

Something Old, Something New

The top 25 marathon finisher medals of 2012.

BY CARA MCLAURIN ESAU

The best marathon medals of 2012 not only spanned the continent but also spanned the history of North American marathoning. One of the oldest marathons in the country, the Atlantic City Marathon, proved to be a winner, tying with Tacoma City and Wisconsin for 25th place among favorite medals. The third-oldest continuing marathon in the United States, Atlantic City just completed its 54th consecutive year. Atlantic City is known for its changes of scenery: city, small towns, boardwalk, and beach. The course begins on Atlantic City's historic boardwalk and offers runners a complete tour of Absecon Island (Atlantic City, Ventnor City, Margate, and Longport). Each town on the island has its own personality and unique features. Margate and Longport are sleepy beach communities, and runners pass quaint restaurants and shops as they race along the bay.

Every year, Atlantic City presents its finishers with a newly designed medal. Previously, the medals have been rectangular or have even doubled as a bottle opener. The 2012 medal is completely different in size, shape, and design. Most prominent on the medal is the historic Absecon Lighthouse (out of which flashes an LED light). Built in 1857, the lighthouse is the largest in New Jersey and is still standing strong, even after Hurricane Sandy! According to race director Genia Chapman Bittner, "This lighthouse represents the longevity of the race and its history, not only in Atlantic City but in each of the communities on the island."

Atlantic City's 3,000 finishers simply loved the medals. The race organizers had revealed the medal design at a race expo several months before the marathon. Many runners registered for the marathon the moment they saw the finisher's medal. Runners were impressed not only with the style, size, and weight of the medals, but even the quality of the ribbon drew praise. Bittner adds, "We wanted to bring the inspiration of the beach and the history of the race. And we wanted

the medal to be huge because we know it's all about the bling!" Well done, Atlantic City Marathon.

Three for three

Age is apparently not a requirement for winning, however! Running for the Bay, in only its third year, has placed among the winners from its inception—and it is among the top 25 again this year. Considered a destination race because of its pristine beaches, Running for the Bay is held in Apalachicola, Florida, one of the most beautiful estuaries in America. Race weekend offers events for everyone. The marathon, half-marathon, and 50K begin in Apalachicola, continue through Apalachicola Bay, and end in Eastpoint and St. George Island. The 10K and 5K feature the natural beauty of Apalachicola Bay. The 50K ultra is among the largest in Florida. Runners love the temperate climate and the small-town feel.

Runners also love the medal! According to race director Mark Henderson, "The medal will change every year. I think it's important that the runners are surprised every year and feel that the medal they have earned is unique." Henderson creates the medal to reflect significant aspects of the community. This year the race highlighted the "world's smallest police station," which is in Carrabelle, the largest town in Franklin County. The police station is actually a telephone booth. (*Doctor Who* fans especially love this.) In the old days, the booth was a functioning police station, where the officers would remain, waiting for calls to come in.

Shoebox full of memories

The West Coast has some mighty fine medals, too! Finishing as number one in 2012 is the Portland Marathon, in its 41st year. Portland's medals have always rated as one of the top medallions, but this year, it was the darling of the panel.

No amount of rain falling in October can keep this race from selling out. The event's motto is "All finishers are treated as winners." Each runner crossing the finish line receives a rose, a sapling, and a finisher's medal that is a work of art.

Over a cup of coffee, Paul Gentry and I sat down last year with Portland's race director, Les Smith, to hear all about the history of the Portland Marathon. He pulled out a shoebox, and to my surprise, it contained a finisher's medal from each year that Portland has awarded medals; each was lovingly encased in Lucite. One by one, Smith related the significance of every medal in meticulous detail. Smith is a walking encyclopedia on all things history and art, and my head was spinning with information by the time we parted ways.

All of the Portland Marathon's medals either depict a landmark that runners may see on the course, or they commemorate a historical Oregon event. Always double-sided, both sides of the medals are worthy of attention and study. Smith

is adamant about the art on both sides: “Frankly, I do not believe any medal considered for an award . . . should lack a reverse.”

The 2012 Portland Marathon medal features, on the obverse side, a rendition of Oregon’s famous Timberline Lodge. Located on Mount Hood, Timberline Lodge celebrated its 75th anniversary last year. Smith honored the occasion in his design of the 2012 finisher’s medal. The starting point of the Hood to Coast Relay, Timberline Lodge is a fascinating blend of art deco and cozy lodge-style architecture, and it has always fascinated Smith. When he was in the fifth grade, living on the opposite side of the country—in Pittsburgh—his teacher returned from a summer trip to Oregon and showed the class slides of Timberline. Smith still vividly remembers the slides and his childhood desire to see the lodge, which at the time was only 12 years in existence.

