heart-wrenching, I can just empty my heart out and have people there who listen, who care, and who have my back! It has definitely made me a better mother and a better friend because I have my group."

*—Dan DiFonzo coaches in the Experienced Marathon Program (XMP). In addition to running with his early morning crew, he looks forward to his weekly group long runs.*

# MCRRC Comes Together for Mike Leonard

by Lauren Kline

After completing the MCRRC Winter 5K Program this past March, many of the coaches and participants continued to use Strava to stay connected and motivated to maintain base mileage. Coach Wanda Walters diligently emailed her group the weekly Strava leaderboard showing who was getting it done. Every week, we'd see the same name—Michael Leonard—at the top, and every week I'd try to get just a few extra steps, in an attempt to catch him. Then, in mid April, Wanda noticed that our consistent leaderboard victor had been missing for a while, and she reached out to see if he was okay. Unfortunately, he had lost his last surviving daughter, Jill Leonard, to cancer. Due to COVID restrictions, he and his wife, Sandy, were grieving alone instead of being surrounded by family and friends to help them through this terrible loss. Mike told Wanda that she could share the news with his running family, and that he was taking a break from running but would be at the Germantown 5 Miler as his first race back in person.

After that, the flurry of emails back and forth contained the same sentiment: "What can we possibly do to help them through this isolation and loneliness, pain and grief?" We couldn't gather inside anywhere, but maybe we could run alongside Mike at the race, and show our support just by being there. Wanda, Keith Ord, and Bet Glover came up with the idea of creating a special memorial bib to honor Jill's memory. Bet received a beautiful picture from Mike, and created the bib. Wanda coordinated the approvals to ensure the Club was on board, and she uploaded the special bib to various sites to share with participants, many of whom were coached by Mike in earlier programs. Runners, walkers, and volunteers were welcome to print the bib and pin it to their clothes to show support for Mike. All we asked for in return was a picture of the participant with the bib, to include in a photo book for Mike.

Many MCRRC members opted to run virtual races in their neighborhoods. They wore the tribute bib and captured the moment with a photo, then sent me their sentiments and pictures to be included in the book we put together. Some of Mike's running friends made donations to charities to honor Jill's memory. Others planted trees in her honor, ran a marathon, wrote a

beautiful poem, and mailed sympathy cards to his house. All of these gestures showed love and support for Mike and Sandy.

Race day was a beautiful, cool brisk day. The Germantown 5 Miler was my first in-person race of the season, and I was nervous about what to expect. *Do I run with my mask on? Will I know where to go? Am I ready to run five miles after training virtually for the past year?* The race looked different. It felt different. We were lined up and spaced six feet apart with someone calling out times

for us to start. For those serious runners who were looking to win the race, and/or set a personal record (PR) for themselves, it was a nice day for that to happen.

I was there for a different reason. I was there to show my support for a running friend, someone I coached virtually in the Winter 5K program, but who would also join me for a few informal runs at Winding Creek Park, always with a smile and a funny story to tell. While running the course, we passed so many people with the memorial bibs pinned to their clothes. Most of the people wearing the special bib were Mike's friends, but many were not and chose to wear the bib anyway, to show unity and support for a fellow runner.

I knew it would only be a matter of time before Mike blew past me, since he's a bit faster. He told me he would never forget what the Club did for him, and that it meant the world to see so many people wearing Jill's picture and honoring her memory.

Mike had made his own shirt with Jill's photo, also running the race in her honor, but he certainly didn't run alone. He had walkers, runners, and volunteers beside him, cheering him on all along the course.

Thank you, MCRRC, for pulling together and supporting one of your members at a time when he needed it most.

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



Photo: Wanda Walters



Photo: Donna Goldberg

Rainell Miller, Marty Kiebert, Steve Jarman, Wanda Walters, and Lauren Kline gather at the Germantown 5 Miler in support of Mike Leonard (center).

# John Way



by Lisa Levin

*John Way is likely the most prolific racer in MCRRC. Outside of the pandemic, he typically runs more than one hundred races each year. Over the course of his running career, he's run about 1900 races, 1800 of them since he joined MCRRC almost two decades ago. A participant in both Speed Development and XMP, John is also (fittingly) the race Participation Series coordinator. John, 56, is a MCPS teacher, and lifelong Montgomery County resident who currently lives in Silver Spring.*

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

I ran cross-country and outdoor track for Peary High School in Rockville.

***When and why did you start running?***

I followed my brother, Tom, into running for Peary. I started in tenth grade in 1980. I had great teammates, including club members Mike “Kenny” Edwards and John “Mugsy” Holten.

***How many races did you run in 2019 versus 2020 once the pandemic forced the shutdown***

***of most races?*** I ran a personal record 155 races in 2019. I managed 53 in 2020.

***What is the greatest number of races you've run in one week, and logistically, how did you manage to fit them all in?***

I did seven races in a week twice in 2019. Both weeks included weekday evening races, plus two or three races at a track meet.

