

MCRRC Intervals

January 2024

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

On the Horizon

Monday, January 1, 10:00 am
New Year's Day 5K
Gaithersburg

Sunday, January 28, 8:30 am
Cross Country on the Farm 5K
(TS)
Derwood

Sunday, February 11, 8:30 am
Kemp Mill (C)hills 5K/10K
Silver Spring

Saturday, March 9, 7:30 am
Seneca Creek Greenway Trail
Marathon & 50K (\$)
Gaithersburg

Sunday, March 24, 8:30 am
Piece of Cake 5K/10K
Rockville

Please see page 8 for a complete list of MCRRC'S 2024 races, and visit our website for updates:
www.mcrrc.org

Board Meetings

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

MCRRC Embraces Seasonal Fun Runs



Photo: Jyoti Bisbey

Participants from the Club's various 5K programs meet in downtown DC for an informal holiday sightseeing run organized by Jyoti Bisbey.



Photo: Conroy Zien

Runners gather near Rio Lakefront for the Grinch Run, so called because the route outlines the head of the title character from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, by Dr. Seuss.

from the editor



Motivational Medley

by Amy Lin

Happy New Year, MCRRC! I'm writing this in December, when my household's music selection is heavily skewed toward holiday songs. Many of them are the same familiar tunes covered by different artists, and some are medleys or mashups. Although I have no head whatsoever for music theory, I can fully appreciate the challenges of combining multiple songs into one piece or layering two or three songs on top of each other.

This month's issue of *Intervals* is a medley of motivation, showcasing various facets of MCRRC and what's great about our club—we've got a little bit of everything to entice you.

If you're looking for new ideas for the new year, MCRRC president Brian Murphy shares notes on the Club's latest initiatives and his favorite personal adventure in 2023.

If you seek new surroundings to get you out the door, Winter Trail program co-director Audrey Fincher heaps praise on the revamped natural-surface trails at Wheaton Regional Park for our latest Where I Run column.

If you want to cozy up with a book for mental motivation, Debbie Sinnott kicks off our new What I'm Reading feature with her thoughts on Des Linden's memoir, *Choosing to Run*.

If you'd like a role model a little closer to home, Lisa Levin gives us the scoop on running machine Ronnie Wong, who has made consistency and longevity the hallmarks of his legacy.

Finally, if you just get a boost from seeing what MCRRC has in store, our back page has a handy reference list of the Club's 2024 races, which offer a great mix of distances, locations, and surfaces.

See you out there!

Stay Informed!

Like us on Facebook – Montgomery County Road Runners

Follow us on Twitter - @MCRRC

Follow us on Instagram - @MCRRC

Subscribe to our *groups.io* for important announcements (membership required): <https://groups.mcrrc.org/g/MCRRC-info/>

MCRRC Intervals

Newsletter of the montgomery county road runners club

Board of Directors

President

Brian Murphy

Vice President

Sherene Sepehri

Secretary

Jane Heinrichs

Treasurer

Ashish Gupta

Member-at-Large

Elliott A. Alman

Member-at-Large

Jim Dahlem

Member-at-Large

Shlomo Fishman

Member-at-Large

Deb Levy

Member-at-Large

Libby Miller

Staff

Executive Director

Ashley Zuraf

Operations Assistant

Terri Robertson

Intervals

Publisher

Brian Murphy

Managing Editor

Freddi Carlip

Editor

Amy Lin

Production Designer

Bob DiIorio

Contributors

Audrey Fincher

Lisa Levin

Brian Murphy

Debbie Sinnott

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. ©2024. 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.





MCRRC Wrapped

by Brian Murphy

As I write this, I've been seeing everyone's year-end Spotify Wrapped pop up all over the place, and it's had me thinking about my year in running and our year as a club (by the way, my number-one artist was Taylor Swift, like seemingly everyone else). It was quite a year—a very special year for me. I turned forty this year, and with it came a minor mid-life crisis of sorts. Instead of getting a red sports car, I took the opportunity to challenge myself—more than usual, I mean.

