



FSTC HISTORY

35 YEARS FROM 1978 : 2013

Last updated February 4, 2013

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The Beginning: In 1978, Jay Alligood of the Continuing Education Department of the Clay County School System decided to hold an October Indian Summer Run. The purpose was to generate an interest in running among the adults of Clay County. Mr. Alligood, with the help of Ken Taylor, Orange Park H.S. Athletic Director and Cross Country/Track Coach, laid out a five-mile course at Gold Head State Park.

A survey was given to participants in the event to see if they were interested in forming a local running club. Ken Taylor coined the name, "Florida Striders" and also designed the club logo.

Chuck Cornett was one of around 20 people who signed up. A club was formed and our first president, Jim Finigan, was elected. Meetings were held in the library of the Lakeside Elementary School and attendance was good to start with, but soon dropped off to only a few attendees.

Our First Race – Autumn Twilight Run: After several months, our treasury had \$67 and we still owed President Finigan the \$100 he lent to start up the club! On a Saturday run, several members decided to put on a race to raise money and promote awareness of the Striders. The race was held at sundown on Saturday, Sept 13, 1980 at the Orange Park Kennel Club (OPKC). It was named the Autumn Twilight Run. Our title sponsor was Kingsley Bank who contributed \$5000. They continued to be the only sponsor for many years. Over the years, the race enjoyed attendance as high as 1200. It was revised to the Autumn Fitness 5K Run, as a morning race, because the OPKC was no longer available in the evenings due to kennel club events. In 2008 the race was moved to January, to avoid hurricane threats and prior year near misses, and was renamed the Resolution 5K. In 2012, the event became the Resolution 5K/10K and the 10km portion of the event continues as a Jacksonville Grand Prix event with registration over 1100 in 2012.

Florida Strider Logo: The club membership rapidly grew after that initial Autumn Twilight Run event. Our club colors are yellow (gold) singlets with red shorts. The original plans called for blue shorts with the gold singlet because Orange Park is a Blue and Gold NAVY town. However, the local running store had a large stock of red shorts and the price was right! You could spot a Strider in any race of any size! Ken Taylor designed this original club logo:



In 2006, while Dave Bokros was President of the club, it was decided by the Board to revise the logo to the design that you see when opening this history of our club. The color of our shirts was changed to white for a brief time, but due to popular demand the color was changed back to the distinctive yellow. People were accustomed to looking for their runner in the bright yellow shirts in the races. The white just didn't stand out!

Membership & Family Focus: After the extremely successful Autumn Twilight Run in 1980, it was decided to funnel proceeds back into the club by subsidizing incentives for new members to join the club. Emphasis was put on family memberships with an extremely low fee which included free cotton running club shirts. Over time cotton running shirts have become rare and our club merchandise has moved to technical fabrics that breathe better & are no longer free, but are priced very low.

Almost immediately, membership boomed. General club meetings featured talks with the focus on all aspects of running; shoes, equipment, diet, technique, heart safety and fitting walking/jogging into lifestyle, etc. These meetings, often attended by over 100 people, were held at local restaurants with a Dutch Treat dinner preceding the talk. Business topics were kept to a minimum and socializing and welcoming newcomers was highlighted.

The meetings were held monthly until a few years ago. The attendance had dropped off significantly and the board made a decision to suspend them until a better idea comes along.

Run to the Sun Begins: In 1982, a morning 10 km race was introduced in the spring to offer a change from the fall evening 5 km run. The race was called the Sunrise Wellness Run and also started and finished at the Orange Park Kennel Club. The Orange Park Hospital sponsored this event for several years. In 1986, Dick Erickson of Sun Tire Company offered full sponsorship and the race was renamed Sun Tire Run to the Sun. The distance was changed to 8 km and has been the RRCA State Championship several times in addition to being the 1998 RRCA Southern Region Championship and 2000 RRCA National Championship. The Orange Park Medical Center is again the title sponsor of this excellent event.

