

## Abara, Opperman honored for their services

Jeff Abara is the first person to be honored on this website who might not be receiving deserving accolades for devoting much time and effort in contributing to the running community. Joining him in 2007 is Harvey Obermann, who along with his wife Lucy, has selfishly helped at many running events. He's often lending a helping hand at Fort Worth Running Club events.

Here is what an e-mailer said about Jeph:

“I would like to nominate Jeph Abara, who organizes races in the Arlington/Fort Worth area. A runner himself, he knows the key ingredients of a good race -- a clearly marked course, accurate timekeeping and a few post race snacks. Aware that many runners in the area race every weekend, he strives to keep race fees low by dispensing with T-shirts and distributing recycled trophies. In addition to the standard age category awards, he also gives out random Souls and Soles awards and door prizes so that everyone has a chance to win something. (Recently) when he realized there were no Saturday races in the D/FW area, Jeph decided to organize a 5K race in Arlington with the help of a few volunteers. He clearly takes event organization in his stride, even managing to arrange for event proceeds to benefit a local charity. He is a generous individual whose efforts are appreciated by many. Thanks, Jeph.”

And former FWRC president Frank McGinty is one of those high on Harvey's involvement. Even though Harvey isn't a runner, he is a past president of the now-defunct Arlington Runners Club and helps at many events that the FWRC is involved. The club awarded Harvey with the 2006 Volunteer of the Year award. He probably could just retire the award because few do as much as he does.

Also, here's a short bio of Jeph, which was requested:

“I was born and raised in Nigeria. I attended college in the U.S, with advanced degrees in Chemical Engineering (Ohio State University) and Industrial Engineering as well as Operations Research (University of Pittsburgh).

I have always run – okay, maybe not from birth, but since I could walk and run. I ran cross-country in high school in Nigeria. Here in the U.S., I engaged recreational running/walking initially. Then I discovered road racing and participated in my first official road race at the 1985 Firecracker 5K in Burleson. I've been hooked ever since. My most memorable race was probably the Centennial Boston in 1996, having qualified at the Dallas White Rock Marathon in December 1994. Here's how I concluded an article I wrote after that race, “Many of us likely will run in other marathons down the road. I doubt, though, that they will rival the 100th Boston in emotion, exhilaration, thrills, compellingness, tradition and a sense of history. For me, it was a humbling happening, an emotional journey, an event I will cherish for a long time. As Forrest Gump would say, ‘It made a lot of sense’, human and historical sense!!!”

Merely running and walking are fine activities in themselves. (Here are some lines from a verse I wrote several years ago: “Can’t afford any country club dues / Don’t need any health club lanes / Just me and my sneakers / Running across God’s open county / Running across public highways and byways.”) They’re fairly inexpensive, have no gender or age bias, are quite universal and are effectively egalitarian and inclusive. I get my highs from road racing. Why? Because road races serve at least three functions. They provide a fun, social outing; they offer athletic competition; and, very importantly, most road races are vehicles for charity fundraising and cause awareness, doing good for a variety of charities and causes. Jeff Galloway has written that we should “remind ourselves that we’re at our best when we help others...Races put us in this positive role.”

Races...that’s what’s it’s all about. Races creating ...  
Connectedness...Compassion...Community...Camaraderie...Conviviality...Celebration  
...Competition...Exhilaration

A few years after that first road race, I joined the Arlington Runners Club. The club’s newsletter, The RoadRunner, featured a very good race calendar. I used to share it with colleagues at work and we used it to pick out the races we would participate in. Later, I began to embellish that RoadRunner calendar by finding out and adding the different race beneficiaries – in order to highlight the charity aspect of the races. Unfortunately in August 1993, the RoadRunner race calendar stopped. In order to fill the gap, I began developing my own calendar in September 1993 by calling race directors from contact info on old copies of the RoadRunner calendars. And, of course, I included the beneficiaries. At the same time, I also left copies of my now independently-produced calendars at The Runner Shop in Arlington. On the calendar, I would underline races that appealed to me.

A few months later, the RoadRunner began publishing race calendars again. But I realized that they were copies of the calendars I left at The Runner, with all my personal highlight markings. So I approached the newsletter’s editor and offered to send the publication clean, unmarked copies of the calendar. Eventually, in September 1994, I became the official race calendar person for The RoadRunner. That continued until the demise of the club in 2001. Meanwhile, I also had begun sharing my calendars with about 100 racing acquaintances. It was through this that the Cross Country Club of Dallas (CCCD) got hold of the calendars and asked me to allow them to post them on the CCCD Web site. That was in August 2001. A month later 9/11 happened. In the aftermath of that terrible event, I felt compelled to put running/walking/racing in proper perspective, to underscore the universality of the sport and its potential for sharingness and uniting all of humankind.

And so I began prefacing the calendars with lead-in e-mail writings that I hoped would be positive and inspirational. I also felt obliged to make the calendar as complete and accurate as I could make it – turning an essentially personal document requiring limited effort into a public calendar that consumes hours of contacts and phone calls in preparation. I now share the calendar directly by e-mail with over 2,500 area

runners/walkers and indirectly with probably many more. Along the way, I also served briefly as the official race calendar person for the Fort Worth Runners Club newsletter.

The "race" calendar continues to be a labor of love – to provide info on road races and charity walks along with their beneficiaries."