

Statue of Liberty, bobcats and minions highlight half-marathon

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
Special to the Daily Sun

Congratulations to the more than 400 runners, walkers and kids who participated in the 49th annual Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff (BBBSF) Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon and 5K presented by Kinney and volunteers from Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association (NATRA) and the BBBSF board of directors.

With temperatures well above normal, and the often monsoon-drenched course mostly parched, a record 85 runners and walkers honored the memory of Flagstaff's walking guru Jack Welch by taking advantage of the early, noncompetitive start. Fifteen years ago Jack asked me if his "J-Walkers" group could participate to support the race, and I said, "Sure!"

After a little birdie told me his wife was running in her 100th half-marathon, the early starters gave Michelle Brooks a heart-warming round of

applause.

The Kids Dash celebrated the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence when the Statue of Liberty (Mo Cooney) led 40 kids and parents on the first quarter mile of the race and back.

In the competitive half-marathon, Steven Cornelius from Valparaiso, Florida, who registered for the race at the last second, surprised everyone with his 1:23:42, which was good enough to hold off last year's men's winner, Dan Kuch, by about one minute. As often happens at the BBBSF half, a masters runner (40-59) won the men's race and 52-year-old Kuch took home the masters title.

With Olympian Rachel Smith missing one of her favorite races, it left the door open for Mia Hazle to take top honors in 1:35:24, ahead of masters winner Valerie Cross, who ran a 1:38:51.

Not to be outdone, Marvin Toya won the

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COURTESY

Runners take off near the the start line of the 49th annual Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon and 5K.

MARATHON

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grand masters (60 and older) in 2:04:06, while Cyndy Lakowski won the women's grand masters in 2:26:14, her second in a row!

Two of the biggest surprises for half-marathon runners occurred around the infamous 8-mile aid station. Staffed

year after year by longtime BBBSF board members Dr. Rich Haag and Dave Klensin, runners who rehydrated there voted by dropping their cups into the bins of their favorite yellow minion (Haag) or purple one (Klensin). Last I heard, one of the minions demanded a recount.

As the election drama unfolded,

course crew volunteer Brian Beamer spotted a bobcat casting a curious eye on the runners and quizzically listening to the annual bickering between Dave and Rich over the naming rights of their aid station: "Haag's Hideaway" or "Klensin's Korner."

In the 5K, Mark Loeffler won the race in 18:59, with Alexandra Dyer winning

the women's in 21:59. Megan Mahoney won the 5K masters division in 22:51, while Daniel Phillips won the men's side in 23:29.

Most notably, Dr. David Hockman, who turns 94 at the end of the month, once again headlined the 5K, completing it in 58:12!

While the Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon and 5K isn't

quite as old as Dr. Hockman, be sure to mark your calendars for Aug. 14 of next year, when Flagstaff's oldest race turns 50!

NEIL WEINTRAUB IS THE COFOUNDER OF NORTHERN ARIZONA TRAIL RUNNERS ASSOCIATION (NATRA) AND ALSO VOLUNTARILY DIRECTS THE BBBSF HALF MARATHON/5K AND THE OCT. 10 SOULSTICE MOUNTAIN TRAIL RUN. WHILE

SOULSTICE IS SOLD OUT, YOU CAN REGISTER FOR ITS WAITING LIST BY SEARCHING FOR THE RACE ON RUNSIGNUP. 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 RACHSCHNEIDT8@GMAIL.COM.