

30 Years of Running!

LMJS: Still Running After All These Years

By Bob Jolly and Len Goldman*

*(Note: An earlier version of this article first appeared 5 years ago on the occasion of the club's 25th anniversary. It has been updated for our 30 year celebration.)

What were you doing in 1976 when the idea for LMJS was hatched? This list of other notable events may help you remember. On July 4th, the US celebrated its Bicentennial, marking the 200th anniversary of our independence. On November 6th, Gerald Ford was defeated by Jimmy Carter for the presidency. In 1976, NASA announced the landing of the unmanned Viking II on Mars and the Apple I desktop computer was introduced by Stephen Wozniak and Steven Jobs. And in California, Christo, the artist, installed his "Running Fence", a 24-mile curtain of fabric across Sonoma County to the ocean. In the Olympics in Montreal, Frank Shorter placed second in the men's marathon with a time of 2:10:45.8; the first Olympic women's marathon took place eight years later in Los Angeles. Joan Benoit won with a time of 2:24:52.

Founding LMJS

In the middle of the 1970's running was becoming very popular as a sport in the U.S. thanks to Jim Fixx, Frank Shorter, Bill Rodgers and a host of others. John Notch and other founders of our club would run in the East Bay or drive to San Francisco and run with the Dolphin South End (DSE) club. Wanting to avoid that drive and feeling the need to become associated with a formally organized group, they considered combining forces with the Eastbay Roadrunners, then sponsors of the Woodminster Run. When that didn't work out, John telephoned some running friends and suggested that they form a new Oakland club. Officially the club was established on July 18, 1977, its first Fourth Sunday Run was in July 24 of that year, and the first newsletter, "Web-Feet News" was issued in September 1977. From this small, humble beginning, Lake Merritt Joggers and Striders running club emerged and would in several years be almost 300 members strong.

The Fourth Sunday Runs

The first organized event of the fledgling club took place on the 4th Sunday of July 1977; the fee collected by the club from runners who showed up at the Lake was fifty cents. The runs have continued since, every year, every 4th Sunday, whatever the weather. These low-key, low-cost runs in the pleasant setting of Lake Merritt are a way to keep active runners involved and drawing new members. "Run for fun" is the main message, but runners who are serious about increasing their speed and distance and in having it recorded officially are also attracted. The venue for our races in the beginning was the "Old Boathouse" at the Northwest end of the Lake and we remained there until the end of 2005, when the City of Oakland started a remodel project to return the building to its former glory. Consequently, in January 2006, LMJS moved to a new location at Lake Merritt, the Sailboat House on Bellevue Ave. LMJS has put on over 350 Fourth Sunday runs since that very first one, and the combined participation, numbers well over 35,000 runners and walkers. Early on the club also established several "theme" races as part of the Fourth Sunday structure. The first theme race, and it still survives to this day is the "Couples Relay" held every February and in 2008 it celebrates its 30th anniversary. Also, a race many club old-timers will remember was the "Blind Duck Relays", where the three person team members were drawn at random out of a hat and each person ran one lap around the Lake. When this race ceased its existence, it was replaced by the "Time Is On Your Side" race and since its beginning, 15 years ago, Pam Rohrich and Karl Gerdes have race directed it, held usually in July of every year.

Berkeley to Moraga Race and Its Successor, Tilden Tough Ten

One of the club's early races not based at the Lake was the "Berkeley to Moraga Race." This point-to-point half marathon race started near the Claremont Hotel and finished at St. Mary's College in Moraga. The route took runners up Tunnel Road and over to Skyline Blvd. heading South. Once it reached the intersection of Skyline Blvd. and Pinehurst Rd., the runners made a sharp left and plummeted down Pinehurst Rd. to the small unincorporated village of Canyon. From there the race continued on Canyon Rd. through the outskirts of the town of Moraga, making a right turn onto St. Mary's Rd. and then finishing at St. Mary's College. In those days, races were conducted without permits, insurance or traffic controls and this was often the norm for small events. With changing times and considering this was an open race with no safety controls per se in place, the Board decided the race could not continue. Consequently, Ernie Isaacs, long time club member and who race directed the Berkeley to Moraga Race in its final years, suggested doing a race at Inspiration Pt., along Nimitz Way and then 1 mile out and back on the Mizou Trail. It would be a race on a closed course without any cars as a hazard. Thus the Tilden Tough Ten was born and this year celebrates its 20th anniversary.

Women Runners

Ruth Anderson was one of the original members of LMJS. According to her, another important aspect of LMJS has always been the encouragement given to women runners. Claudia Notch was part of a women's running group in 1976; it was called FORE (Females Organized Running Event). Although this was a short-lived group, it was significant in bringing enthusiastic women into the leadership of our club. This tradition has continued over the years, and several LMJS presidents have been women, Valerie Doyle, Elf Blair, and Ruth Grimes; and women have always been part of the Board, helping to guide the club. Our Couples Relay also gives women their just recognition, with the tradition of the first lap of the relay being run by women only. This year's race was also the first 2007 race in the Women's Distance Festival sponsored by the RRCA and Skirt Sports.