Running Classes: Coach Chuck Cornett started club sponsored half-day EAT SLIM-WALK TRIM - Learn How To Jog and Love It clinics at various locations around the state. The clinics provided a major source of new members for years. Additionally, Mini Running Camps were held for runners who would like to improve racing times and for those desiring to enter marathons or ultra distance events. In 2005, and in the spirit of club legend Coach Chuck Cornett, Bob Boyd established a beginning running class. That first class focused on new runners and had about 40 participants. The class, quickly expanded to meet the needs of all levels of runners, grew to over 180 participants and was capped at 150 going forward to avoid parking problems at our beautiful host facility at St. Johns Country Day School. The class also expanded to work with walkers in 2011. It is hard to say who gains the most from the class, the runners who adopt a new lifetime habit or enhance their existing fitness, or all of the volunteers who find themselves inspired and gratified to be part of the process. Our classes now begin the first week of April and culminate with the Memorial Day 5K.

Sunday Sun Tire Group Run: We have stressed the key to becoming a distance runner is the Long Slow Distance (LSD) run once a week. When the Florida Striders Track Club first started, we all were running this LSD run at different times and from different locations. A group would meet at the Lakeside School and run the 7-mile loop around Moody and Doctors Lake Drive. This bunch would run at 7:30 a.m. on Sunday morning and the pace was brisk. Chuck and several other "slow beginners" decided to meet at the Sun Tire store on Blanding Boulevard, next to the Famous Amos 24 hour Restaurant. We picked a starting time of 6:30 a.m. Sunday to begin running. That early time would allow us to run, eat breakfast and still be home in time to join our families for church.

The first of these runs was on October 13, 1979. Five original Striders took part; Bill Dewey, Roy Fisher, Dave Taylor, Jack Stanley, and Chuck (the latter three later served as Strider Presidents). Since that day in 1979, there has been a group running every Sunday. However, on the memorable morning of the "Great First Coast Freeze" on Dec 23, 1989 when there was snow and ice on the course, only Frank Frazier and Jack Sykes showed up. We nearly broke the streak in the early 80's when everyone else had gone down to run the River Run course. However Bill Saye and John TenBroeck showed up at Sun Tire to keep the string going! We are very cognizant to continuing this tradition and someone will always be sure to be there. During marathon training there were as many as 150 runners and walkers taking part in this weekly event. The Sunday run always starts promptly at 6:30 a.m. and if you arrive at 6:31, we will be gone! The complete route is 20 miles long; however there are various turnoffs to allow for distances of 6, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 17 miles.

In the beginning years, the rule was that no one would run faster than the slowest runner. As the slower runners turned off for shorter mileage, the pace would pick up. This rule ensured socialization and was good training for all. Now days, there are various sub groups ranging from serious runners on down to walkers. The runs have spawned several additional Sunday running groups in the Clay & Duval County areas. All walkers/joggers/runners in the community are welcomed to these events. Membership in the Florida Striders is not necessary!

Community Projects & Socials: The club has always been involved in service projects to promote running and fitness in the community. One of our most ambitious projects was providing financial backing and

assistance in rebuilding of the Orange Park High School track. It remains one of the best facilities in North Florida.

During the early eighties, the club sponsored twice-monthly Saturday morning 1 & 4-mile fun runs at the OPHS track with Richard and Jenny Allen as the usual hosts. Ribbons were awarded and light refreshments provided. This later evolved into a monthly fun run/social held the second Friday of each month. At some point the run part stopped while the social continued through the mid 2000's. The club socials are held less frequently now, but are often held in conjunction with another event, such as the Gate River Run tent, the annual Club Election and Picnic, and social events at 1st Place Sports with a good speaker(s), pizza, and beverages. When held at 1st Place Sports in Orange Park a fun run of 3 to 6 miles is held before the social for those who wish to run.

Wednesday Group Run/Track Workouts: We also offered weekly Wednesday night track workouts at the OPHS track that were well attended. The OPHS track workouts went by the wayside in favor of a run of 5-10 miles on Kingsley Avenue and Doctors Lake Drive. While that Wednesday group run has ended, since 2005 we have held weekly Wednesday evening track workouts at the St. John's Country Day School track. There are lots of different paces and attendance varies depending upon the time of the year. While the April through May running class is in session, also started in 2005 by then President, Bob Boyd, the number at the track on Wednesday's has reached 200!

