

The Runner Spotlight

The Runner Spotlight is the first of a series to profile runners and members of HARRC. The intent is to introduce to the club its members and to highlight their stories not to name a “runner of the month.” It will not be about the fastest, the youngest, or the one who has run the most races, but as Paul Harvey says, “The rest of the story.” We are all unique in ability with different reasons for running. The words that follow are to share that uniqueness.

With that said, let me introduce you to a runner and a member of HARRC. His name is Jeff White and he loves to run. There is no doubt about it. One of Jeff’s favorite quotes is “Nothing is really work unless you would rather be doing something else.” Jeff would probably run every day all day if it were physically possible; he enjoys it that much. Even when you just talk about running with Jeff you can tell he loves the sport. He knows a lot about it. He can amaze you with rattling off records of varying distances; training tips tried and true, races around the globe, and stories of world and national figures, both past and present. Another thing you discover when you talk to him about running, his running, is that Jeff is unassuming. He is modest about his feats. In fact, it is down right difficult to get him to discuss his achievements. He reluctantly revealed some information about his running, and the more he revealed, the more it confirmed just how skilled and knowledgeable Jeff is at this sport.

There is a fine line between a passion and an obsession, but Jeff has found that balance. He realized early in his life in Youngstown, Ohio that the dream of being a football player or playing basketball were probably not going to be his best sports as he lacked the height and the build for either, but he loved sports. He does remember, during high school, his amazement by a marathon finish on TV; the winner just quit running and walked away without looking winded. Then a few years later, while attending ROTC at Bowling Green State University, Jeff would watch his

Commanding Officer (Colonel Gibson) run during the entire physical education class period. He was envious of each man’s stamina. Jeff decided to try it and began running with a pair of low-cut Converse basketball shoes. He admits he found out that he did not have the natural ability for running either. Slowly, though, he began his passion with a few laps around the gym until he was running three miles. Running hooked him; it was 1975.

After a few years of running (mostly around a track), Jeff was comfortably running 8-milers when he decided to enter his first race in 1978, which was a mini-marathon (15K) held in Cincinnati, Ohio. He ran with Bill Rodgers and Jack Fultz, but admitted he finished just a little further back in the pack than the two of them. Nonetheless, Jeff was thrilled. It was not until he secured a federal job and moved to Detroit that his passion for long distance running emerged. Jeff did not know anyone in the area and quickly became incredibly bored. Because of his boredom, his running regimen of 8-milers continued and eventually increased to frequent 20-milers in the months to follow. Long distance running hooked him; it was 1979.

Jeff trained for his first marathon bound and determined to finish no matter what. He did just that when he completed the Detroit Free Press Marathon on 10/04/1979. Jeff ran a very respectable 3:34:00 and felt exhilarated after he finished. From that point forward, he became a marathoner. Jeff likes a quote from an unknown marathoner. The marathoner, when asked by a non-runner why he would ever want to run 26.2 miles, replied, “Because I can.” Well, Jeff proved he could and he only got better. His first marathon time of 3:34:00 stands as the slowest of the forty-five marathons he has completed.

Jeff has run forty-four marathons since his first and posted some very impressive times. There is not enough space to show you every marathon Jeff completed, but listed below are Jeff’s twelve fastest finishes which all just happen to be under the 2-hour and 50-minute threshold.

Cleveland Revco	5/20/1984	2:39:55
Skylon International (Niagara Falls)	10/13/1984	2:40:12
Nittany Valley	12/15/1984	2:42:25
Cleveland Revco	5/15/1983	2:43:30
Cleveland Revco	5/18/1986	2:43:40
America's Marathon (Chicago)	10/20/1985	2:44:07
Bluefield Marathon (West Virginia)	5/25/1985	2:45:13
Columbus Bank One	10/16/1983	2:45:26
Saginaw Delta College (Michigan)	5/2/1987	2:45:38
Boston Marathon	4/15/1985	2:47:08
Pt. Huron Scotty Hanton (Michigan)	9/2/1989	2:47:53
America's Marathon	10/26/1986	2:49:23

Suffice it to say, the list contains an additional twenty marathons Jeff has completed in under the 3-hour mark. His favorite marathon is the Cleveland Revco, which he has run five times in addition to finishing Harrisburg, the Detroit Free Press, and Boston four times.