Club Traditions: The Tahoe Relays, Woodminster Run, Christmas Relays

One of the club traditions from the beginning, since 1977, has been participation in the Tahoe Relays every June. Though not started by our club, this event has been one of our annual highlights, as club members and their families make the trek to South Lake Tahoe for a weekend of running and camaraderie. Our teams usually come back with "hardware" to show for their efforts and in fact our Women's 60's team lead by running legend Ruth Anderson are the course record holders for their age group.

Another tradition, that apparently even pre-dates the founding of the club, was the "Woodminster Run." This informal Tuesday evening gathering started in April and went until October, coincident with the time changes that used to occur during those months. Runners would meet for a trail run lasting anywhere from 4 to 8 miles or more and then relax around a barbeque dinner and share running stories of their accomplishments. For many years, John and Ruth Anderson were stalwarts of organizing this gathering of runners. However, once the Anderson's moved to Oregon and as participation continued to decline this tradition came to an end, but was recently, replaced with a new club activity, the 2nd Saturday run. Every month on the 2nd Saturday of the month, club members and others gather for a run at popular location, it changes every month, and the run is followed by coffee and a bite to eat. Usually 12 to 20 runners meet for this event and it has proven to be a popular activity.

Finally, another tradition, starting 20 or so years ago, the club traditionally fields teams, sometime competitive, often not, for the annual Christmas Relays at Lake Merced. The important thing is gathering together for this end-of-year event and celebrating through running the holiday season. Everyone brings goodies to share and after running we gather at the club rally point and imbibe in holiday treats.

The Split: The East Bay Striders

In 1983, a group of runners split off from LMJS and formed a new club, the East Bay Striders now called the Pacific Striders (www.pacificstriders.org/). Some of the names of that group are Dan

Williams, Thom Trimble, and John Monteverdi. Here's what former LMJS President Dave Reichel said: "The runners who started the East Bay Striders were competitive and wanted to compete against the other top club teams in the area. At that time, the LMJS focus was on running for fun and we were not interested in becoming a racing club like the Aggies, but rather embraced runners of all abilities." Actually, LMJS, with a brief period in early eighties the exception, was never competitively oriented. Many members ran for other clubs when competing (and listing their affiliation) but enjoyed the social side of LMJS, so they were active in two or more clubs. The hotshot women ran for Impala or NorCal Seniors and ultra-runners who wanted to go farther, joined Bay Area Ultra Runners. Today, all clubs in the East Bay have recognized the benefits of "teaming" together for their mutual benefit and the "Triple Crown Challenge" is the prime example, but we also have had combined potlucks and share other activities.

The Logo

John Anderson, drew the first one, which was one duck, not the three you see now. That drawing appeared on the first newsletter, published in September 1977. Shortly thereafter, Pat Jennings (an early club member) came up with the three running duck design and it has been our logo ever since. It first appeared in the newsletter published, March 1978 and has adorned our apparel, and club publications ever since. Over the years, the club logo has been featured on our t-shirts, sweatshirts, singlets, socks, windshirts and even coffee mugs. It seems to have withstood the test of time and symbolizes our current tagline "A Community of Runners."

Why We Have Lasted So Long

Whereas many other running clubs in the East Bay have come and gone over the years, LMJS remains strong and active. Jack Zakarian and many other people in the organization feel that our 4th Sunday runs are the main reason for its success. The ceremony of giving out ribbons to those who win and place in their age category is an important way to encourage neophyte runners. And serious runners like having their time recorded on a measured course. Probably another reason for our long success is the encouragement from the beginning of women runners and women comprise about 50% of our club membership. Our variety and scope of activities that are social in nature including the potlucks, 2nd Saturday runs, informal training groups, etc. that keep us all bonded together also account for our longevity. The recent addition of "Kid's Races" has also proven to be a popular activity where parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles can watch the youngsters "spread their wings" and run in an organized race for the first time. Taken in their totality, all these activities combine to make LMJS unique and a friendly, welcome place for runners.