Children's Running: In the late eighties we sponsored a four-week summer running camp at OPHS for the youth of the community. Through club president India Hendley's persistence, we were fortunate enough to receive a Nike grant through the RRCA to continue this program for several years. Vicky Connell led an excellent children's running camp at Ridgeview High School in 2008. We have also been fortunate enough to receive a recent grant from the RRCA's Kids Run the Nation Program.

All of our races have a free fun run that attracts from 300-1,500 youths. Our largest youth event was in 1989 when we had over 1600 kids run the 1-mile Run to the Sun Fun Run! Dick Erickson of Sun Tire gave every child a free T-shirt and footed the bill for loads of goodies. Ken Bendy directed that event. The Resolution Fun Run almost tied that record in 2012 with over 1500 in attendance. Jacksonville Greyhound Racing has been providing \$1800 in participation money for that excellent fun run for at least the last ten years, funneling much needed money to keep our children healthy. In the 1980's, we began sponsoring a Kids Marathon Program that began with nearly 300 children participating. To see the growth in our children's programs, flash forward to 2012 when we distributed over 4,000 Marathon medals to elementary school children in the area. The Florida Striders, in partnership with over 50 elementary school run/walk programs in the area, provide the mileage incentives that keep the children excited and motivated to log as many miles as possible. The incentives include Mile Club T-shirts, awarded at 50, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, & 350 miles, along with smaller incentives for intermediate mileage accomplishments. If you want to see sheer exuberance and enthusiasm for running or walking, visit one of the school run/walk programs or attend one of the free fun runs at our races. All of the mileage incentives mentioned above are provided at no charge as we do not want lack of funds to stop any school from providing a regular and fun opportunity for running or walking for our children.

Hershey Games: In 2006, James May asked the Florida Striders if they would be interested in partnering in putting on the Hershey Games, a free track and field event for children between the ages of 9 to 14. We joined forces, James joined the Florida Striders, and the rest, as they say, is history. 2013 will be the 8th year the Florida Striders have put on this excellent event which has grown to over 180 competitors. It continues to grow bigger and better and is still hosted at the Orange Park High School each spring. Winners at our local/district Hershey Meet are eligible to compete in the Hershey State meet and will be sporting t-shirts with the Florida Strider logo shown proudly. In almost every year, our young Hershey competitors have also reached well beyond the State meet and have competed in the National Meet in Hershey, PA. Everyone must pre-register for

this event held at the Orange Park High School Track. Please check our website, www.FloridaStriders.com, for details.

Our Support for Running in the Community: We have provided free kids RRCA running booklets and published a brochure of local running routes that was distributed to area hotels, motels and fitness outlets in our early decades. We continue to provide newsletters at 1st Place Sports and offer our informative newsletter, The Strideright, as a free download on our website, www.FloridaStriders.com. In addition, we championed the building of local 4 and 7-mile fitness trails and have provided assistance in maintaining the facilities. We used to have 2 to 3 "Clip n' Sip" workdays a year to maintain the Doctors Lake trail because the county did not have the money allocated for maintenance of the trail. The project ended in the 1990's. Robert Shields personally took over the task and kept it in excellent shape. Unfortunately he moved from the area in 1998 and the trail deteriorated considerably for a time. The county had limited funds and resources to maintain the trail and it continued to deteriorate. In 2003 George Hoskins took on the challenge of maintaining the trail and was successful in recruiting volunteers to help maintain it. In 2012 the county received a Federal Grant to upgrade and improve the Doctor's Lake Trail. It was widened and resurfaced and is now an excellent paved trail for a run or biking.

As evidenced above, the Striders are known for their support of running in the community and received the Reinhold award for "Outstanding Service to Youth & Families" many times since 1996 and their renamed "Celebrate Clay" awards since the mid 2000's. In the late 1990's we instituted a scholarship program spearheaded by Tom Sullivan that awards \$1000 scholarships to outstanding High School Seniors each year.

