

Editor's Note: Pat Board was an extraordinary friend and supporter of the running community in the Kanawha Valley. Below is a feature story about Pat that appeared in the spring 2006 issue of *News from the Tallman Track Club*. Pat will be sorely missed, but memories of this kind and caring man and his countless contributions will endure.

Chairman of the “Board”

Race organizer dedicated to runners

By Jeff Morris

One of the best known faces to runners in the Kanawha Valley belongs to someone who has never lined up to compete in a road race.

There's no mistaking the booming voice of the big, dark-haired man who might identify the race starter as the weight-lifting champion of the world or threaten to scalp non-registered runners who cross his finish line.

Pat Board, the self-described “easy going, broken down athlete,” has been a race organizer, timer and running promoter in the area for more than 25 years.

But why is this non-runner so dedicated to the running community? The answer is simple really. It all boils down to his son, Patrick Board IV, who was mentored by veteran runners from the time he ran his first 15-mile Charleston Distance run as an 8-year-old to his development as a 34-minute 10-K competitor.

“They've been good to him,” Board said of local runners. “I just feel an obligation to the runners because it (running) was great for Patrick.”

Board's involvement with running can be traced back to the day when he and his son, then age 7, pulled their car over to watch the Charleston Distance Run. When they got home, Patrick vowed to compete in the event the next year. Board took him to participate in a one-mile race at Coonskin Park. Both father and son were hooked.

Board has since helped organize countless road races. He has been a longtime

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Pat Board

Chairman of the “Board” Continued

member of the Distance Run Committee and for many years was president of the Kanawha Valley Road Runners.

While Patrick gave up running in the early 1990s, Board continues to help organize several local races because people still keep calling him to ask for assistance. Health issues, particularly problems with his knees, have him hinting at retirement.

“I’ve got to get out of it. If I retire from work, I might hang it up,” Board said. “I’ve scaled it way down. I do Poca, Thomas Hospital, the Pumpkin Race at Kanawha State Forest and Riverfest in St. Albans. Everything I can get out of, I get out of.”

That schedule is quite different from the days when Board once juggled four races in one weekend. Still, runners who line up at 8 a.m. May 13 in Cross Lanes for another edition of the oldest race in West Virginia, the Poca River Run, can expect to see Board. He has been race director of the 9.3-mile event since 1983.

At the starting line, they’ll likely hear a few quips from Board, who admittedly will say anything for a laugh. He said race helper Mike Blake has been the target of a good deal of his ribbing. “In the fall, I’ve introduced him as just getting back from parachuting off the New River Gorge Bridge,” Board said. “You wouldn’t believe how many people came up to him and asked how it was.”

Runners have come to love and appreciate Board and his sense of humor. When the South Charleston resident was asked recently for his age and what he does for a living, he joked that he just turned 127 years old and he’s a ballroom dancer.

Board’s memories of running are filled with funny stories – like the race that issued straight pins instead of safety pins for race numbers and the time the horse jumped in with

runners at Poca River. He also recalls a humorous exchange from a race at the Clay County Apple Festival. “We pulled into the parking lot and Steve Fox was getting out of a car. I said, ‘Hey Steve, how’s the course?’ And he said, ‘It’s downhill out and downhill back.’”

Through the years, Board has worked a lot of races. But he is quick to say he certainly shouldn’t be given all the credit for his long record of contributions to road racing. He said he has depended heavily on volunteers Mike Blake, Glen Jarrell and Winston Gregory. With this experienced crew, he can grab a couple of people to man a water stop, find some folks to take care of registration and – presto – put on a road race. “Glen, Mike and Winston will do anything from painting the race course, to copying race applications, to firing the starting gun to calculating the race results,” Board said. “I’ve had Glen sing the National Anthem.”

Joining forces to make road racing successful has created a whole group of friends for Board. He also has developed a strong appreciation for runners.

“The great thing about the sport of running is you can have a doctor, a lawyer, a roofer, a laborer and someone who is unemployed. You can have someone who is slow, someone who is fast, someone who is overweight and someone who is in shape. Anyone can do it. All they’ve got to do is get their butt out there,” Board said.



Pat reviews the awards list at the classic Poca River 15-K.