

MCRRC Intervals



September 2024

Newsletter of the *montgomery county road runners club*

On the Horizon

Sunday, September 8, 6:45 am

Parks Half Marathon 2024 (\$)

Rockville

www.parkshalfmarathon.com

Saturday, September 21, 8:00 am

Lake Needwood 10K (TS)

Derwood

Saturday, October 5, 9:00 am

Cabin John Kids Run

Bethesda

Saturday, October 12, 9:00 am

Black Hill 10K (TS)

Boysd

Sunday, November 3, 8:30 am

Rockville 10K/5K (\$)

Rockville

Saturday, November 9, 6:00 am

Stone Mill 50 Mile Run (\$)

Montgomery Village

www.stone-mill-50-mile.org

For updates, visit:

www.mcrrc.org

The Heat is On



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Yi Dang is unfazed by Country Road Run 8K's hot temperatures.



Photo: George Barker

Travisha Gunter prepares to conquer the hills of Riley's Rumble Half Marathon.



Photo: Bruce Lemieux

Abigail Rivas and Kevin Aguillon Rivas tackle Matthew Henson 5K together.

Board Meetings

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



Olympic Achievements

by Amy Lin

I'm sure I'm not the only one who binge-watched last month's exhilarating Paris Olympics—I love seeing sports that aren't normally broadcast, and every competition celebrated both jaw-dropping feats and awe-inspiring stories.

Though Olympic dreams and stadium-sized crowds might be far out of reach for most of us mortals, MCRRC offers many ways to realize individual dreams, whether that means returning from injury, starting a new training program, meeting a race goal, or simply getting out and back safely.

Brian Murphy hands the From the Board baton to Wanda Walters as she highlights our Fall 10K and 5K programs with testimonials from past participants.

In our Coaches' Corner, Jyoti Bisbey dispels some myths

about the “back of the pack” and offers thoughts on how MCRRC embraces its motto, *A place for every pace*.

For this issue's The Rundown, Catherine Howard and Walter Hill compile safety tips from Club members, as a lead-up to National Running Safety Month in November.

Our Runner Profile features Vicky Nathan, a frequent ultra runner, a fixture at nearly every MCRRC event on the calendar, and an enthusiastic coach in multiple Club training programs.

Last but not least, Brian Belonia provides a personal look at his post-injury running comeback, capped off with a Ragnar relay finish.

Happy autumn, MCRRC. Here's to a new season of achievements that are Olympic to you!

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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.





Fall 5K/10K Programs Want You!

by Brian Murphy

As president of MCRRC, I often have to check my perspective on running, the environment around me, and my experiences to really appreciate the breadth of what the Club offers and how to best serve it. Despite my love of the 5K, I don't have great experience training for one—for me, it's usually in the midst of marathon or even super-marathon training. MCRRC offers opportunities for members to *actually* train properly for one, and I'm happy that Wanda Walters, long-time member, program director, and coach, is here to give us some insight into the Fall 5K and 10K programs and to share some great testimonials. Thank you, Wanda!

Whether your goal is to become a faster shorter-distance runner, a stronger middle-distance-paced runner, or a run/walker, or to walk your way to improved health and fitness, the Fall 5K and 10K programs are for you! Those who are working to increase their mileage may find it beneficial to participate in both programs and extend their training season into December.

Choose one or both! Don't delay, register today! Here are some participant stories:

The first race I ever signed up for was the 2022 Rockville 5K. After running 2023 Pike's Peek, I joined MCRRC, since I figured I'd be running for a while. The main member benefits that drew me into the Club were its low-key races and the Run Performance Lab. While in the Lab, staff mentioned the training programs.

At that time, I was mainly running by myself in my neighborhood with

a goal to re-run Rockville 5K and see how much I could improve my time. I noticed that Fall 5K advertised the Rockville 5K as its goal race. Since it was also my goal race, I figured I would try out both the Fall 5K and 10K programs.

Running with groups is different from running alone. It was nice to meet other Club members and become acquainted with different running venues. An added plus: my race times became significantly faster!

