

MCRRC Intervals



July 2024

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

On the Horizon

Friday, July 12, 7:00 pm
Midsummer Night's Mile (CS)
Potomac

Saturday, July 20, 7:30 am
Matthew Henson Trail 5K (CS)
Silver Spring

Sunday, July 28, 7:30 am
Riley's Rumble Half Marathon (CS)
Boysd

Friday, August 2, 6:45 pm
Going Green Track Meet (CS)
Potomac

Sunday, August 11, 8:00 am
Groovin' Woodstock 7K (TS)
Dickerson

Saturday, August 24, 7:30 am
Eastern County 8K (CS)
Silver Spring

For updates, visit:
www.mcrrc.org

Board Meetings

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

Time for Summer Sun and Fun



Photo: Henry Sandridge

Matthew Duran enjoys the shady terrain at Little Bennett 10K.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Shannan Burton posts a strong finish at Run for Roses 5K.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Team Tisha (Wendy Young, Lin Burrell, Shawna Cottage, Annie Brenny, Catherine Shank) of Athletes Serving Athletes charges the uphill finish at Suds & Soles 5K.



Good Times

by Amy Lin

As members of a running club, especially one that holds as many races as ours, we often focus on times: fast or slow, PR or PW. A time goal can be a powerful motivator some days; other days it can feel better just to aim to have more fun than not. *Getting* a good time means much more when you're also *having* a good time.

July's Intervals takes a look at the many ways in which MCRRC members come together to create good times.

In From the Board, Brian Murphy recaps two different Club events that celebrate the community aspect of running—our awards banquet, which focuses on member achievements, and Suds & Soles, which welcomes hundreds of non-members to experience the magic of an MCRRC race.

Priya Konings shares her story of forming and maintaining a running group within a running group and how these “solemates” encourage

and challenge each other over many times and distances.

Next, Kevin Camp, Lisa Chilcote, Brian Murphy, and Monika Schneider provide a peek into the world of what many members simply know as “the fast people”—MCRRC's Competitive Racing Team.

At any Club race you're likely to have seen Teresita Cuesta volunteering, running, or both, always with a joyful smile. This month's Runner Profile spotlights Tere, as she sets an excellent example for finding motivation beyond the numbers on the clock.

Speaking of clocks, if you've ever wondered how the MCRRC timing team works, Bonnie Gitlin pulls back the curtain from this crucial component of Club races, showing (literally) what makes it tick.

Wishing you good times—in every sense of the phrase—all summer!

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





Celebrating Our Club and Community

by Brian Murphy

It was really great to see such an incredible turnout at our annual awards banquet in May. Personally, I had a fun time connecting and chatting with so many of you in a venue outside of races, group runs, or other sweaty events. As I mentioned at the event, it's one of my favorite things that MCRRC does. It gives us a chance to come together and celebrate our members for outstanding achievements, performances, volunteering, and other significant contributions to our running community. A big congrats to all winners and nominees!

Things are heating up around here—not just in terms of all the programs, races, and workouts the Club is hosting, but the weather we're doing these events in, too. As the temperatures continue to rise, it's a good reminder to review our summer running safety—slow down, stay hydrated, be smart about when you run outside, etc. To this end, the board has been reviewing how to better organize MCRRC's medical supplies, policies, and procedures. We have some amazing, medically trained members who have stepped up and offered to help with this. As we review these, we'll continue to hold the highest quality events with even more peace of mind regarding our participants' safety.

The board has also been reviewing how we communicate with our members, to find better ways to highlight upcoming races, opportunities to volunteer,

and other ways to get connected with MCRRC and the running community. This will be coming to your inbox soon (or has already, depending on when you read this), so keep an eye out. Rest assured that this is not meant to flood your inbox with more unwanted emails but give you better formatted, easier-to-read email updates with useful information.

Just one last thing: I'm writing this after spending the weekend at Suds & Soles 5K. I started this column talking about a party (our awards banquet), and I'll close it out talking about another party. Just as it was a thrill to see so many

people at our awards banquet, it was an equal thrill seeing you (now sweaty) at Suds & Soles—a different kind of celebration. It was fantastic to catch up with many of you between different RD duties. It's always energizing coming off these events and feeling so connected to the Club and our extended running community. I'm already looking forward to our next opportunity to celebrate together!