Club Leadership

As with any volunteer organization, having solid, strong leadership is an important key to success. Over the years, LMJS has been fortunate to have dedicated, hardworking race volunteers and Board members. Without them, our Club would not have lasted 30 years and would be just a distant memory, forgotten by most runners. Instead, LMJS today stands as one of the most recognizable of Bay Area running clubs and we are as vibrant and active now as we were at the Club's founding. While space here does not permit us to name the hundreds of volunteers and Board members who have served the Club over the years, we have taken the liberty to name the Club Presidents who have guided us through the years. They are:

September 1977 to June 1983	John Notch
July 1983 to June 1984	Valerie Doyle and John Notch (Co-Presidents)
July 1984 to June 1990	Elf Blair
July 1990 to June 1991	Jack Zakarian
July 1990 to June 1994	Ruth Grimes and Roger Sharpe (Co-Presidents)
July 1994 to June 1998	Dave Reichel
July 1998 to present	Len Goldman

Names from the Past

Many members of old are still in the club, and a select few have been dues paying members every year since the start, according to records they are Ruth, John, & Rachel Anderson, John Notch, and Jack Zakarian. In addition, others have been members continuously almost from the beginning and this list includes Mike & Linda Nelson, Jane Colman, Ted Vincent, Doerte Murray, Guillermo Barron, Roland Carrothers, Richard & Laury Fisher, Ernie Isaacs, Keith McConnell, Ruth Grimes and Roger Sharpe. Finally, there are those that joined early on and have been club members for many year including Dick Miller, Gordon Gilmonth, Bill Jenney, Hilary Naylor, Pam Rohrich, Karl Gerdes, Don Hildebrand, Jim Grodnik, Mary Hauck, and Will Uher. Our first club roster was published in 1980. Our apologies if we overlooked anyone, please call the hotline and let us know if we did and we will recognize you in the next newsletter.

LMJS in the Community

LMJS is a community resource and part of the fabric which makes Oakland so unique compared to other cities. The City of Oakland Parks and Recreation Department recognizes our importance in providing a healthy exercise option to its citizens and has supported us in our efforts. In return, we are involved in contributing to the greater good and are actively involved in giving back to both running in general and the community. Some recent examples are:

- Actively supported with volunteers, a cash donation, and free entry into our races, an Oakland based marathon training program for at-risk high school aged youths called "Students Run Oakland."
- Sponsored the TACLE program (Technology and Augmentative Communication for Learning Enhancement) at Redwood Heights Elementary School in Oakland by designating them as the non-profit beneficiary of our 2005 "Couples Relay" race. Donations from runners and friends in the community raised \$1,200 for this program as a result of our sponsorship.
- For past two years, we have partnered with "Girls on the Run," an after-school program for girls ages 8 to 13 with a presence in several Oakland schools, and helped them raise almost \$3,000 through race fee proceeds and donations from runners.
- For the past two years, the beneficiary of our Couples Relay race has been the Hershey Track and Field Program-Oakland Chapter and we have raised almost \$500 on their behalf. In addition, LMJS has provided volunteers for their annual track meet.
- Club members and LMJS contributed a combined \$1,500 to the Road Runners Club of America (RRCA) for the Hurricane Katrina relief effort to help runners in the New Orleans area who suffered losses due to this disaster.
- Contributed over \$1,000 to the East Bay Regional Park Foundation to help support the efforts of the East Bay Regional Park District.
- Partnered with two other local running clubs in creating the "East Bay Triple Crown Trail Championship Series" in which almost 1,000 runners have participated in annually since 2001.
- Created in May 2006, "Kid's Races" as part of our Fourth Sunday races. This race is offered every month and is for kids 10 and under, its purpose is to introduce them to running. Every kid gets a medal, a snack, and runs a short distance in the parking lot where our race registration takes place. We have averaged 12 children per race since we started this program and it is free.

National Recognition for LMJS

LMJS has been a member of the Road Runners Club of America (RRCA) for the past 8 years. The RRCA is an non-profit organization representing the interests of running clubs and among other things provides race liability insurance, policy guides and educational information. The RRCA consists of over 700 running clubs throughout the U.S. representing about 150,000

runners. Every year at its national convention it honors those clubs and individuals for their accomplishments. This year is the RRCA's 50th annual convention and of the awards in 16 different categories, LMJS is receiving two of these awards, and we are the only club to receive more than one award. Our club was selected as the "top" small club website and Len Goldman will be honored as the outstanding club president. This is the third national award from the RRCA that Len has won. In 2001, he won the "Children's Development Award" for his work with "Students Run Oakland" and in 2004 he was selected as the male master "Runner of the Year."

The Future?

What does the future hold for LMJS? If the past is any sort of guide, and hopefully it is, LMJS should continue to be a beacon for runners and a resource for them. There will be challenges, as there have been before, but the future looks bright, especially if in fact we are in the midst of another running boom. However, the club will have to adapt to the times, and be flexible to the needs of its members and runners. LMJS will continue to rely on its members for support and input regarding its direction, for without them we would cease to exist. We have no doubt that LMJS will continue to celebrate landmark anniversaries, and that all runners who enjoy the camaraderie of our sport, will seek us out and join us for the myriad of activities that the club offers.