I am now registered for the Summer Half Marathon and First Time Marathon programs. Joining two programs within a season allows me training and scheduling flexibility. —Jonathan Hou

I have been running with MCRRC for about seventeen years, and I have participated and coached in distances from 5K to half-marathon. I coach both the Fall 5K and 10K programs, supporting the 12- to 13-minute pace groups.

Fall 5K and 10K incorporate varied training models and opportunities. For example, 5K "strength-building" concentrates on hill repeats, while 10K offers a more traditional track/speed workout. Weekend workouts for the two programs also differ. Fall 5K long runs utilize run/walk intervals while 10K employs the LSD (long slow distance) model. On a weekly basis, both programs provide a consistent running routine that increases my mileage while improving my overall endurance and pace.

In Fall of 2023, I was able to participate in two races in the same week: The Philadelphia Half

Marathon and YMCA Turkey Chase 10K in Bethesda. My finishing paces were 11:55 and 11:30 minute per mile, respectively.

Participating in both the 5K and 10K training programs provides a very complementary four-day-per-week training experience. And there is a registration discount! —Sheila Patel

A friend told me about the Marine Corps Marathon. I said I wanted to run it, though I wasn't a runner. My friend told me there was more involved than I thought and that I should join MCRRC, so I joined both the Fall 5K and 10K programs.

After my first day of walking, I didn't know if I was going to make it. I started out at a walk pace close to 30+ min per mile. My legs would even yell at me after a workout. Ha ha!

With my coaches' encouragement, I continued. Soon, I became physically stronger and able to walk more efficiently.

My official finish time for the 2024 New Year's 5K race was 49:32. A 15:57 walking pace!

I am now participating in the Spring 10K program. My new goal is run/walking. —Cathie Peirce

Our contributors are all active and engaged MCRRC volunteers, too! Registration information, including a discount if joining both programs, can be found here:

MCRRC Fall 5K — <https://mcrrc.org/training-program/fall-5k-run-walk-program/>

MCRRC Fall 10K — <https://mcrrc.org/training-program/10k-program/>

Tips for Running Safely

by Walter Hill and Catherine Howard

Running safely means different things to different people, and the likelihood of a serious safety incident occurring depends on a number of factors, some known (e.g., running in darkness) and others impossible to know (e.g., random attacks by humans or wildlife). As an unfortunate fact, safety risk for women looks different than for men. According to a 2017 *Runner's World* study, 43 percent of women at least sometimes experience harassment while running, compared with 4 percent of men. Runners have a lot to consider when thinking about safety and, as rare as serious instances may be statistically, we've had upsetting events happen to our members while they were running.

"The Club takes runner safety seriously—and we also remind runners to keep themselves safe," says Patricia Maloney, chair of MCRRC's Run Aware initiative. "For that reason, we urge runners and walkers not to wear headphones, to let someone know where they are going, to travel with a charged cell phone with an **In Case of Emergency Number** on the lock screen, to wear clothing that keeps them visible, and to wear ID. Runners and walkers may be confronted on a running trail, park, or just about anywhere. Often, it is a case of people trying to exert power over a different gender or race, by someone who feels superior." Here are some additional safety tips from MCRRC members:

"The biggest thing is simply not losing awareness of my surroundings. Most runners know that it is easy to drift off into a meditation of sorts while running. I have avoided collisions with pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles by not losing consciousness of the inherent dangers of otherwise anodyne elements of everyday life while running. 'Run aware' is the simple term we apply to this, and it matters." —*Lyman Jordan*

"Since being the victim of a rape attempt (at age 24; I'm now 65)—fortunately I was able to get away—I highly recommend the book *The Gift of Fear*, by Gavin deBecker, and carrying a cat [self-defense] keychain." —*Anonymous*

"Never give cars the finger... don't assume a driver won't stop and beat up the person who gave them the finger. Always assume cars have the right of way. Anything that weighs twice as much as me or can move twice as fast as me always has the right of way, and that includes cars, dogs, cows, horses, bears, moose, deer, etc." —*Cliff Tell*