For years, I've had the idea to try and run Rim-to-Rim-to-Rim of the Grand Canyon. A total of about 45 miles and a little more than 11,000 feet of climbing—down, up, down, up. I've never been an ultrarunner, but you could say I've been curious for a few years. That's especially true due to constant pushing from friends trying to convince me how much fun it is. I figured that turning forty years old was a solid enough excuse to jump into it. I mentioned this to a few MCRRC friends, and suddenly we had a group of twelve ready to camp and run.

I could go on and on about the actual adventure—it rained a bunch (in a desert/boreal forest); it was much colder than

expected; the Canyon needs a few more bathrooms; trekking poles are a life- and quad-saver; mules poop a lot; camp showers should have later hours, etc. That's not the point of this article, though. (Seriously, I'll gladly talk your ear off about it at the next Club event if you ask!) The thing I realized several hours into the Canyon was that, through MCRRC, I've gained an incredible network of friends who will push me to do hard things *and* do the hard things with me.

The Rim-to-Rim-to-Rim adventure is just one example of this, of course. I hear stories like this all the time from people in the Club, whether they're thirty-year members or one-year members, whether it's meeting friends on a Thursday to do tempo miles or knowing someone your pace will be at Ken-Gar on Sunday to get you out the door. This is something the MCRRC Board will be looking at as we consider the value proposition of the Club, how we communicate benefits to new and prospective members, how we retain members and build community, and how we better connect with each other in the Club.

One aspect I love seeing thrive in MCRRC is our transitioning

of key volunteer roles to new faces. I must give kudos to our Race Committee for this. You'll see new faces at the helms of several races in the coming year. You can still expect a high-quality event, whether it's one of our bigger races, such as Pike's Peek, or a low-key race, such as Spin in the Woods. This is again due to the Race Committee and all the groundwork that members like George Tarrico did for MCRRC throughout the years.

We are looking to carry the Race Committee's success into other areas, namely our programs, with the newly established Program Committee, and our messaging and communications, with the Communications Committee. We've had great growth in our membership, our programs, and our races this past year, but there is still plenty of room for growth.

As we put 2023 behind us, I'm excited about continuing to build on our successes as a club and to build our community.

—Brian Murphy is the President of MCRRC and a member of the Competitive Racing Team. He can be reached at president@mcrrc.org.

Wheaton Regional Park

by Audrey Fincher

This summer, a quiet transformation was taking place right smack-dab in the middle of Montgomery County. You probably didn't hear about it or know it was happening. For several weeks I ran by the backhoes, the loaders, the trucks, and the workmen. Then one day they disappeared, and I wandered around trying to figure out where I was and where I was going. According to my GPS, I should have been in the middle of a forest, and I found myself running in circles more than once. By the early fall, the new signage and maps were finally posted, and a beautiful new trail system was revealed—smooth, runnable trails, challenging hills, and an understandable pattern to follow. I didn't get lost once, and it was a joy to run! So where is this place? It's Wheaton Regional Park, and it's where I run.

Most of us think of Wheaton Regional Park as the home of Brookside Gardens on one end and the mini-train and carousel on the other. But nestled back behind these crowd-pleasers is a lovely system of natural-surface trails, suitable for hiking and running. For years, I watched as the trails became more and more eroded, with rocks, exposed roots, and washout areas that made it hard to run. The trails

themselves followed no predictable pattern, and I got lost many times as I tried to figure out how to get from here to there.

With the new construction, the trails have been re-graded, re-named, and simplified. There's a large outer loop called Wheaton Way, and a smaller inner loop called the Little Bit Loop. There are also offshoot trails that will take you to different areas in the park. There is extensive signage, in addition to maps with those handy "you are here" location dots. The trails themselves have been covered with a thick layer of packed dirt in most places, and the surface is slightly springy and awesome to run on. You can easily get a five-mile run within

the park boundaries, but if you're looking for something longer, you can cross over Kemp Mill Rd and pick up the Northwest Branch Trail directly across. Then you can take that all the way to Colesville Road and come back the way you came, or return on the more rugged Rachel Carson Trail. Choices, choices, choices!

