



## RRC History 1969 to 1986

Many current members of the Rochester Running Club (previously known as the Rochester Track Club) are not aware of how the club began and what the club did in its early years. Most likely, members have wondered who have been past presidents and board members of the club, who have won awards, and which races the track club has put on. This article is an attempt to recap some of the highlights of the past 17 years of the Rochester Track Club to give the current members a perspective of how the track club began and where it has been since then.

An article by Dwight Pierson in the Spring, 1979 newsletter was the starting point for this article. Old newsletters and tidbits from some of the long-time members of the club were also used. To gain a true flavor of the history of the track club one would have to browse through all the newsletters. This article will recap some of the main events through the years and not chronicle all the activities the RTC has been involved in.

The initial catalyst for the Rochester Track Club was Dwight Pierson. Dwight Pierson took up running while living in the Twin Cities and was involved in the Twin Cities Track Club. When Dwight moved to Rochester, he wanted to start a similar club and he put an inquiry into the newspaper asking interested runners to meet one evening. The article appeared in the Thursday, April 10, 1969 edition of the Rochester Post Bulletin. That's how the Rochester Track Club was conceived way back in 1969. The first meeting of the club was Friday, April 11, 1969 at the Soldiers Field clubhouse.

1969 proved to be a year of firsts for the Rochester Track Club. Dwight Pierson, the Founding Father of the RTC, was the first official member of the track club and at times, the only member. Dwight Pierson and a few Junior College guys were the track club for the first few months. They competed together in several distance races through August. During the first few months of the track club's existence, no elected officers existed. In August, the track club started to become formally organized.

Glenn Amundsen was the first president of the club with Dwight being the first vice-president and Carol Geerdes the first secretary. The first newsletter of the Rochester Track Club was published in September, 1969 under the name of Rochester Track News. It consisted of 4 mimeographed pages sent out to interested runners in the community. October 19, 1969 was the date of the first RTC sponsored road race in Rochester, the Apache 6 Mile, with 29 runners paying \$1.00



to participate in the run. The Apache 6 continued to be held for another 9 years.

The early days of the track club had a greater emphasis on track and field since distance running had yet to achieve great acceptance from the public. Glenn Amundsen, who was also president in 1970, was the chairman of the Minnesota Association of AAU. He helped bring the 1970 Minnesota AAU Mens and Womens Track and Field Championships to Rochester which, by the way, the Rochester Track Club won. Dick Norman was the head coach of the track club in its early years. In 1970, the Brian Kelly Benefit Track and Field Meet was held for the first time with Hubert Humphrey speaking at a pre-meet dinner. This benefit meet was held for two more years with Jesse Owens speaking at the 1971 event.

Local high school and junior college coaches, such as Glenn Amundsen, Dick Norman, Myron Glass, and Lynn King were involved in the early years of the track club. The school runners would participate with the adults in track meets. Through these many track meets, there was an ongoing relationship between the adult and high school runners. As the Rochester Track Club grew and changed directions, the close relationship between the club and the school track programs eroded.

The track club acquired team uniforms in 1970 and special RTC singlets and shirts have made their appearance several times in the past years even though there is not presently an official RTC uniform. The track club was also affiliated with the AAU through most of its early years.

In order to help pay for the activities of the RTC, the first dues for the club were set at \$4.00 in 1970 and remained so until 1985. This is a reflection on the many hours of volunteer work put in by members to keep the costs of our club as low as possible along with the fine sponsorship we have received. The second edition of the Rochester Track News was printed in 1970 and along with the newsletter came several new races for the area. The Minnesota AAU 25K Championship Road Race took place in Rochester on April 4, 1970 and was held another 10 times in Rochester. Bruce Mortenson entered the Rochester racing scene by winning in a time of 1:24:30. A Minnesota AAU 30K Road Race Championship in September and the 2nd Annual Apache 6 Mile rounded out the Rochester road racing scene in 1970.

Bruce Mortenson started the All Comers Meets in 1971 from a similar event during his running days in Oregon. The All Comers Meets at Soldiers Field are the longest running event of the Track Club having been put on for 15 consecutive years. The meets were named the Hal Martin All Comers Meets in 1981 as a memorial to Hal



Martin, an RTC'er who died of a heart attack. The Rochester Track Club also sponsored All Comers Meets several years in Byron and Eyota.

A 3 mile All Comer Cross Country Event was held at Eastwood on November 6, 1971 with a windchill of minus 20 degrees. The traditional Polar Bear Run had its start on December 31, 1971 (Actually, the cross-country run was probably a polar bear event). This popular event, a fun run with eats, drinks, and fun afterwards, is the second longest running event of the Track Club with 15 annual runs including 1986.

