



A Turkey Trot to Remember

They came to SouthWood in record numbers last Thursday.

When you show up for a 3:30 a.m. meeting with Bill Lott at 3:28 a.m., you are likely at least 15 minutes late. “I might as well get up, I could not sleep anyway,” Bill tried to explain upon my arrival. We both knew at that point we were in for something special as registrations were strong and the weather was going to be perfect.

2016 has been a tough year in general. It seems to be a record year for losing family and friends. Our world is changing fast and keeping up only gets harder. Many of the foundations we have relied on for so long have been cracked right down the center by the fast-paced change. Thanksgiving remains a day we try step out of the express lane and take a deep breath.

Starting the Saturday before the Turkey Trot Festival and not ending until at least two days after Thanksgiving, Peg Griffin probably averages 10 hours a day managing the race entry data, doing her best to assure that everyone crossing the finish line will get an accurate time. Bill Hillison is meticulous in his planning to make sure the timing system will perform the way it is supposed to, including this year’s new development – posting times live on a web page within a minute of a runner’s crossing the finish line.

The list of people who gave so much of themselves to make this event a success is very long. I am confident there was a record number of volunteer hours worked this year. And yet, there will always be things not covered the way we wish they had been. For example, having 30-35 coolers for water and Gatorade and a water

source to fill those coolers are not of much value on race day morning if there is not a hose to get the water from the faucet to the coolers. It was not the first time I have neglected to put a hose in my car or make certain that someone had been assigned that duty for race morning. You would think the angst that roils in my brain while watching the time digits on the clock roll by as the coolers sit empty would assure I never repeated that mistake.

But we found a hose and the coolers were filled and taken out to the course. Twelve or thirteen coolers with water and Gatorade found their way to the first water stop near the 2-mile mark where Rayanne Mitchell and Lincoln High school students prepared for the onslaught of runners. The TCC African Drummers were at their usual spot just before the water stop inspiring runners with their music to move – either by running or dancing. Thousands of cups filled and ready to go to the aid of thirsty runners were, in fact, grabbed, emptied and crushed before being tossed to the ground for race volunteers to retrieve.

For the people like Dave Watson and Michael Savage, the job of making sure volunteers went where they were assigned and knew what they need to know was most stressful. Despite all the chaos, the finish line remains one of my favorite places in the world to be – especially working in the Turkey Trot finish area from about 35 minutes through about 57 minutes as the waves of humanity make the turn off of Merchants Row and runners give it their best effort to cover the final tenth of a mile to the finish where Bill Hillison, Peg Griffin, Bill Lott and Ray Hanlon wait to record their time. It is usually the time when I convince myself, “ok, I will do this again next year.” This year, during that stretch, 2101 (approximately half of the total 5K runners) 5K runners crossed the finish line. That is more people than finish any other race in town. And almost all of them are still trying to run. They are all ages, colors and shapes bound by a common goal – getting across that finish line.

There were 6856 runners registered for this year’s races and 6183 recorded finishers. They broke down by race as follows: 15K – 354; 10K – 682; 5K – 4,274; and 1 mile 873. The winners (in same order) were Stan Linton (47:44) and Sheryl Rosen (59:42); Justin Garrard (32:01) and Renee Cox (41:40); Trevor Touchton (16:02) and Katie Sack (19:48). The mile winners were Jackson Yarbrough (6:09) and Emma Chesser (6:55). Herb Wills provides more details in his recap of the races at [Trouble Afoot](#). Complete results are located [here](#) or you can access them by going to the [Gulf Winds](#) or [Turkey Trot](#) pages.

It was great to see Navy Ensign Stan Linton take down the record for SouthWood 15K races by almost 2 minutes. The record belonged to another class act, six-time winner of the 15K, Chris Lake. I need to research this a little more, but I believe Sheryl Rosen's 15K win this year, makes her the only 7-time champion of the 15K.

The record breaking turnout did cause some unexpected problems. Traffic got backed up for a bit with arriving runners on Capital Circle and the race start was delayed about 15 minutes. When the 10K and 15K runners came around on Bald Cypress Way for their second loop, they found a "wall of runners and walkers" on Shumard Oak Boulevard and had some difficulty getting across that intersection. But they found a way. Three of the timing mats across the start line failed, meaning some runners did not get the net times they were promised. Finish medals and food for the 5K, 10K and 15K runners ran out before the runners did. (If you are a deserving finisher who did not receive a medal, please email me at david@radeylaw.com and include your bib number.) Last year we had too much food and too many medals.

For some strange reason, some of the runners finishing later in the race were not able to find the water coolers for finishers. The water table at the end of the race was located in the main registration area, the same place it has been for 12 years or more. This problem can be easily solved next year by moving this water stop closer to the finish line after the races start. I think one of the reasons for the confusion was the increased activity along the access road. Whole Foods set up along the access road and provided thousands of runners with food. Life Basics Church passed out 4,000 custom designed water bottles, filled with water. Last year they had 1,000 left over bottles from the 5,000 total they had ready. This year they gave it all away and then started filling cups. The water table near the registration area was always ready for runners.

The Turkey Trot Striders Tent City brought representatives of many elementary and middle schools to the access road area as well. More than 900 participants ran on behalf of a middle or elementary school. We will be announcing more than \$1200 in grants to go to the winning schools. Amy Miles worked very hard to make it all happen.

The U-Haul was crammed full of donations, food, clothes, toiletry items and more. I am sure it took David and Lynn Landis a long time to sort and deliver everything. While all the financial counting is not done yet, I am hopeful it will be a very good year for the Shelter, the Refuge House and the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Big Bend. Last year they each received \$15,000.

Some days it is harder to find the reasons to be thankful than it is at other times. But Thanksgiving offers a day where most people focus on the positive, family and friends. And yes, for many it is a day that starts with a run, the Tallahassee Turkey Trot. The race began this year with the ringing of a 14 inch brass bell. Winners of the 15K race will have their names inscribed on the bell.

We gave some of those facing the toughest challenges a chance to tell their stories through an upgraded version of the Turkey Trot Magazine and it worked. There was the beautiful “Turkey Trot Love Story” from Marianne Trussell as she recounted how she met husband Don at the first Thanksgiving Day Turkey Trot run and how they ran every Turkey Trot since until this year when Don died from Mesothelioma. Debbie Peters told us her story of fighting breast cancer “in the acres” and followed her last chemo treatment the week before thanks giving by ringing the bell at the hospital and then running the 5K at Turkey Trot. She got to ring the bell! We lost Rex Cleveland to cancer and committed to keeping his memory alive with a magic downhill mile to kick off Turkey Trot in early November.

While medals and awards are fun, that is not what the Tallahassee Turkey Trot is about. As I noted in the welcome for the Turkey Trot Magazine:

There is no doubt the world around us is often a dangerous place with very mean people making it so. Maybe it seems it is getting worse, maybe that is not so. No matter, join us on Thanksgiving Day, if you will, and enjoy that simple experience of greeting your neighbors with a smile, getting some exercise through a good run, and lending a helping hand to someone who needs it. It has been a good formula since 1992, at least. So, bring your family, wish your neighbor well, run as hard or easy as you want, and be most thankful for what you have on this special day.

I hope you were able to find something special to be thankful for on November 24, 2016, the 25th running of Turkey Trot on Thanksgiving Day.