For those of you who are trail running-curious, Wheaton Regional is a great place to start. The trails are wide enough for horses, and you might encounter a few from the stables next door. (Oh, and watch for what they might drop on the trail, too!) With the new trails, you'll get a smoother run while still experiencing the joys of being out in the woods. For those of you who swear never to touch a running toe on a natural-surface trail, try Wheaton Regional. At least you'll get a great hike!

See you on the trails!

—Audrey Fincher has been involved with MCRRC as a coach or participant for so many years she has lost count. She currently co-directs the Winter Trail program and has been known to make everyone around her stop in the middle of a run to marvel at the scenery.



Photo: Audrey Fincher

Wheaton Regional Park's natural-surface trails feature new signage.

A Champion's Memoir

by Debbie Sinnott

Any runner who has dreams of conquering a big goal will embrace the account of Des Linden's rise from high-school runner to collegiate athlete to 2018 Boston Marathon champion in her recently released memoir, *Choosing To Run*. In her cleverly structured memoir, Des intertwines the story of the drive and commitment it took to become a world class runner with that of winning the Boston Marathon by alternating chapters to tell both experiences.

Her memoir begins with a run on the beach in her hometown near San Diego, California. That day, she procrastinated running for so long that she had to complete her miles after nightfall while her father followed along on a bicycle with a flattening tire. As she ran, she imagined that she was in the lead pack of a race, and she put distance between herself and the chase pack, who in reality was her dad. This is the first of many examples that Des shares of her competitive, elite mindset which pushes her to be a top competitor.

In alternate chapters, Des writes of her unexpected victory at the Boston

Marathon. Her recollection of this day starts at Mile Zero, the ride to Hopkinton to toe the line in her sixth running of the race. She had low expectations for herself. The weather was not ideal—39 degrees Fahrenheit with rain and gusty winds. She had just come off of an illness, and her training cycle wasn't the smoothest. She guides readers through her experience as she ticks off the miles, going from just another runner in the field to competitor to champion of the race.

Des normalizes the challenges of training—stress, fatigue, and setbacks. We can learn from her elite mindset and savvy as she strategizes to be at the top of her game as a runner and with life in general. Runners who love running and are inspired by others should give this book a read.

—Debbie Sinnott joined MCRRC in 2018. She has coached in the *Advanced Marathon Training* (now *Winter Marathon Training*), *Speed Development*, and *Experienced Marathon programs*.