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

2023 MCRRC Awards

Lifetime Achievement Award

Don Shulman

President's Awards

Travisha Gunter

Karen Kincer

Eric London

Runners of the Year

Grandmasters

Margaret Kuhn

Mark Neff

Masters

Kaari Liisi Linask

Chris Pruitt

Open

Rachel Cluett

Charlie Stern

Runner of the Year Recognition

Aaron Anderson

Kathy Cea

William Clem

Kevin D'Amanda

Tim Greszler

Chris Moen

Melissa Rittenhouse

Meg Ryan

RJ Spalding

Margaret Sprock

Pete Wergin

Mountain/Ultra/Trail Runners of the Year

Laura Turbe

Ryan Cox

Most Improved Runner

Jack Levensgard

Outstanding Running Achievement

Cindy Conant

Outstanding High School Runners

Tori Ketzler

Sarah Seigle

Griffin White

Journalism Award

John Shin

Race Director of the Year

Jim Farkas

Coaches of the Year

Sandra Engstrom

Shirley Skorbiansky

Volunteer of the Year

Kristen Kelman

Youth Volunteer of the Year

Ansuya Bisbey

Volunteer Service Awards

Art Drisko

Jennifer Meyer

Jimmy Schneidwind

Solemates

by Priya Konings

When I was in middle school, my family and I moved abroad. We moved back just in time for eleventh grade, which turned out to be a terrible time to be a new student. Cliques had already formed, and no one was interested in new kids. After weeks of having lunch in the car with my mom, I finally made a friend: Lora Reineck. We spent the next two years listening to Third Eye Blind in Lora's forest-green Jeep, studying for several heinous AP exams, taking self-defense classes (Lora's idea), and stuffing our faces with fondue at The Melting Pot, milkshakes at Silver Diner, and fries at TGI Friday's. We stayed friends through college and both went to graduate school in Baltimore, where we met to watch *Grey's Anatomy* weekly (yes, we still watch it!). After that, Lora moved away for her residency and fellowship, and I became a lawyer and began work representing children in the foster care system. I also started volunteering in the Montgomery County Bar Association Pro Bono Program, which provides free legal assistance to low-income county residents. There, I became friends with another attorney volunteer, Juan Washington. We organized happy hours and dinners with other volunteers and chatted regularly.

Fast forward to 2014: Lora moved back to Montgomery County, and she asked if I wanted to meet up on weekends to run. While I had run occasionally in college, and worked out regularly, I was in no way a runner, and starting to run at the age of 34 seemed crazy. But we went for it! Soon after, I told Juan about our weekly runs, and he asked if he could come with us. Lo and behold, a tiny running group was formed, and we named ourselves "solemates"—pun intended!

Our weekly four-mile runs were full of conversation and camaraderie, and we soon developed an interest in running races. We signed up for Pike's Peak 10K and had so much fun we

became members of MCRRC in 2018. Since then, there has been no stopping us! Solemates has run countless races with the Club, from Piece of Cake to Turkey Burnoff to Parks Half Marathon. We search the photos after every race and share them with each other—and are delighted to be featured on MCRRC's social media.

Solemates has given me a great friend group and something to look forward to every week. Sometimes our conversations are light and fun, describing recent vacations or holidays with family, and sometimes more serious, analyzing issues at work or personal problems. We discuss our



"Solemates" Juan Washington, Lora Reineck, and Priya Konings grab a finish-line photo at Pike's Peak 10K in 2022.

ongoing injuries (shin splints for me) and trade advice on stretching and the best running shoes. Being a part of MCRRC as a group has been especially fun because it expanded our enthusiasm for running, and we love being a piece of a larger community that gives us the opportunity to run in new locations at greater distances. We eagerly review the Club calendar to see which races fit into our schedules.

Lora recalls, "I started running in college, and found it a lot more enjoyable to run with a friend. When

I moved back to Maryland in 2014, I was really happy when Priya agreed to try running. It was great to catch up regularly and burn calories at the same time! Before long, Juan joined us, and our running group was born. I'd never run more than four to five miles at a time prior to running with Solemates, and now we do 10Ks regularly and even did Parks Half Marathon in 2019! I look forward to our weekly runs and love that we challenge, motivate, and encourage each other."

For Juan, Solemates has been equally meaningful. "As a young person, basketball wasn't just a game to me—it was my entire world. The court was where I felt most at home. As the years passed, arthritis crept into my joints, and the game I loved became a source of pain rather than joy. In the wake of basketball, there was a void that I struggled to fill. That's when life introduced me to Priya. With a smile and an invigorating spirit, she introduced me to Lora, and together, we created Solemates. Solemates has been more than just a running group; it was a revival. For the first time since my days on the court, I felt truly alive. Each stride was a testament to perseverance, each breath a celebration of movement. As I age, running with Solemates has become my fountain of youth, my stress reliever, and my platform for creating joyful experiences with good friends.