"Whether participating in a program or race, participants' safety and well-being is of utmost importance. Through years of experience, I have learned that the Sweep position for both programs and races ensures the best safety outcomes. (A "sweep" is a race volunteer who

stays behind the last runner, helping should a runner be in distress, amongst other responsibilities like removing course markings.)" —*Wanda Walters*

"Minimize use of music when running. I enjoy music when running, but I keep the volume way down so I can stay aware of my surroundings. Also, making sure I have adequate liquids and nutrition for longer runs." —*Dan Goldberg*

"If a sidewalk isn't available, run on the side of the road that gives you and cars the best visibility and offers you a safe place to jump to, if needed. Typically, the left side but not always!" —*Catherine Howard*

"Wear light-colored or reflective clothing at night. I see people wearing dark clothing, making them hard to see in the hours after sunset. Wearing light clothing or even clothing with reflection helps. I have occasionally seen people carrying lights." —*Walter Hill*

"Come to Wednesday night workouts to cover all your bases!" —*Denis McDonald*

Do you have a running question or advice you'd like to share, or would you like to co-author The Rundown? Send an email to: intervals@mccrrc.org

Nurturing the BOP

by Jyoti Bisbey

MCCRRC has evolved over the years. I see much more variety in physical capabilities of members, including many slower athletes, in the Club's training programs. Consequently, program directors have adjusted and adapted to the shifting needs. However, I still note a lack of understanding of this group, so I'll venture to combat some of the myths. Who is the BOP? "BOP" is short for "back of the pack." For the purposes of this article, BOP refers to athletes who are at paces 12 minutes and slower per mile.

Myth #1: The BOP is a very small number of MCCRRC members. I was curious, so I reached out to the two of the most supportive program directors I know and with whom I coach BOP groups regularly, Wanda Walters (Fall 5K) and Larry Feidelseit (Summer Half Marathon). According to their registration data, the BOP has made up more than 70% of the Fall 5K program and more than 40% of the Summer Half Marathon programs over the past two years. That is a remarkable achievement and an illuminating sign of future demand. However, if you compare this to the Club's race participants, the BOP numbers are around 15–20%. There is a disconnect here. If we are training for the distances, then why are we not doing the races?

Myth #2: The BOP doesn't have a place in long-distance races. Pace varies, and it's okay. Some are runners, some are run/walkers, and some are walkers. The important fact to remember is that we are out there working out in all weather and spending sometimes two or three times the time that faster runners take to do the same distance. It's not enough to say that the Club is inclusive; the group training programs and races must tangibly change the way they think of a participant. Current long-distance races are not designed to include BOP. Most half and full marathons limit the time to finish, restricting many of the

potential athletes who could participate in them. Messages about time limits, road closures, and minimum pace all have an impact on the willingness of people to even have the ambition to do these races and start training.

Myth #3: The BOP needs to get faster. I don't believe this is the case. As more and more county residents become active and take the opportunity to join MCCRRC, our programs need to adapt to the changing demographics, including older participants and more walkers. Many people chose to go up and down the ladder in distances and paces as life happens—injury, illness, work-life balance, etc. Races need to adjust to athletes wanting to go longer distances at slower paces. The objective should be to encourage more people to become active, rather than limiting the chances of receiving a medal at the finish line.

Myth #4: The BOP is not strong. This perception is encouraged by outdated thinking that one is not a runner unless one is fast. In apps such as Walktober, the slowest pace allowed is 12 minutes per mile. On average, a BOPer spends a half-hour to two hours more on a race course than a faster peer. Sometimes, when we reach the aid stations or finish line, there is no water or food left, or worse—they've packed up the supplies. When I ran

the Cambodia Half Marathon, by the time I reached the aid stations, they were packing up and had no water left, in 100°F temperatures with 100% humidity. Improvising, I just took their leftover ice and stuffed it in my bra! Many times, we are running by ourselves over trash and empty cups, with no cheering crowds to encourage us. Traffic is often open, and we must switch to sidewalks. All this with the overhanging possibility of no medal or official finish time at the end if we finish after the cut-off. Through all this, we keep going, as we are resilient and here to take on every workout and race.