The newsletter obtained a new name in 1972 with the introduction of the "Second Wind" in Spring, 1972. In 1972, Bruce Mortenson, the RTC President, was the first American to finish in the Boston Marathon with a time of 2:19:59 and placing 6th overall. And would you believe it, a 24-hour relay was held on Soldiers Field in July 28. 3 ten-man teams, 2 nine-man teams, and 1 six-man team ran for 24 hours. The 4-mile Goose Chase debuting on September 17th started the long history of races around Silver Lake.

The 3rd Annual Polar Bear Run was held with runners congregating around the Pierson (1973 President) residence for eats afterwards. The early Polar Bear Runs ended up at the homes of RTC members. As the track club became larger, the Polar Bear Runs were held at Mayo and most recently, the YMCA. The All Comers meets continued to be popular with 1000 people showing up for the Southeastern Minnesota night. The National Masters AAU 15K race was held in Rochester on June 10, 1973 with Hal Higdon winning in 52:49. 31 Masters from around the country participated with temps in the mid 90's (4 did not finish the race). The first Corncob 9 was held on July 15, 1973 with 69 runners finishing.

In 1974, the Rochester Track Club went to the State AAU Track Meet in Mankato and won the overall team title.

1975 was a banner year for the All Comers Meets with 2100 participating in Rochester, 535 in Byron, and 240 in Eyota. A great deal of participation occurred in track and field with RTC members going to 7 different events throughout the area. Another cross-country open meet was held at Eastwood on a 5 Mile course on November 2nd.

The first Douglas Trail Race took place in 1976 with Doug Peterson finishing ahead of 37 runners in 58:11. The Douglas Trail Race had 141 participants in 1979, its largest field.



In 1978, the first large corporate sponsors for local road races emerged with Dayton's/Nike involved with the 25K road race and the First National Bank with a 10K run. Through Dayton's sponsorship, T-shirts were made available to runners for the first time in Rochester. Rochester's first 10K run was held on October 1, 1978 with 201 runners finishing the race. Steve Reynolds came in first with a time of 30:15. In addition, 165 runners participated in the 2-mile run. At that time, it was the largest run put on by the RTC since it started in 1969.

Both Mayo and John Marshall had all weather tracks by 1979 with the Rochester Track Club being instrumental in pushing for funds for these tracks since 1976. John Brunette began organizing a drive for all-weather tracks in 1976. Initial talks started with the Park Board regarding Soldiers Field but led to the school board for tracks at the high schools. The proceeds (about \$800) from the First Bank Run in 1978 were donated to the school board for use in the all-weather tracks.

The first annual banquet was held on February 2, 1980 at the Carleton with Paul Raether the guest speaker. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Dwight Pierson Award for distinguished service to the Rochester Track Club and running community. Appropriately, Dwight Pierson was the first recipient. The Outstanding Service Awards were also presented for the first time with John Brunette and Dennis Johnson being the recipients. Jay Lucas represented the interests of local running by serving as a board member of the Minnesota Distance Running Association in 1980.

The first Rochester Women's Race was held in 1980 with DeeAnn Daugherty cruising around Silver Lake in first place. The newsletter was published for the first time with the help of a commercial printer in February, 1980 under the guise of RTC News. Six issues were sent out in 1980 with the aim of making the newsletter as regular as possible. The Christmas Carol Run made its debut with a long run of over 20 miles and only Jingle Bells being sung. This run was also repeated in 1981.

The first elementary school track meet was held in 1980 with 600 children from the local area participating. The first RTC picnic was held at the Silver Lake Park East Pavilion on July 12, 1980 following the Goose Chase. The Pumpkin 6 miler replaced the Apache 6 in 1980 ending the reign of the RTC's first road race. On November 8, the Bear Creek Handicap 7 made its debut on the Rochester road racing schedule. The RTC hosted a very successful Region 7 Junior Olympics Cross Country Championship on November 16th, 1980. With the running boom in full swing, the Rochester Track Club membership reached 150 by the end of 1980.



The Rochester Track Club Board attained its present size of 11 members in 1981 when Bruce Mortenson led the RTC. The Annual Picnic moved to Oxbow this year with the All Comers Meets in 1981 also being held in Bryon and Rochester. The first Godfathers 10K was held in the Quarry Hill Park area with Lloyd Ness winning in 32:18.

The Frozen Goose Relay, a celebration of winter sports in Minnesota, was first held in January, 1982. The Rochester 20K made its debut as the first race of the Rochester Track Club racing season in April, 1982. The RTC held its first survey of members in 1982 with 44 members providing some input to the club's board. This survey was helpful in finding out what the members want and was repeated in 1985. 1982 also brought the Hot Fudge Sunday Race to the Rochester scene.