Since those early days, Smith has stayed at Timberline Lodge many times, skied the slopes of Mount Hood, and run halfway down the mountain and back up to the shelter of the lodge. The inspiration for Portland’s 2012 medal came to him through another medal that a German friend had given him, depicting the Matterhorn. “The design falls from the mountain to the edge, so the mountain is in high relief,” says Smith, “and on our medal, the Timberline outline adds another level of relief, so depth will be apparent.”

On the reverse side, the 2012 medal depicts a stunning rose. Portland’s nickname is “Rose City,” so Smith has featured a rose in previous years also. Because Smith emphasizes his conviction that a winning medal absolutely must feature high-quality artwork on both sides, he has designed the reverse to be so beautiful that runners will have trouble deciding which side is actually the front: “I suspect that our reverse will probably be considered the obverse by our runners. That will be a compliment,” says Smith. “But when I see that, it will cause me to smile because I know the ‘reverse’ concept worked.”

Above and beyond

Variety is the spice of life, and our 24-person panel was the picture of diversity but with two important things in common: they were all marathon runners, and they all agreed that this year’s medals were the most beautiful ever. Indeed, every panelist commented, “It’s nearly impossible to choose which medals are the best.” Apart from those two factors, our panel included new runners and seasoned athletes; some fast and some slow and steady; some who have run more than a hundred marathons and some who have run only one or two; and we even had one who has crossed the entire country on foot!

Similarly, the winning marathons were remarkably different, but with one thing in common: a commitment to making the event memorable and meaningful for their runners. Some medals are huge, while others are small. Some are full

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of bright colors, while other medals feature earth tones, and still others are shiny and metallic. One medal this year was so lively that a panelist called it “cheesy, but wonderful”; other medals were elegant and artistic.

Yet, in the end, the phrase “Cream rises to the top” rang true as Hartford, Flying Pig, and last year’s number one medal—Route 66—were all winners again for the fourth year in a row. The Space Coast Marathon launched up to number four for the second consecutive year while Newport’s glass running heron was in the top 10 yet again. Year in and year out, the eagle, globe, and anchor medal of the Marine Corps has been an absolute favorite of our panels. Incredibly, our 2009 champion was selected as the runner-up both in 2011 and in 2012. To a Marine, second place would be considered inadequate, but not to every finisher who holds an MCM medal. Runners agree that their keepsake is among their most prized possessions. Finally, of course, is the 2012 champion, the Portland Marathon, winning its well-deserved place as the year’s best medal.

After months of training and miles of running, we finishers long to grasp medals that are worthy of our work. With designs getting better every year and the number of medal chasers on the rise, 2012’s medals were the most inventive of all time. Marathons everywhere continue to raise the bar: East Coast, West Coast; big city, small town; a race that’s old, or one that’s new: here’s to the best bling for your 26.2!

Medal submissions

It’s our goal to see all 500 marathon finisher medals each year! Race directors, please email close-up pictures of your marathon medals to medals@marathon-andbeyond.com. If you are shutterbug challenged or want to ensure that you have great pictures for our medal panel, we can shoot the pictures for you. Simply email and ask us for our address.

The 2012 Winners

Honorable mention:

Baton Rouge, Blister in the Sun, Boston, Freedom, Leading Ladies, Myrtle Beach, Ottawa, RnR Las Vegas, St. Jude, and Toronto

25. Three-way tie:

Wisconsin. A little “cheesy,” but nice!

—*Steve Walters*

Atlantic City. I’m a sucker for LED lights. I love how the lighthouse blinks and lights up to represent



the symbol of the Jersey Shore. The birds and waves with blue coloring make me feel like I'm on the AC boardwalk with the wind in my hair and saltwater taffy in my fuel belt.

—*Maricar Korff*

Tacoma City. I like that it functions as both a finisher medal and a bottle opener. Makes it easier and more acceptable to pull it out and brag at a party.

—*Allie Moore*

- 24. Heritage Trail.** Beautifully set in the wood—most unusual and nice to display.

—*Mandy Barwell-Parker*

- 23. Cowtown.** It's an awesome design, and I love the fact that it rewards marathoners who come back to an event year after year.

—*Michael Considine*

- 22. First Light.** This gets my vote for best artistic composition. A great blend of contrasting colors with a whimsical smiling sun as the center attraction.

