

On the Run
By Mark Lorenzoni

The Dogwood Track Classic, the oldest and largest high school track meet in Virginia, celebrated its 62nd anniversary with a wonderful two day event a few weekends ago, highlighted by the stellar performances of some of the best track and field athletes in the mid-Atlantic. Held at UVa's Lannigan Field, this year's edition featured over 2500 athletes from 150 schools, making it one of the largest and most competitive on the east coast.

The event continues to be heralded as one of the best organized track meets in the country, as this army of athletes and the throngs of spectators in the packed stands are treated to a well oiled, high octane event. Yet, despite the shining quality of organization, one of the most unique and compelling aspects of this iconic event, one that very much has to do with its gold standard reputation, often goes unrecognized.

The first distinct aspect of this special event is that it's co-organized by our four local public high schools. Yes, traditional cross-town athletic rivals Albemarle, Charlottesville, Monticello and Western Albemarle all come together, with their coaches, parents and athletes, to help run the show side-by-side in unison, working the front gate, the concessions, the t-shirts sales, clerking, officiating the events and cleaning up well into the late hours of the night. If there ever was a shining example of "rivals under the same flag" this sure tops it!

To add to the luster of this unique four-school partnership, this army of helpers are all doing this on a purely volunteer basis. Literally hundreds of folks doing this out of the love of the sport and to help raise valuable funds for their track and field programs.

And to top off the uniqueness of the event, the massive meet is co-directed by former Western Albemarle teammates Cass Girvin, Charlie Hurt and Alec Lorenzoni, who put in countless hours planning out every detail of this spectacular event. Over the last fifteen years, these longtime friends have made it their personal mission to carry on the longtime legacy of this iconic event in making it the best and most welcoming track and field meet in Virginia.

Many would argue that the driving force behind the event's stellar reputation as one of the best organized track meets in the country has to do with the strength of this unique four school partnership and the wealth of experience on the part of the three hardworking Meet Directors. So, a huge community tip of the cap to all who helped make this year's Dogwood another huge success and enhanced the legacy of this special partnership!

-And here's just a small sampling of some of the impressive performances turned in by our local athletes at Dogwood: Samantha Nitzsche (William Monroe), who ran a mighty 1600 (4:50) and 3200 (10:22) double; Jon Nathan Lawrence (Covenant) with an equally magnificent double in the 1600 (4:07) and 800 (1:55); CHS's Sprint Medley Relay team of Aleah Harris, Makiyah Brown and the Pierce sisters (Juliana and Elaina), who broke the meet record with a rocket fast 4 flat; Garrett Jordan (Fluvanna) who won both the 200 (21.22) and 400 (47.15), arguably Meet

MVP resume builders; Emerson Ritter (WAHS), who blazed to a 4:52 school record in the 1600 and Evans Roberts (Madison), who set new school records in the 1600 (4:17) and 3200 (9:17)!

-And speaking of co-directing successes, the Charlottesville Track Club Board hit a huge home run when they decided this year to have four folks take on the helm of co-organizing Central Virginia's oldest and largest footrace. Elaine Cheng, Katie Harrison, Nicoiel Hawker and Stew Pollock did a dandy of a job directing the Charlottesville 10 Miler, as they hosted close to 3000 participants and raised over \$100,000 for a variety of local causes. Local Runners absolutely dominated in this regionally competitive field, as they took home blue ribbons in all but four of the thirty one age categories, starting with Dean Yost, who led the charge, as he won his third title in the past four years with a 50:10 clocking and Jenna Magness, who blazed to a 57:45 win in the stellar women's field! Kristi Flaherty, Emma Schmitz, Laura Kiley, Krista Bates, Ann Mazur, Courtney Smith, Gaby Gorman, Kendall Tata, Ellen Brock, Jolene Bodily, T. Lund, Creighton Doherty, Bryce Davis, Matthew Peart, Ned Fischer, Jason Tiezzi, Jason Lehmann, Guian McKee, Mark Drummond, Hernan Garbini, Russ Sawyer, Mark Ortola and Mike Stone all had gold medal age group performances in their hometown race!

-Several of our local marathoners conquered the legendary hills of the Boston Marathon in April, with many scoring p.r. performances at this iconic international race. Charlie Magee, Beth Cox, Kate Kaminski, Anne Etten, Leslie Lepage, Maria Badaracco, Binyong Liang, Jeanine Wolanski, Matt Barresi, Kristen Heinan, Alex Monson, Isaiah King and Tommy Shannon were among the fifty area athletes who had successful finishes at the "granddaddy of them all". But perhaps the most impressive stories of the day were turned in by Jim Ryan, Matthew Jull and Joan Bienvenue. Ryan, UVa's 9th President, finished his 15th straight Patriots Day event with a sparkling 3:33, well ahead of the time standard he needed to qualify for his 16th...while Jull, a fifty five year old UVa professor clocked an amazing 2:47 (6:25/mile) to finish first American in his age group and Bienvenue completed her 13th Boston and 50th marathon total!

-And speaking of long distance running, are you looking to find local folks to train with for a fall marathon or half marathon in a professionally coached program? The Charlottesville Track Club is hosting their 30th annual Marathon/Half Marathon Training Program, where runners of all abilities run together in pace groups while prepping for a fall long distance event of their choice. Go to the CTC's website to sign up but hurry, as the program has almost reached its 175 participant limit.

-And if you're looking to improve your speed there's a community group that meets early every Wednesday morning to workout together. Upwards of 100 folks regularly show up and are separated into smaller groups based on paces. It's free and all are welcome to join...the only requirement is that you must have a recent long run of at least 5-6 miles under your belt. Text me at 434-962-1694 if you're interested.

-The Charlottesville Track Club will once again be hosting their immensely popular community All-Comers Track Meets this summer. The meets, which are held at CHS's beautiful Curtis Elder

venue, are free and open to all ages, including kids as young as two. The track meets, which feature events ranging from 100-1600 meters, will be held every Tuesday in July at 6:30pm.

-Monticello's popular Montalto Challenge is back...but with a twist! This time around, the enthralling mountain climb to one of the magnificent finish line views in the country, will, instead of going the normal 5K distance, only be covering 1.776 miles, in honor of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Race date is June 28th. Go to Monticello's website to sign up but hurry, as the field is limited and is filling up quickly!

Also in the starting blocks...

-June 6- 4 Our Freedom 5K at Panorama Farms

-June 7 Bruce Barnes Mile at Greenwood

-June 9 O-Hilly Trail 5K

-July 4 Kiwanis Independence Day 5K in Hollymead

Call 434/293-3367 for more information on these and other upcoming community events.

Mark Lorenzoni has been directing community footraces and coaching local runners on a volunteer basis for over 45 years. He can be reached by texting him at 434/962-1694.