We are tremendously lucky to be part of a club where more training programs are receptive to the differences among us. Wanda Walters, an MCCRRC veteran, says, "When I joined the Club more than twenty years ago, 'walk' was reacted to like it was a blasphemous four-letter word." That's no longer the case, and this is a good thing. Our club really is "a place for every pace!"

—Jyoti Bisbey has been an MCCRRC member since 2009 and loves coaching distances from 5K to half-marathon. Her favorite trail is Riley's Lock at sunrise, and she enjoys organizing informal group runs. When she's not running, she volunteers cleaning up local streams, hikes with her kids, and binge-watches Harlan Coben.



Coach Jyoti Bisbey (center front) pauses for a photo break with her BOP pace group during a Summer Half Marathon program training run.

Vicky Nathan



by Lisa Levin

Two decades ago, Vicky Nathan signed up for the Beginning Women's 5K training program as a gift to herself for her fortieth birthday. After running her first race, Run for the Roses 5K, she knew she was hooked. Over the past twenty years, Vicky has progressed from the 5K to ultra distances, completing the Umstead 100 Mile Endurance Run earlier this year. Vicky is also a constant presence at Club races and training programs, volunteering in many capacities and serving as a pace coach for the 5K, 10K, Half Marathon, and First Time Marathon (FTM) training programs. She's currently the co-director of the 10K training program. Vicky, who just turned 60, was born in Guatemala and moved to Bethesda when she was 11. She currently lives in Germantown with her husband, Marc, and has two sons, Zach (26) and Ian (25).

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

I never considered myself an athlete. I played basketball for one season, and played in one game for all of five minutes.

When and why did you start running?

In 2004, I saw a flyer for Kids on the Run and registered my sons, which encouraged me to sign up for Run for the Roses and the Beginning Women's 5K training



Photo: Ben Dillon

Vicky Nathan flashes a thumbs-up and a smile on her way to completing Umstead 100 Mile Endurance Run 2024

program (now the Spring 5K program) to prepare for that race. After doing a training run in the rain, I knew that I was hooked.

What do you remember most about that first race?

I remember thoroughly enjoying the excitement before the race, the encouragement during the

race, and the camaraderie after the race. I especially remember the celebration after the race, with my training group!

All these years later, do you have a favorite race or race distance?

That's a hard one! I love the Baltimore 10-Miler and the Parks Half Marathon, particularly for the post-race watermelon, which makes them stand out in my mind.

What is your proudest running moment?

Crossing the finish line for the Umstead 100 was a personal highlight for me. I was so happy to have completed the race with my training buddies. I have to say, though, that some of my proudest running moments are watching participants in the training groups I coach cross the finish line, particularly the new runners that experience the joy of their first race. I paced Federica Conti at the 2021 Parks Half Marathon, and that finish still makes me smile. There was also a runner from Ukraine who had watched the finish of Parks in 2017 and dreamed of running the race. Her tears at the finish line the

next year were priceless. I also remember watching a 2023 FTM participant finish Marine Corps Marathon and then go on to complete the [Seneca Creek] Greenway 50K. Their accomplishments and the joy they experience really make me the proudest; I feel so honored to have been part of their journey.

How has your training changed over the years?

I have stopped focusing on pace and just enjoy every mile and every run. My goal is to run into and beyond my 70s.

Which Club training program has been your favorite?

I have loved the friendships I have made in all of the programs, but since I have done FTM the longest, it's given me a chance to really get close to a lot of my fellow runners.

Do you have any unique race superstitions?

I don't have any superstitions, but I do have a mantra on longer races: I dedicate each mile in honor of a friend, family, or cause. It makes the miles go by faster.

What's your favorite piece of

running gear?

My backpack. I like having space for a light jacket or extra hat.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Vicky Nathan (left) finds joy in pacing Federica Conti to the finish line of Parks Half Marathon 2021.

