

Metroplex Team Cleans Up

By Melanie Endert



Members of the Trinity River Trash team at top (left to right): Bob Stachow, Paul Kosakowski, Annabell Lee, Denise Boerner, Lynn Parker, Seth Shiver, Rachel Harp, Robert Webb, Melanie Endert and team captain Ben Boerner.

Yes, we did it for the “fun” of it, but there was a competitive streak burning in each of us... if we were gonna run 203 miles in 24 hours, why not try to haul home some hardware?

This was the inaugural Texas Independence Relay, held March 1-2, 2008, and we were the “Trinity River Trash” team – a deceptively named group of racers from throughout DFW (and a mixer from Connecticut), ready to follow the course laid out years ago by those who fought the battles to win our great state’s independence.



After staying overnight near the race’s starting line in Gonzales, we made it to the little town’s square for our assigned staggered start time. The patriotic theme of the race and the overwhelming warmth of every volunteer and town we would encounter began there.

After a one-mile starting lap together as a team, our first runner peeled off and began his first leg of about 6 miles. The 10-person team (five men, five women) was divided between two vans, and one van was “on-duty” at any given time.

As Runner #1’s first leg neared completion, we waited for him at the appointed exchange so that Runner #2 from our van could receive the baton (a plastic slap bracelet). As this second runner took off, we let the first runner cool down for a few minutes, use the port-a-potty, then jump in the van as we headed off to the next exchange. This way, Runner #3 could be in place when #2 came into view, and so on. As the last runner in our van, #5, finished running, the second van was ready to take over, and their first runner (actually #6 for the race) was ready for the exchange.

When each of us in the first van had run our first legs (of the four legs we would eventually do), we found a little local restaurant along the route, and dined on very homemade chicken soup, sandwiches and baked potatoes. We had a few hours while the second van runners completed their first legs, then had to be ready to take over again.

Things started to get interesting as the sun went down, because we just kept running – only now it was pitch black, kind of lonely, and basically pretty scary. We wore headlamps, reflective vests, and clip-on blinky lights, but those barely stood up to the 18-wheelers that whizzed head-on in the lanes just beyond the shoulders we ran in, the drivers most certainly surprised by the crazy middle-of-the-night runners encroaching on their desolate territory.

Of course, the often-present scent of skunks was a reminder that a huge, roaring truck was actually more welcome than some of the lurking nocturnal wildlife we could have stumbled into or over at any given moment.

Because of the staggered start, we had not seen a single other runner from the race up to this point; but as 3:00 and 4:00 in the morning approached, that all-important competitive streak was going to provide some much-needed midnight oil. As we began to pass runners from other teams on the deserted highway, we stayed fired up by chalking them off as “bogeys.” We were starting to count and calculate any teams we’d spotted along the way, and wondering what their standings might be at this point?

As the last legs of the race entered the city of Houston, the one weak spot of the race organization came to light: poor markings (or complete lack of markings) on areas of the course resulted in added time and mileage to the race legs of four on our team. However, our collective need-for-speed filled in the gaps and powered us to the finish line at the San Jacinto monument.

The finishers’ medals – each a huge, heavy, encircled iron star that hung from a wide brown ribbon – looked and felt like they’d been cast from the star at the top of the monument itself.

As we wolfed down pizza and candy bars (we’d been dutifully chomping on rice cakes and Gatorade ever since that chicken soup the day before), we checked out the teams who might be vying for our title. Then sure ’nuff, we got called up to the judges’ stand, and it wasn’t for some chintzy gold-colored plastic! This is TEXAS, and we each got awarded a generous Salsa Sampler box for winning Second Place in the Open Mixed Division, with a time of 25:38:55, at a pace of 7:33, in a field of 63 teams; and seventh of 113 teams overall. (The team who beat us in our division came all the way from Los Angeles, so we’ll give it to ’em, eh?)

The ride home from Houston was quiet, with dreams of eating more real food, using real bathrooms, and spending the entire upcoming week catching up on lost sleep. Next March, there will be more Trinity River Trash blowing in on the Houston highways, and we’ll be cleaning up again!
