

Post Crescent

Hats off to the PAPERFEST 5k and the Goodwill Efforts of Dedicated Individuals

By Gloria West

July 11, 2008

Six years ago, Jim Boots, the Paperfest Co-founder wanted to expand the local mid July Kimberly Festival by adding a 5k Run. This small festival that started in 1989 has now raised over a half million dollars for local non profit organization. With this idea he knew exactly who he could turn to. So Jim asked his friend Ed Willenbrink to take on this venture to expand the Paperfest Weekend activities and increased the revenues made from the festival.

Ed, who is a well know local Kimberly runner, instantly agreed and was pleased for the opportunity to promote running and fitness in his community. Ed has loved running since he grew up as a child in Louisville, KY. He was a top runner for the Notre Dame College team. Ed has continued his passion ever since, running every conceivable distance all through the 80s when he could easily clip off a 2:29 marathon. He can also surely be proud of his 2:42 marathon at the First Community First Fox Cities Marathon in the early 90's.

Although Ed has been an avid and strong runner, it was the late beloved Marathon Director, Bret Younger, who helped Ed, mentoring him on how to put on a race. In his usual unselfish devotion to the community, Bret spent countless hours and many meetings teaching Ed all the basics and fine points of putting on a race. Bret even helped Ed as he floundered for a unique name for the 5k and the coined it for him "The Sunset Run".

This 5k Walk/Run starts the first night of the festival at 6:30 pm, which is unique from most running events. Normally 5k's start early in the morning followed by a brief rehydration, food and then onto typical Saturday mundane activities. This run was designed to be different. As the participants finish the race they are welcomed to Friday night Festivities and lineup of bands. Rides, games, sporting activities, competitions, food, two stages for music are all a part of the festival.

Ed is the type of guy that will shy away from any credit due Sunset Run's success. Many of us know there are local 5k's that are now non existent because rousting up volunteers each year can be a tedious and not so easy task. Ed says "I have a great group of reliable "co-directors" helping with the race. The group includes Mike Gritton, Luke Demerath, Bob Sarver, Don Morey, Bill VandeVoort and Jason Jansen. Each of those individuals has taken-on particular responsibilities and made race preparation very easy on me."

Ed also wanted to be sure the event promoted fitness to the entire community including the youth, and added the Positive Youth Kids Run. This is a no fee 1k fun run for children 12 and under, of all abilities, just to promote interest and participation in running, fitness and a healthy life style.

He meekly adds, "Our motivation is to promote running in the community, particularly with the youth. There are also so many willing volunteers representing the Kimberly Area Running Club who help on race night. In return, the club receives proceeds from the Paperfest that are used to help support the Track and Cross Country programs in Kimberly.

This year Ed is especially fortunate to have a dedicated and reliable group of co-directors to promote the race. As the entire running community knows, Ed was struck by a car that was in a freak accident this February, while he was out running. He has not been able to run ever since and is only now beginning to walk.

We all pray for Ed's speedy recovery to return to the sport he loves. In the meantime the Sunset Run 2008 will be bigger and better than ever, since he and his group of co-directors will put in selfless hours of effort to once again put on one of the best 5k community runs in the area.

Come join Kimberly, Friday evening July 17th to celebrate Paperfest, celebrate running and celebrate such a wonderful sense of community goodwill. Thank you Ed and fellow workers.