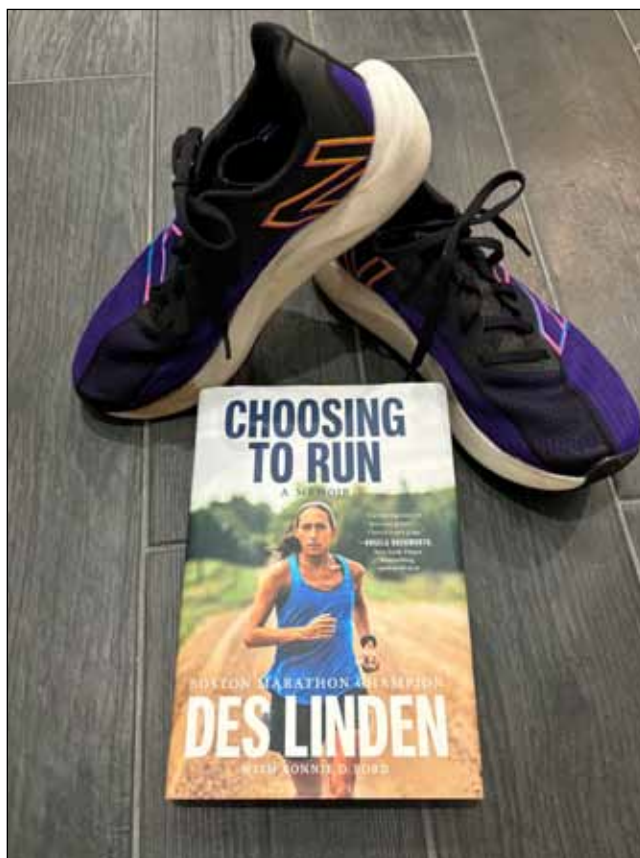


Photo: Debbie Sinnott

From Disco King to Running Royalty

by Lisa Levin

In March 1980, Ronnie Wong was working as a chef at the Castle Harbour Hotel in Bermuda. Dubbed the “Disco King” by coworkers and friends, Ronnie spent every night at clubs, drinking and dancing until the wee hours of the morning. A native of Singapore, neither Ronnie nor anyone in his family had ever run, but he was a “skinny guy,” as he puts it. When the hotel association sponsored a 10K run, in which the various hotel departments would compete against each other, Ronnie was recruited by his friend, a German chef, to join the chefs’ team. The friend issued a challenge: If Ronnie didn’t finish the race, he would have to buy everyone on the team a shot of whiskey, but if Ronnie did finish, the chef would buy Ronnie *six* shots of whiskey. Challenge accepted, Ronnie ran the 10K in an old pair of shoes and finished in a brisk 47 minutes. As a bonus, he asked for an extra shot of whiskey, to bring his total reward to seven shots.

That same German chef friend, an accomplished sprinter, taught Ronnie how to run. Ronnie soon figured out how to train around his demanding work schedule, which required him to be in the kitchen preparing

food from 9:00 to 11:00 in the morning, then again from 5:00 in the evening until closing time. Ronnie’s training runs consisted of running up and down the hill upon which the hotel sat. Training and racing on tired legs must have been good preparation for what was to follow: Ronnie ran his first marathon, the Bermuda Marathon, kicking off an annual tradition of running the Bermuda Marathon every year since.

In 1982, Ronnie moved to Baltimore, where he continued his pursuit of running more miles, fitting his training in between his twelve-hour shifts as a chef. Ronnie’s moniker is no longer “Disco King,” but “Marathon King.” In October 2023, Ronnie completed his 400th marathon, the Ocean City Marathon, finishing the race despite having gone through three surgeries in the months leading up to race day. Although his finish time of 6:49 was far from his personal record, it was good enough for an age group win because, as Ronnie explains, not many runners in the 75+age group show up at marathons.

Along the way to his 400 marathons, Ronnie has run the Boston Marathon twenty-five times, finishing four of those

in under 2:50, which was the qualifying time for men until 1987. He’s run three hundred of his marathons in under four hours, with a PR of 2:38:34 at the 1984 Montreal Marathon. When he was forty-three years old, Ronnie ran eighteen marathons, qualifying for Boston in each of them. He’s even run back-to-back marathons, running a marathon in Delaware on Saturday in 3:02, then returning to DC to run Marine Corps Marathon the next morning, finishing in 2:58. Ronnie is a longtime Club member and ran every one of MCRRC’s Marathon in the Parks, from 2000 to 2004, before it became the Parks Half Marathon.

Ronnie didn’t stop at the marathon distance—far from it. In 1990, Ronnie won the Sri Chinmoy Ultra Trio’s longest race (1300 miles), which took place in New York’s Flushing Meadows Corona Park, along a one-mile loop. Over the course of nearly fifteen days, he covered a staggering 1177 miles to defeat his closest competitor by 58 miles. Previously, he competed in the 1986 USA Track & Field 100-Mile championship, placing sixth overall, in 17 hours and 20 minutes. He’s run countless ultra-distance races, including

the Comrades Marathon and the famed Western States 100-Mile Endurance Run, finishing in 22 hours to earn a silver belt buckle.

What's remarkable is that Ronnie accomplished all of this even though one leg is shorter than the other, due to a broken foot he suffered when he fell from a moped many years ago. Ronnie says that the pain from that break and its subsequent repair made any pain he felt during an endurance race manageable in comparison, and gave him the mental strength that is the secret to his success.