—*Marshall Ulrich*

- 21. Running for the Bay.** I love the detailed design, complete with a spinner and small “pearl” and featuring a quirky little fact of the town (smallest police station).

—*Mark Payne*

- 20. Missoula.** Effective design utilizing the horseshoe and runner. I love the open space within the design, making it one of my favorites for overall creativity.

—*Marshall Ulrich*

- 19. Chicago.** Classic and clean.

—*Nadia Gonzales*



18. St. George. A simple medal but made of area stone, which makes it unique and very attractive.

—*Tim Collins*

17. Mississippi Blues. I almost played this record on my stereo! This life-sized 45 record medal is very authentic. The colorful glitter guitar makes the medal pop!

—*Lisa Rini*

16. Detroit. Makes me want to put the top down and drive 26.2 miles!

—*Tammy Heathco*

15. Park City. I loved this; it would look great hung up in a window!

—*Mandy Barwell-Parker*

14. A1A Lauderdale. I almost put these sandals on because they were so detailed. The tongs on the sandals added depth to the medal as well as the extra touch of the sailboat. Makes a marathon in February truly feel like summer.

—*Maricar Korff*

13. Top of Utah. My favorite among the new medals this year. This light-hearted jewel captures the spirit of the “wilds of the Rockies” while reminding us of the folly that is long-distance running. The shoe-bound moose made me laugh. You have to love a medal that makes you feel that good, even after 26.2 miles!

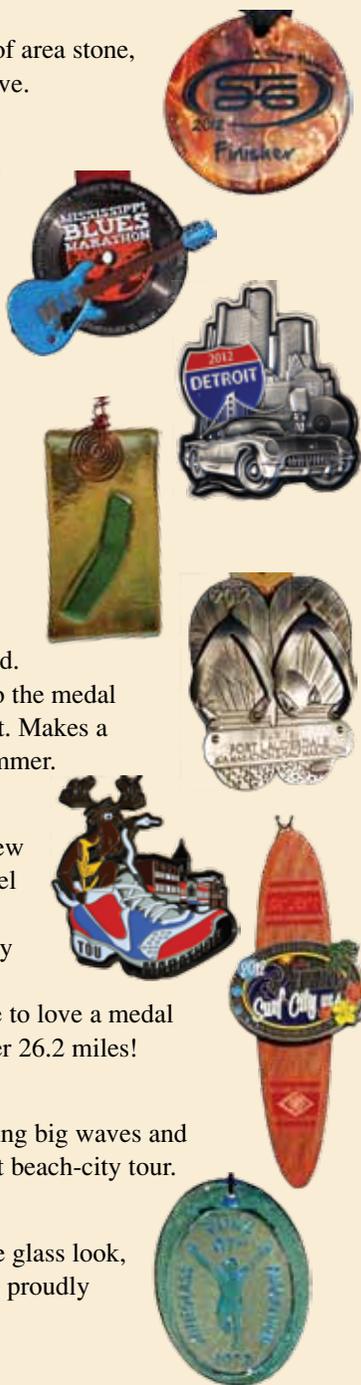
—*Rob Rayder*

12. Surf City. Who doesn't dream of catching big waves and surviving? A nice memento of this great beach-city tour.

—*Mike Bierner*

11. Wineglass. With the cool-blue, delicate glass look, this is one of my favorites that could be proudly worn as a special piece of jewelry.

—*Marshall Ulrich*



10. **Miami.** City, beach, key lime pie on Lincoln Street: this medal screams sexy!

—*Tammy Heathco*

9. **Disney.** Seeing Mickey automatically makes you feel like a kid again.

—*Ryan Smith*

8. **Big Sur.** I love how the style of the writing, “Big Sur” in red, stands out. Rawhide strings instead of ribbon makes this medal truly stand out—an original, beautiful medal.

—*Lisa Rini*

7. **Hartford.** Building and arch detail are excellent and the color scheme blends well.

—*Tim Collins*

6. **Flying Pig.** Front or hind, I give this medal a large OINK!

—*Jonathan Hughes*

5. **Route 66.** It will always be a top vote getter because of its great design with bold lettering and colors that jump out at you. Classic look in keeping with its name.

—*Doug Kurtis*

4. **Space Coast.** The shuttles may be retired, but we can fly around this marathon course and get one to wear. Nice.

—*Mike Bierner*

3. **Newport.** It’s fun, colorful, and I love the idea that it was made with local glass.

—*Allie Moore*

2. **MCM.** Unique shape. Great use of detail. Patriotic as well as symbolic.