"With every run, I'm reminded that life is a marathon, not a sprint. I am committed to running this race for as long as I draw breath. Together, we'll continue to chase horizons, share laughter, and support each other through every mile. Solemates isn't just a part of my life; it's a part of who I am, and I hope to keep it that way forever."

—Priya Konings lives in Takoma Park and loves a good 10K. She works for Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), is also a food and travel writer, and volunteers at Montgomery County Animal Services & Adoption Center with her husband.

A Look Inside the Competitive Racing Team

by Kevin Camp, Lisa Chilcote, Brian Murphy, and Monika Schneider

You might ask, what is it that one does on a racing team, and why might one want to join? Like many groups within MCRRC, the Competitive Racing Team connects people with similar goals: a love of competition, a desire to improve on previous PRs, and always looking forward to the next race. There are no formal team workouts, but a group chat and email message board keep communication open for people to arrange low-key runs, workouts, and pre-race logistics. Being on the team also gives you a ready pool of potential running buddies when you want to initiate (or get roped into) some sort of off-the-wall run adventure or mid-week tempo run that feels less difficult with company. Team members have also joined to coordinate travel for non-local races such as a major marathon, USATF Championship race, or other such event, while still representing the Club.

The MCRRC Competitive Racing Team was established in the spring of 2013, out of a desire to build a notable, cohesive group of runners to represent the Club at a myriad of races throughout the Washington, DC area. Another objective for founding the team was to recognize highly talented runners. Early on, team members were required to participate in a series of identified races. A few years back, the race requirements were opened to races of an individual team member's choosing.

Not only did the process surrounding required races change, but the application process transitioned from a once-a-year review to accepting athletes on a rolling basis. Runners previously had to apply and submit supporting documentation that was then reviewed by an application committee composed of individuals who held various volunteer positions within the Club. Now applications are reviewed by team captains, allowing the team to acquire new talent at any point during the calendar year.

Qualifying has also evolved over time, from a set list of qualification times to utilizing a standard of 70% age-graded performance results in at least two races, at distances from 1 mile through marathon, within the previous twelve months. We found this to be a more equitable way to incorporate Club members interested in representing MCRRC. The age-graded standard also helped expand the team to the size it is today—about 100 members—and

increase the visibility of the team and, by extension, MCRRC, in the local running community. Our team singlets with the Club logo are easy to spot during races.

Now that you've read a primer on the team and its history, you may be wondering what's in store for its future. In May, Monika Schneider and Kevin Camp took over from outgoing team captains Lisa Chilcote and Brian Murphy. Monika and Kevin plan to continue the typical captain duties: recruiting, reviewing and accepting applications, coordinating race entries for team members, helping to secure comped and seeded spots in "big-ticket" local races (such as Cherry Blossom 10 Mile, Annapolis 10 Mile Run, and Marine Corps Marathon), encouraging volunteering, and, last but not least, communicating with and providing general updates to the team.

Beyond that, activities focused on team bonding will be a priority. Ideas include optional team workouts and long runs, as well as a happy hour or cookout every so often. These will be particularly timely given how many new recruits have joined in the past year or so. One could argue that a stronger team bond will reinforce the collective spirit of the team and translate to better racing results. Whether or not that proves true, it would still be a way to get together and have fun as a group. Above all, the racing team will continue to do what it's always done: race! Any current team member who reads their email can attest to plenty of recent encouragement to sign up for local track

races during this "summer of speed" season. And, as Monika and Kevin get fully into the swing of co-captaincy, a massive expression of gratitude is in order for Lisa and Brian, who are leaving their leadership roles having fostered a group of runners with incredible talent and matching camaraderie. Thank you both!

If the racing team sounds like something that you might be interested in, read on. The racing team is always looking for talented runners to join our ranks, and as previously mentioned, we accept applications on a rolling basis. Team members are expected to compete in at least eight races in the MoCo/DC area every year (We are a racing team, after all!). We also encourage everyone on the team to volunteer in the various races that the Club hosts.

For more information on the MCRRC Competitive Racing Team, please visit <https://mcrrc.org/teams/competitive-racing-team>. Feel free to email racingteam@mcrrc.org with any questions, and check out who's on the team and where we're racing at our team site, diligently maintained by racing team member Nicolas Crouzier: <https://race-team.mcrrc.org>

—Monika Schneider and Kevin Camp are the current co-captains of the MCRRC Racing Team, following Lisa Chilcote and Brian Murphy, who served as co-captains since the team was created in 2013.