More than forty years after Ronnie gave up alcohol and disco nights for running shoes, he's still running and racing strong. He still races almost weekly, participating in many of the Club's low-key races, and runs on the treadmill a few miles a day. When asked what motivates him to keep going, Ronnie says he wants to keep inspiring "youngsters," but it's pretty certain that he inspires runners of all ages, especially those lucky enough to cross paths with him.

—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.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Ronnie Wong sails into the finish at Riley's Rumble Half Marathon in 2022.

MCRRC Race Schedule 2024

Register for your 2024 Low-Key bib and chip online. Guidelines can be found at: <https://mcrrc.org/for-members/chipbib-procedure/>

Monday, January 1, 10:00 am

New Year's Day 5K
Gaithersburg, MD

Sunday, January 28, 8:30 am

Cross Country on the Farm 5K (TS)
Derwood, MD

Sunday, February 11, 8:30 am

Kemp Mill (C)hills 5K/10K (CS)
Silver Spring, MD

Saturday, March 9, 7:30 am

Seneca Creek Greenway Trail Marathon &
50K (\$)
Gaithersburg, MD

Sunday, March 24, 8:30 am

Piece of Cake 5K/10K (CS)
Potomac, MD

Sunday, March 30, 7:45 am

Spin in the Woods 4M (TS)
Wheaton, MD

Sunday, April 21, 7:50 am

Pike's Peek 10K (\$)
Rockville, MD

Saturday, May 4, 8:30 am

Kids on the Run (\$)
Gaithersburg, MD

Saturday, May 11, 8:00 am

Capital for a Day (CS)
Olney, MD

Sunday, May 19, 8:00 am

Run Aware 5K (TS)
Bethesda, MD

Monday, May 27, 8:00 am

Memorial 4M (CS)
Rockville, MD

Saturday, June 1, 7:30 am

Little Bennett 10K (TS)
Clarksburg, MD

Saturday, June 15, 7:30 pm

Suds & Soles 5K (\$)
Rockville, MD

Saturday, June 22, 8:00 am

Run for Roses 5K (\$)
Silver Spring, MD

Sunday, June 30, 8:30 am

Country Road Run 5K (CS)
Dickerson, MD

Friday, July 12, 7:00 pm

Midsummer Night's Mile (CS)
Potomac, MD

Saturday, July 20, 7:30 am

Matthew Henson Trail 5K (CS)
Silver Spring, MD

Sunday, July 28, 7:30 am

Riley's Rumble Half Marathon (CS)
Boyd's, MD

Saturday, August 2, 6:45 pm

Going Green Track Meet (CS)
Potomac, MD

Sunday, August 11, 8:00 am

Groovin' Woodstock 7K (TS)
Dickerson, MD

Saturday, August 24, 7:30 am

Eastern County 8K (CS)
Silver Spring, MD

Sunday, September 8, 6:45 am

Parks Half Marathon (\$)
Rockville, MD

Saturday, September 21, 8:00 am

Lake Needwood 10K (TS)
Derwood, MD

Sunday, October 6, 9:00 am

Cabin John Kids Run
Bethesda, MD

Saturday, October 12, 9:00 am

Black Hill 10K (TS)
Boyd's, MD

Sunday, November 3, 8:30 am

Rockville 10K/5K 2023 (\$)
Rockville, MD

Saturday, November 9, 6:00 am

Stone Mill 50-Mile Run (\$)
Montgomery Village, MD

Saturday, November 23, 6:15 pm

Run Under the Lights 5K (\$)
Gaithersburg, MD

Saturday, November 30, 8:00 am

Turkey Burnoff 5M/10M (CS)
Gaithersburg, MD

Sunday, December 8, 9:00 am

Seneca Slopes 9K (TS)
Gaithersburg, MD

Sunday, December 15, 9:00 am

Jingle Bell Jog 8K (CS)
Rockville, MD

CS = Championship Series
TS = Trail Series