StrideRight Newsletter: The first newsletter was a half page typewritten sheet by club president, Jim Finigan on Dec 12, 1978. The newsletter continued in this typewritten format, usually four to six pages long for four years. It was stapled together and mailed out to the membership. The first formally printed issue of our award-winning newsletter, the "StrideRight" was printed in January 1982. It was printed and mailed courtesy of the Orange Park Hospital. Susan Critchlow, Publicity Director of the hospital and a new Strider member at that time became the Editor of the Strideright. In subsequent years, the Strideright has been printed in different formats by different printers. It has always featured articles for, by and about Striders. One of the most popular monthly features was Ken Bendy's Racie Ramblin's column. Ken scoured the racing scene to report on all of the trash, trivia, scandal, PR's, etc., in addition to poking fun at our various adventures (or misadventures). Since Ken's retirement after seventeen years of regular journalistic duties, the concept was continued by Robert Glenn as "Mile Marker Musings," Mike Marino and Gail Pylipow's "Back Page" and most recently Vicky Connell's Striders Spotlight.

Under the stewardship of editor Glenn Becker, the Strideright was named the RRCA's Southern Region's best newsletter in 1986 and went on to earn the RRCA's Best Small Club Newsletter for 1987. The Newsletter continues to be a top contender for RRCA Journalism Awards and is currently edited by Trish Kabus.

Memorial Day 5K Beginnings: In 1984, we were asked by the city of Green Cove Springs to conduct a 5 km race to help celebrate the Memorial Day Festival. The race was called the Shipshape 5000 and was sponsored by a local bank. It was renamed the Memorial Day 5K and was held in Green Cove Springs until 2011. This very popular event has continued to grow bigger and better since its move to Orange Park in 2011 it has a better, more shaded course ending at the town park at US 17 & Kingsley Avenue.

Hog Jog 5K is Born: Our most "fun" event was the Hog Jog 5K cross-country event. Beginning in 1988 it was held in conjunction with the Ham Jam Festival, a qualifying round for the National BBQ Cook-off. The first two years the race was staged on the town streets of Middleburg. More space was needed for the Ham Jam so the event was moved to Spencer Farms on Route 218 just south of Middleburg. It then became a very interesting cross country race. The course director map read something like this: "Start at the turkey pen gate, follow the cow path to the junk cars, cross the grass airfield and follow the dirt lane to the hard road. Take it to

the end and follow the dirt road to the left, turn at the end (watch out for the dogs)! Reverse course and turn left at the barn/hangar with the sign "Redneck Airlines". The finish line is at the two trees just past the barn!" We usually had about 300 runners and walkers. The awards were always some form of a pig. The race lasted for about 10 years, much of them under the direction of Dick Miller, but in 1998 the club dropped it due to problems with the race location. In 1999 Jane Manion resurrected it as a 5km cross country at a new location in Lake Asbury. After the 1-year hiatus it's still going strong but the name has changed a couple times. For a short period it was the Florida Striders' Cross Country Challenge 5K and today is the shortened moniker, Hog Jog 5K. Steve Bruce continued to direct the event until 2010, setting a record for most FSTC races directed. The event's 5km and fun run attendance grew dramatically under Steve's care. Leslie Kindling directed the event in 2011 and continued the growth in attendance with over 300 in the 5K and another 300+ in the fun run. Commander Kindling was transferred to Washington D.C. and Charlie Hunsberger now directs our excellent cross country 5km race. Don't miss this fine event each November at Ronnie Van Zant Park in Lake Asbury.

Gate River Run Tent: Our club members really support the races in the Orange Park/Jacksonville area and the premier event of the year is the Gate River Run 15K presented by our good friends in JTC Running. Known for our friendly, family oriented functions, in 1992 we decided we needed a central point to meet before and after the race and the Strider Gate River Run Tent was born! Stan Scarlett, his able assistant Marge Ruebush and a host of other volunteers have shepherded the project to this day. Literally hundreds of members and guests enjoy this activity each year. What started as a tailgating party by the Florida Striders at the River Run 15K developed into a full blown event with the Florida Strider tent, refreshments, pot-luck, replete with massage therapists, and private port-a-lets, all coordinated by the indomitable Stan Scarlett. Stan's attention to detail and his strong desire to make the tent area bigger and better every year deserves the credit for making it the great success that it is. Attendance at the tent makes it the biggest Strider party of the year and is always a great time to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. While we are still in disbelief that Stan passed away on November 30, 2012, his legend and his legacy will be with us all with the ongoing Florida Strider tent at the Gate River Run.