Members of the MCRRC Competitive Racing Team gather at this year's Cherry Blossom 10-Mile Run in April.

Teresita Cuesta



by Lisa Levin

Since she joined MCRRC in 2010 for the Beginning Women's training program, Teresita "Tere" Cuesta has participated in every single Club training program other than XMP, which she has plans to join (primarily for the cool shirts). Over the course of the last decade, Tere has also progressed from doing her first 5K to completing 100-mile races. Tere is an avid participant in MCRRC races, both as a volunteer and as a runner, and won her age group in both the Championship and Trail Series in 2023. Tere, 59, is a middle-school teacher and lives in Gaithersburg with her husband, Mike, and 14-year old dog, Luke.

When did you start running?

Running was never my sport. I played basketball. I started running when I joined the Club. I just wanted to participate in a sport.

What are some of your earliest memories from your first races?

My first race was the Clarksburg 5K, which I did before I started my first MCRRC training program because I wanted to have a baseline. I know I walked a lot, especially the hills. What I really remember was my first half, which was Frederick. I didn't know anything about racing and was so surprised with so many kind volunteers, all the spectators, the funny signs, the neighborhood watch parties, and the fact that we all got medals!

What do you remember most about your first marathon training cycle with the First Time Marathon (FTM) program?

When I did my first FTM, initially I felt so intimidated because I thought everyone would be a first-timer and, instead, there were all these

people who had already done so many marathons! That turned out to be one of the biggest strengths of the program: you learn so much from each other.

What's your favorite MCRRC volunteer job?

I usually do parking for most low-key races I run and have been parking team



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Tere Cuesta exudes joy at Stone Mill 50 Mile Run in 2022.

captain for the Seneca Greenway 50K for a few years. I like greeting people as they arrive, and it ensures I get there early and get a good parking spot.

Do you have a favorite race distance? What about a favorite race?

Currently, my favorite distance is the half marathon. It's still an accomplishment that requires effort and makes you feel proud but doesn't take so much out of you. However, my

favorite race is Stone Mill 50 Mile Run. The first time I did it, I said I was going to take it as an all-day walk in the park. I was blown away by the aid stations, especially at Pennyfield Lock, where you can leave a drop bag. I kept saying I felt like an elite athlete, with volunteers bringing me a chair, fussing over me, seeing if I needed my water pack refilled, asking if I wanted to change my socks, providing me with food options, etc. I've done it six times, and it's still a magical experience.

What is your proudest running moment or moments?

My proudest running moment is completing the C&O Canal 100 [one hundred miles] in 2022. I kept saying that just being able to do the training made me feel accomplished because by the end of it, aside from a couple of other, shorter runs, my mid-week run had me up at 3:00 am so I could squeeze in 15 miles before work, and my weekends consisted of 30 miles on Saturday and 20 miles on Sunday. The support of my running family during training was incredible, with people meeting me at the crack of dawn or running through the night without hesitation (thank you, Roberta, Caroline, Julia, Smita, Mike, and Gretchen!). On the day of the race, my husband, who is a jazz drummer, kept meeting me at different points with an old-school drum he got especially for the occasion, to serenade me with his beats and cheer me on. Audrey Fincher and Dubrabka Trakic were my pacers for the last 30 miles.

Before the race, I had said that even if I didn't make the cutoff, I was going to finish, and I would know that I had done it. But I started having severe stomach cramps, and I asked Audrey and Dubrabka if they thought I was going to be able to finish before the

cutoff at the pace we were going. They immediately said yes, but I insisted, “Do the math and tell me the truth.” At that point I wanted an official finish and my first belt buckle. And I did it! If all goes well this year, I’m planning to train for and do C&O again for my sixtieth birthday. This was also the most challenging race I’ve done, and it reaffirmed my belief in the power of community and my gratitude for the support I have.

Other accomplishments that I’m proud of are my third-place age-group finish at Ocean City Marathon on a hot day, the day before running Marine Corps Marathon, which I actually finished faster; as well as placing first in my age group for both the MCRRC Championship Series and the MCRRC Trail Series in 2023. It doesn’t mean I’m the best runner. It demonstrates the power of showing up and doing your best.

Which do you prefer, trail or road running?

Trail and road running are two very different experiences, and I like them both. I advocate for trail running in road-running groups for several reasons: It’s easier on your body, you listen to your body more closely, you learn to become less dependent on your watch, it’s an excellent core workout, and different muscles get a workout and avoid the repetitive stress of road running. Most importantly, being immersed in nature is good for your emotional well-being, the vibe is more of camaraderie rather than competition, and you eat and drink well.