The 1983 Annual Banquet had a special videotape of several 1982 races from Bob Ivnik's KSBI news team which included John Stewart (hence, KSBI). The Basic Four Plus, the Lionhearted Seven, and the Stride for Fitness were run for the first time in 1983. Olmsted Community Hospital became a major supporter of the Rochester Track Club with the Stride for Fitness race.

In 1983, the year of Rochester's 125th Anniversary, the First Bank of Rochester helped cosponsor Rochester's First Run. The First Bank essentially paid for all expenses of the races and donated the entry fees to the track club. The track club used the fees to purchase the Chronomix Display Clock present at all of our races. In addition, this clock has been used at several of the local high school cross country meets. In 1984, with First Bank's help, the track club was able to purchase the Chronomix Printer Timer to help record results of races. Much thanks is due to First Bank for their contributions of over \$3000. Rochester's First Run in 1983 was a very competitive race with Jim Smith, an IBM summer employee from Stanford, finishing first after 4 miles in 19:11 ahead of 306 runners.

The Rochester Grand Prix made its debut in 1984 with nine races in the series. The sponsorship of the series by Dr. Steve Fetzer of the Northgate Chiropractic Office enabled the RTC to provide some awards for the overall winners. The Grand Prix continued with changes in 1985 and 1986. In 1984, the Rochester Track Club put out the Rochester Area Road Race Schedule in a calendar/poster format for the first time. With the generous support of sponsors, this calendar has now been around for 3 years.

The Bridgeman's Sundae Run made its debut on July 15 with an excellent turnout of



well over 200 runners. With this race, Bridgeman's became a major supporter of the Rochester Track Club. Serious work was put into determining the chances Rochester had in putting on the 1988 Women's Olympic Marathon Trials. After many meetings and contacts by Joe Roque, it was decided the chances were not great and the excellent idea was shelved. The Hardee's Halloween Race was held at the end of October with some interesting ghosts and goblins participating. It was encouraging at the end of 1984 to see 80 people participate in the RTC board elections. This carried on to the 1985 Annual Banquet held at the Holiday Inn South in which 60 people enjoyed an evening of fun.

The President's Award made its appearance at the 1985 Rochester Track Club Annual Banquet. To help promote the Grand Prix Series, a finish line banner was made up to be used at the Grand Prix races. After 16 years of dues set at \$4.00, the single membership dues were raised to \$6.00. The Rochester Track Club acquired a new logo in 1985 designed by Jeanne Block. Rochester's first half-marathon was held on August 24. Roger Spee brought on the revival of a cross country race at the Eastwood Golf Course by organizing a race on September 13 following the Mayo Invitational Cross-Country Meet. The RTC also helped out at the Region 1A Cross Country Meet held at the Northern Hills Golf Course. The first biathlon in Rochester was held in October 1985 with sponsorship by Bicycle Sports and the Rochester Track Club.

Jay Lucas has seen the Rochester Track Club go through three phases since its inception in 1969. The club was small and school dominated. The presence of track coaches, an accomplished runner such as Bruce Mortenson, and enthusiastic adult males who took on running (Ken Miller) provided the club validity, knowledge, and continuity. The Rochester Track Club's second stage was a period of transition in which schools and coaches phased out of the club and adult male runners became accomplished performers. The club slowly grew to a membership of around 50. In the late 70's with the increased interest throughout the country in running, the third stage of the track club began. Membership increased to over 200 members, the number of women runners increase, and numerous running, social, and educational events emerged. Now that the bulk of the membership growth has occurred, the Rochester Track Club can settle in to appreciate who we are, what are strengths are, and remembering our roots.

As you can tell from the many activities the Rochester Track Club has put on, the club has more than survived as an organization during the past 17 years. It started out when running was something strange in which only a few people participated. It grew through the boom years of running in the mid - late 1970's and has remained



a top notch, stable organization during the past few years with over 250 members. Many people have contributed countless hours in keeping the RTC alive. RTC depends on the willingness of its members to participate in its activities either by running or working and also supporting the sponsors of various RTC events. Many members have shown a willingness to support the track club through its many years - Keep up the good work and the Rochester Track Club will be around for many years.

In a short article like this, it is hard to mention all the people who have contributed so much to the development of the Rochester Track Club. The award winners, presidents, and board members have been mentioned but this is not to say that others don't deserve any recognition. This article is not meant to be the final authority on the history of the track club or to recognize everyone who has contributed so much to the RTC. Hopefully, these few paragraphs have given you a flavor of where the RTC has been. We are sorry if some names that should have been mentioned have been left out.