What inspired you to start coaching?

I was inspired by the coaches that helped me when I started running. There are so many, but the late Jim Rich stands out. He knew how to bring out the best in his team.

What is the most important thing you have learned as a coach?

I have learned that everyone can run and meet their goals

by following the plan, tweaking when necessary, and listening to their body.

What do you think makes a good coach?

Getting to know the runners in the group and helping them discover their potential. This is what I love so much about coaching.

When you are not running or coaching, how do you enjoy spending your time?

Watching *The Andy Griffith Show* (it is now on 24 hours a day!) and reading.

What are your goals for the rest of this year?

Simply to enjoy the FTM training and run the Berlin Marathon this fall!

How would you summarize your 20+ years of running?

"Running has given me many things, but the best thing is the people that it has brought into my life." —Unknown

—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.

Why Did the MCRRC Runner Cross the Country?

by Brian Belonia

For me, 2023 was a forgettable running year, marred by another injury and a shortened FTM season. I found myself looking to 2024 to recapture my running mojo. So, when I was approached to join a team for Ragnar Road Northwest Passage, I reveled at the chance to set and accomplish a new goal. After a long recovery stint and training period, on July 12, I was among a dozen runners who set out from Blaine, Washington, to make the two-hundred-mile trek south to Langley, Washington, just outside of Seattle. This relay begins near the Canadian border and covers stunning sights, including the glacial Cascade and Olympic Mountain ranges, Deception Pass, and Puget Sound.

Our team's name? Faster Than Sasquatch—a nod to local legend Bigfoot.

I was runner number five; I had a short 2.7-mile leg to start but then got increasingly more difficult tasks: an 8-mile leg during the night and a final leg of 8 miles with 555 feet of elevation gain. Daunting? Absolutely. Insane? Yes. But I was determined. On my initial run, it was good to get out and stretch my legs. Tall trees and an ocean breeze provided moments of relief from the sun as onlookers questioned my sanity. But just like that, the warm-up run was over, and I became van support for the next runner. There was an infectious excitement. Seeing colorfully decorated vans and runners of different skill levels donning various team uniforms and costumes reinvigorated my love for running.

As night fell, we turned our attention to safety gear, so that we could see and be seen amidst passing cars. This second leg would test my endurance over a longer distance, a concern that mentally weighed on me—especially in unfamiliar surroundings. Kicking off, I could see headlamps and taillights, and with my competitive nature, these were my “kill” targets. But for each target I sought, I was also sought and quickly dispatched by faster runners throughout this leg. When my race leg ended with no reoccurring pain from my last injury, I rejoiced: *I can and will finish this.*

Dawn brought introspection: *Where's the shower? I need coffee! Where's our runner? Are we still doing this?* The sun baked us

mercilessly, daring anyone with strength left to test their fortitude on their last relay legs. Fueled by water, snacks, adrenaline, but not sleep, I stared down my final eight miles.

With all due respect to our local behemoths, the Silencer and the Mormon Temple Hill, the climbs on this leg would give all of them a run for their money. Determined not to stop or walk, I trekked up the hill, then sprinted down the hill, only to go back up again. It was a test of mental fortitude and willpower. A smile, cheer, or a passing Ragnar van provided a needed distraction and gave me the energy to keep going. Eventually, I rounded the final corner to hand the baton to my teammate, and I thought to myself, *I made it!* It was a true testament to mind over matter. Battling injuries, setting a goal, not knowing if I could make it to the start line, and then finishing reinforced the notion *Yeah, I can do this.*

As Faster Than Sasquatch's final runner turned the final bend, the rest of us joined to cross the finish line together, roughly thirty-five hours after we started. After high-fiving each other and receiving our medals for a job well done, we could only pose a single question: “When are we doing this again?”

—Brian Belonia is an avid long-distance runner and has been with MCRRC since 2019. He has completed more than a dozen marathons. When not running, he works as a capture manager for Leidos and enjoys contributing to Intervals in his spare time.



Photo: Brian Belonia

“Nice night for a run.”