Capitalizing on the success of the River Run tent, then president, Bill Cornell initiated a similar project for a tent at the Jacksonville Marathon in 1999. Jane Manion and Lillian Lawless kept this tradition going for many years, however interest waned and we elected to expend our efforts on manning an aid station on the Jacksonville Marathon course.

Our Website, www.FloridaStriders.com: In 2001 Mike Mayse took on the task of bringing the FSTC into the virtual media age by building the Strider's website (<http://www.Floridastriders.com>). Mike did an outstanding job, but unfortunately his job took him to Ohio. Several capable webmasters contributed their time and talent in the intervening years, until Mike came back to the position in 2012. Our very own long time Strider, Larry Clark, became Webmaster in 2013. Stay tuned as things keep getting better.

Race Course Improvements: We took a significant step forward in race safety in 2002 when we changed the courses of the Autumn Fitness 5K and the Sun Tire Run to the Sun 8 K to get them off of US 17. Traffic was becoming increasingly heavy and the town and the club were becoming concerned about liability. Our Resolution Run 5K/ & the Orange Park Medical Center Run to the Sun 8K races are now entirely on scenic River Road and the east side of Park Avenue. The Resolution Run 10K course between Milwaukee Avenue and Holly Point East incorporates a very short section of US 17 (Park Avenue). The Memorial Day 5K and one Mile Fun Run starts adjacent to the Orange Park 1st Place Sports on Milwaukee, (just off US 17) and stays in the shaded neighborhoods until the finish near the Orange Park Town Park, also escaping any running on US 17 or Kingsley Avenue.

Close Call: Like most clubs, we've had our peaks and valleys. In the 1990's, we had lost our race sponsors, membership had dropped to less than 200 and club interest was waning. We were one newsletter payment away from bankruptcy! Fortunately, with the leadership of Wally Lastinger and some hard work by a lot of people, we recovered and just over a three year period went from a small club to nearly 500 memberships. We owe a

great deal of this to Dr. Russ Pratt who put the squeeze on all of his friends in the medical profession and in a short time had all of our races sponsored.

Membership: Our current membership includes 700+ Single, Family, Junior, and Senior memberships. Counting family members, the number of Florida Striders is over 1,000 from all over the Clay/Duval County area and we still enjoy some members scattered all about the country. Our membership covers the full spectrum of runners, walkers, serious competitors, and some that just join to work our events or socialize! We participate in everything from fun runs to ultra marathons. Our Club has fielded a world class Paralympic and Olympic wheelchair athlete (LeAnne Shannon) who joined our club at the age of eight! A few years later another tiny eight year-old girl by the name of Fallon Heffernan joined our club. She set records in the Gate River Run 15 K, set more records in High School and was the number 2 ranked in-line skater in the world! At the other end of the membership spectrum our oldest member was Ed Root who passed away at the age of 91 several years ago from complications of injuries sustained when he fell off his bicycle training for a triathlon!

Jenny's Pennies: We celebrate our anniversary on a Sunday morning in October of each year with a post run celebration from Sun Tire. It is funded entirely from the money we find on the roads from the date of the previous year's celebration. Jenny Allen is the custodian of the fund known as "Jenny's Pennies"! We usually find \$150 to \$200 on the roads each year!

Volunteering and Welcome: Many of our members have contributed a lot of their time to make the Florida Striders Track Club a community icon in running and physical fitness as evidenced by the number of members who have contributed over 2000 hours to be honored with the RRCA National Volunteer Certificate Award. The four races and their fun runs, the many socials, the support of over 50 elementary school run/walk programs with 14,000+ children, our running class, Hershey Games, the scholarship program, website, newsletter, and more all take good volunteers. When shared by many, the work is light and the fun factor is high. We invite you to participate in our club events, races, join us for a run in the Orange Park/Jacksonville area, or volunteer with us to make our community a better and healthier place.