We are fortunate to live in an area where you’re never more than a short drive away from a paved or dirt trail. I run on the road only when I’m doing FTM. Otherwise, the Greenway is my home for training.

When did you decide you wanted to coach?

I always wanted to coach. About five years into FTM, I thought I was ready to start coaching, but I was in the midst of doing a master’s degree program that had me in Cambridge, Massachusetts for eight weeks each summer for three years, so the timing did not work out. I



Photo: Tereisa Cuesta

Carol Cuesta painted this portrait of her sister as a surprise Christmas gift in 2023.

then went through a period of injuries and general physical hardship, to the point that I had planned for 2020 to be my last year of marathons. Of course, we know how 2020 went, so all the races I had lined up as my farewell (including 2Slow4Boston Marathon, where the last three finishers get the prizes) became virtual. In 2021, I had the opportunity to have a sabbatical semester and with it, the time, energy, and mental space to rekindle my running. A year later, I was finishing my 100-mile race and reaching out to Conroy [Zien, FTM co-director]

to see if he needed a coach. I also started coaching with the Winter Trails Program.

Why do you enjoy coaching, and what do you think makes a good coach?

First of all, to give back to others what I have received from my coaches. And second, because the teacher in me just loves being able to support someone’s growth as they go after their dreams and goals. Being a good coach is similar to being a teacher: Creating a positive culture and developing relationships is essential, along with asking questions and listening more than you talk, fostering runners’ self-knowledge and helping them visualize where they want to go.

What are your goals for the rest of 2024?

My main running goal for the rest of the year is to stay healthy and injury-free as much as possible, so I can tackle my very busy fall race calendar, take it easy for a few weeks, and then get back to train for the 100.

What do you do when you’re not running?

When not running or coaching, what I love the most is doing anything with my husband, Mike, and our dog, Luke, and our kids and their spouses Teri and Derek, Luis and Sara, and our grandpup, Delilah, and grandkittens, Boo and Leo. I enjoy backyard grilling and the fire pit, visiting breweries, hiking and camping, going to the beach, and reading.

—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.

So You Want to Be a Race Timer

by Bonnie Gitlin

Timing an MCRRC race takes a coordinated team with complementary skills. The lead timer for a race is responsible for gathering the necessary equipment, working with the race director, operating the IPICO timing system during the race, and compiling and posting the race results to the Club's website. This involves downloading the registered runner data from RunSignUp into a program that then places them in the order that they finish. Another program recognizes a runner's RFID chip as it crosses the finish mats, and provides an accurate finish time.

The lead timer then compiles this data into results and posts them on the Club's website. Sounds complicated, but a bit of practice helps things work smoothly. The lead timer is supported by a small crew that sets up the start and finish lines, runs the race-day registration and solves registration problems if necessary. This crew also keeps track of runners as they finish—this data is a back-up in case there are discrepancies in the results—and breaks down the equipment after the race.

Back when I started as a race director,

the race registration process was a mystery, and race timing involved place cards and bulletin boards. A few years ago, I volunteered to do race registration. I discovered it was carefully choreographed chaos, with paper forms, manual data entry, and a lot of running back and forth. Then I learned how to do the data entry, which was my introduction to the MCRRC Timing Team. I gradually learned to do select timing—we're the people stationed at the finish line with little machines, calling out race numbers as runners cross the finish line—which requires focus, good eyesight, and fast fingers.

But that was before RunSignUp.

Registration is now all online through RunSignUp. Whether you love it or hate it, RunSignUp has streamlined race registration and data for timing. Because most Club members register for their low-key bibs online before their first race and non-member race participants register online, race registration has become primarily a customer relations job. The registration volunteer is a problem-solver and trouble desk staffer. You need to know

your way around RunSignUp, both computer-based and on mobile phones. You need to help people who are not comfortable with computers, have language barriers, or just forgot their reading glasses, complete the electronic registration process. Then pack up all your gear and get out to the finish line to run a select timing machine.

I've had a lot of fun working as part of the timing team. I've learned so much about how a race comes together and the behind-the-scenes mechanics that result in a seamless experience for our running friends and all the race participants. Sometimes it's like making sausage (you're better off not knowing), but most of the time I have the satisfaction of working with a supportive and friendly (if sometimes snarky) bunch of friends. It's a pretty great way to start any day—hope you'll give it a try!

—Bonnie Gitlin has been with MCRRC since 2002. Though she no longer runs, she works with the Timing Team, dabbles in race shirt design, and stays busy as a volunteer ranger at Seneca Creek and Patuxent River State Parks.