

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Legends both new and familiar highlight 27th Soulstice

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
Special to the Daily Sun

Back in 2001, I was one of 34 runners participating in Bill Ring’s second annual Soulstice Mountain Trail Run. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would spend the next quarter century voluntarily directing it.

At the 2001 postrace party, a handful of us thought that starting a Saturday running group email list might help promote the race. When the Northern Arizona Trail Running Association (NATRA) officially began organizing Soulstice in 2002, participation skyrocketed to 160. The following year, the race filled, kick-starting Soulstice’s streak of 24 consecutive sell-outs, including during our pandemic-forced virtual year.

Over the past 25 years, 150 people have become legacy runners by completing Soulstice at least seven times. The most legendary legacy runners of them all, Howard Brown and Daniel Maestas, have finished every race. To celebrate his 25th Soulstice run, Maestas tattooed his left calf with the NATRA logo in front of the San Francisco Peaks.

This year, notably, more than half of the entrants were newcomers to the race, and I was happy to see that they completely embraced the magic and energy of our remarkable running community. Dozens of them were eager to share



Olivia, her mom Stephanie Bridegam and Luke5Adventures volunteers gather for the Soulstice postrace party.



Luke5Adventures volunteer Sherpas Carry Olivia in “Rosie.”

with me how Soulstice was either their first trail race or their first 30K.

As I reported in an article last month, we were thrilled to partner with Luke5Adventures Flagstaff (L5A) and support 11-year-

old Olivia Bridegam’s first 10K. Wheelchair-bound with cerebral palsy, Olivia is blind and does not speak. L5A Executive Director Maeona Moseley told me she expected her volunteer Sherpas to carry Olivia

in their adaptive chariot, named “Rosie,” for two and a half hours. The team shattered expectations and nearly broke two hours, finishing in a remarkable 2:02:21. Her Sherpa volunteers reported to me that Olivia had a blast,

smiling and making her happy cooing sounds the entire time.

With our second annual 30K growing by more than 60%, grand masters runner Ted MacMahon, at 60 years young, won the overall title in 2:18:09, besting Roy Quinn’s 2:20:15. On the women’s side, Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon champ Mia Hazle’s 2:28:03 narrowly bested Alexis Aguiar’s 2:28:22.

When our 30K favorites Rachel Smith (running for two) and Ruairi Moynihan (of Trail Gangstaz) dropped down to the 18K, I basically knew the outcome of our middle-distance race. Rachel and company ran 1:22:53, finishing ahead of annual masters champ Valerie

Cross’s 1:25:40. Ruairi cruised in at 1:14:00 ahead of masters champ Kevin McClintock’s 1:26:38.

In the 10K, Soulstice postrace party cohost Selena Langner ran a speedy 47:47, using her home-field advantage to best men’s winner David Edge, who ran 48:45.

Most importantly, thanks to our dozens of sponsors and volunteers, the race raised over \$13,000 for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff youth mentoring programs.

Registration for next year’s Oct. 9 Soulstice opens on New Year’s Eve, with early-bird specials during the first week of 2027. The race will no doubt sell out far faster than this year (Aug. 1), so don’t procrastinate too long about joining in on next year’s fun!

NEIL WEINTRAUB IS THE COFOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE NORTHERN ARIZONA TRAIL RUNNERS ASSOCIATION, LLC, AND HAS SERVED AS THE VOLUNTEER RACE DIRECTOR FOR THE SOULSTICE MOUNTAIN TRAIL RUN AND THE BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF FLAGSTAFF HALF MARATHON FOR 25 YEARS. HE WISHES TO THANK HIS RACE SPONSORS AND FRIENDS, WHO ARE ALWAYS FIRST TO LEND A HAND WHEN HE NEEDS ONE.

RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM TO TWO WONDERFUL GIRLS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER, AND FEELS LUCKY TO CALL FLAGSTAFF “HOME.” SHE IS ALSO THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN AND WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO IT BY SENDING YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY TO HER AT RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM.

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