As you could probably tell, the marathon is Jeff's favorite distance with all other distances being a means to the end. Along the journey of his forty-five marathons, Jeff has achieved some impressive PRs in other distances. Jeff indicated that most of these were set several years ago when he was much younger, but we know they still count.

1 mile	5:07
5K	17:05
5 mile	27:22
10K	35:07
10 mile	57:40
13.1 mile	75:00
Marathon	2:39:55

On the other hand, we know among all the achievements rest some setbacks. Jeff has weathered his well. In fact, he states, "You only lose when you quit trying." Jeff's most significant running setbacks occurred twelve years apart. His first running injury occurred during a 10K in 1984 just two weeks before running Boston for the first time. The tendon in his left foot swelled and prevented Jeff

from getting his shoe on. In a panic, he found a running doctor who knew how terribly he wanted to run Boston. The doctor took mercy on him and gave Jeff some cortisone that deadened the pain for a few hours. Jeff only needed 2:54:57 to run the race with a slight limp, but that experience taught him how quickly injuries appear and how long it takes to free you from them.

Disappointed about running Boston injured, Jeff entered the Cleveland Revco Marathon a mere four weeks later and ran his marathon PR. He attributes the remarkable recovery and PR to the forced rest, and it was evident he hurdled his first injury with relative ease. Injury-free for the next twelve years, Jeff began experiencing a severe pain in his left heel in 1996. Not only did the pain cause a reduction in his training but ultimately led to abandoning his running log because of the frustration with his mileage.

After delaying the inevitable doctor visit with the belief he could run through the injury, he eventually went. An x-ray showed a bone deformity (retrocalc exotosis) causing an inflammation of the tendon that would require surgery. After getting up enough nerve, Jeff had the surgery in December 1998. His recovery went well and again he hurdled a second injury with relative ease. Jeff has been running great since then although not as fast as he once was capable, but he does not quit. He has completed some local races of varying distances as well as the 2000 Harrisburg Marathon (3:13:00) and the 2001 Steamtown Marathon (3:08:52).

Jeff has lived a few places over his forty-eight years and realizes through having to say goodbye to the running friends as he moved from place to place how much beyond exercise running gives a person. Jeff puts it like this, "The relationships forged by running innumerable miles with people is one of the great benefits of the sport. There is an opportunity to get to know those who you train with which far exceeds time available in many other situations in life."

Jeff became a member of HARRC in July 1993 after his then-wife accepted a position

with Pinnacle Health in Harrisburg. He says he has always joined the local running clubs wherever he has lived, if for no other reason, than to support local running in that small way. He insists, however, that in the Harrisburg-area he discovered a running community equal to that of his hometown in Youngstown, Ohio. "The folks here accepted an out-of-stater immediately, which was fortunate because by this stage in my life, the balance between the competitive aspects of running and social benefits had clearly shifted from race times to friendships.

After a divorce, Jeff met Licia Bowers in 1996 and they became inseparable. Jeff and Licia married each other and they live in Lower Paxton Township with their daughter Courtney. Running is a family activity and you will see Jeff and Licia at most club runs maintaining their pace in preparation for future races, which are mostly marathons. "It is something we both share," Jeff says. "We both understand what motivates a runner. Why a runner goes out in bad weather or why a runner gets difficult to live with when injured. We try to run the same races but her enthusiasm is greater than mine."

When asked to explain his training philosophy, Jeff shared this: "Years ago I believed that every day of running had a training purpose even if it was a "rest" day of only five miles. However, as the years went by, my training philosophy changed. I realized the sense of accomplishment achieved at working towards a goal is often times more satisfying than attaining the goal. My philosophy is to continue running for life. Consistency in training has replaced my race times and freedom from injuries has replaced weekly quality workouts. I think the essence of running is to endure. Since I have started running, I have not let up. I have been off due to injuries, but I never stopped when I could. I feel running has given me a good life and I do not consider the time spent training as a sacrifice. Running is an end in itself."

Jeff organizes a motley crew of runners (nicknamed the "River Rats") for long runs every Saturday morning at 7:30 a.m. from

City Island. Besides being good company for the long runs, Jeff eagerly shares his experience and knowledge of the sport. I should know. I am one of them. What you should know is Jeff loves to run. There is no doubt about it. By the way, he is good at it.