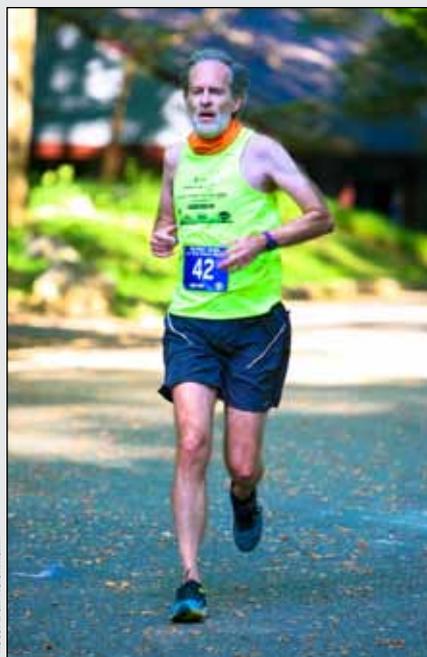


Photo: Dan Reichmann

John Way adds the 2021 Run Aware 5K to his list of finishes.

***What did you do to stay motivated during the pandemic, when very few races were on the calendar?***

As a substitute teacher, I had no work during the spring of 2020. I started a streak of 226 consecutive days running at least two miles. I had never trained that consistently. It got me in my best shape in five years by the fall.

***What does your training look like outside of racing? How many days/week do you run, and how many miles?***

Through most of 2020, I was running 40–50 miles a week, my most ever. Now this year, I'm working my way back to 30–45 per week, since I'm getting more hard miles with more racing.

***What are your favorite training routes?***

I like the Rock Creek Trail, but mostly I try to do a variety of paths and surfaces.

***Do you have a favorite race distance?***

I regularly do races from one to ten miles, so I enjoy the variety.

***Do you have a favorite race?***

I don't have a particular favorite race. I enjoy completing race series with my various running clubs.

***Do you prefer road or trail running/races?***

I prefer road racing now that I have become more inclined to fall in trail races, but I'll still do some.

***What is your proudest running moment?***

My proudest moments are being sixth man on my high school's cross-country state championship team, narrowly qualifying for the NYC Marathon with 1:29:52 in 2010, and my 19:52 5K last fall.

***Do you have a recovery routine following your races?***

I usually do at least a mile warm-down. I use a roller on my leg muscles at times.

***What is your secret to staying healthy and uninjured while racing so prolifically?***

I keep my training runs at a slower pace since my races serve as my speed work.

***How has your running, and racing, changed as you've aged?***

I used to focus on a couple races per year and would slack off after them, but now I focus on staying fit year-round.

***What do you enjoy doing when you are not running?***

I enjoy maintaining spreadsheets to track my running and racing. Everybody needs a hobby.

***What are your goals for 2021?***

I'm not going to reach my goal of running 2,021 miles after a slow start, but I still plan to top fifty races. I also want to get back over a 73% age-grading for races of at least 5K.



John Way races at Lake Needwood in 1982.

—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.

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**Runner Seeks Challenge**

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the sun breaks through the darkness to give way for the final push. That last four miles. *Put one foot in front of the other*, whether it is running, walking, or shuffling, that's the repeated mantra until elation.

Viewing all these runners and their experiences in this challenge created that same sense of running community we all felt pre-pandemic. Now just one question remains: Who's doing the 4x4x48 challenge with me next year?

—Brian Belonia has been a member of MCRRC since 2019. He currently coaches in the First Time Marathon program.



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## Coaches' Corner

by Mary Travaglini

**D**on't want to run alone but you're faster than people you know? Do you know someone who needs a running buddy but is slower than you? Have you showed up to a workout with no one your speed?

Running with a slower runner not only means supporting someone who needs motivation, but provides safety in numbers, and you might also learn something while getting a great workout.

I've run with slower runners and even with walkers, for a variety of reasons. I first learned how to wear myself out running alongside one of our disabled Club members who walks more than he runs, and who needs support and companionship to feel safe and to get social interaction. But since then I've often run with folks who are slower than I am, or with runner friends coming back from injuries, because they're fun to be with!

I sometimes get folks protesting, "Oh, but I'm slower than you," but if

I paid any attention to that, I'd never get to know them at all. So I ignore their pleas to be left alone and instead ensure they get the many bonuses of my amazing company by joining their run (ha ha!).

Here are a few techniques I have employed to run with someone slower:

- Run with high knees. Talk about a workout! If you lift your knees really high, not only does it slow you down, but you'll get quite a bit of cross training, and you may also get out of breath enough that you'll need to slow down.
- Run yo-yos—run ahead a few minutes, run back (the slower runner probably won't be out of sight) and again, you'll be out of breath enough to run alongside them a little bit, or walk at a really fast pace (also excellent cross-training).
- On a track, circle back the

opposite way every now and then so you can high-five. (Make sure you stay out of other track users' paths.) Or do some sprints and catch up to them and then slow down for a bit.

- Wear weights, a weight vest, or a water bladder. No better way to slow down than to carry a load!
- Talk more. And just keep talking. Nothing makes a run better than a good therapy session.
- Enjoy yourself. You can always run more, and faster, another time!

—*Mary Travaglini joined her first MCRRC program in 2012, less than a year after back surgery. The run/walk format of the 5K program made running again possible for her, and she now coaches in the 5K program and participates in the 10K and Speed Development programs.*