—*Lisa Rini*



1. Portland. For a devoted follower of all things finisher's medals, this piece of artwork is in a class all by itself. It is professionally minted and is more coin than medal. The detail is incredible! When you hold it in your hand, it is so beautiful that you believe you are holding something really valuable and special. That is how I want to remember my marathon experience, as something valuable and special that I will still get goose bumps from 50 years from now. Only Portland has captured that feeling for me. Long live the king (of marathon medals, that is).

—*Rob Rayder*



Our 2012 panel

When **Mandy Barwell-Parker** (Canada) moved from England to Canada, she joined the Running Room in order to meet people. She fell in love with running and has now completed eight marathons, including Boston. Additionally, she has finished four half-Ironman and two Ironman races. A full-time teacher, Mandy has two daughters, ages 6 and 3. Because Mandy and her husband are triathletes, her daughters love running, swimming, and cycling, too!

Michael Bierner (Illinois) began running at age 12. He was a soccer player, and he would participate in cross-country just to stay in shape off-season. Since those early years, he has continued to run. Michael does not boast of great speed, but he enjoys running and has been in the middle of the pack for 45 years at every distance. Now 57, Michael has completed 64 marathons, ardently pursuing and collecting finisher's medals. Each medal in his collection is a prized possession.

Fifty-two-year-old **Tim Collins** works as a CPA in Vero Beach, Florida. He has been running marathons since age 37, when he ran the 1997 NYC Marathon; at that race, he was “bitten by the bug.” Fifteen years later, he has completed 68 marathons in 35 states and is hoping to run a total of 100 marathons in all 50 states before he hangs up his Sauconys. Tim has run Miami every year—10 years, and counting.

When **Mike Considine**'s (Iowa) dad passed away from cancer in 2001, his mother began running marathons as therapy to deal with the grief. Mike would carry his mom's water and nutrition, singing to and encouraging her during her runs. Thus, Mike, too, became a marathon runner. Mike founded a race to raise money for the

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Wounded Warrior Project and the University of Iowa Veterans' Association. At the young age of 20, Mike is race director for the Warrior Challenge, a full-time student at the University of Iowa, and a business owner, and he is currently deployed with the Air National Guard.

A Midwesterner at heart, having grown up in Nebraska, **Deanna Culbreath** calls New York City home. Her favorite races are 100-milers on trails. In 2009, Deanna ran her first marathon, which was ING Miami. After crossing the finish line, she was hooked. Though she has run numerous races, she continues a personal tradition: for a week after each event, she carries the finisher's medal as a tangible reminder of what she can achieve when she chases a dream.

Katherine Gifford (California) began running at age 30. She was out of shape, and she entered a local 5K sponsored by her company. Now, seven years later, she has run many races of varying distances (5K to 100K). Katherine is a proud member of the Brooks I.D. (Inspire Daily) team and a pace-group leader for the California International Marathon.

At age 14, **Nadia Ruiz Gonzales** (California) ran her first marathon alongside her dad. She was immediately hooked on the life-changing experience. Now, 14 years later, she has completed three Ironman events and 85 marathons. With great love for the sport and lifestyle, Nadia has devoted herself, in the last three years, to speed training, bringing her marathon PR from 4:00-plus down to 3:16:05.

Michael Harmon (Arkansas) is the Senior Staff Attorney at the Arkansas Supreme Court Office of Professional Conduct. When he's not exhorting attorneys to do the right thing, Michael can be found running races, ranging from 5K to 50K, all across the Southeast. Michael is a member of the Little Rock Roadrunners Club, the Arkansas Ultra Running Association Club, and the Marathon Maniacs, and he is a new member of the 50 States Marathon Club.

Tammy Heathco (Maine) has been running competitively for 26 years, starting in high school and continuing through college. Since then she has participated in many road races. Over the last five years, marathoning has become her passion, and she has completed 10 marathons. A school counselor and the proud mother of two teenagers, she loves the challenge of a marathon. In particular, Tammy enjoys destination races with her husband or friends.

As the founder of RunningRats Run Community, based in Toronto, Ontario, **Jonathan Hughes** (Canada) provides leadership for the social running group. He has run 10 marathons and 25 half-marathons. His marathons include Toronto Goodlife (three times), Toronto Scotiabank, Ottawa (twice), Chicago, New York, Washington, and London. The motto of the RunningRats is to "Run with the Spirit." Jonathan has his own personal motto: "No person can rise above that for which they aim."

For 12 years, **Ryan Kohler** (Idaho) has been a runner, logging about 50 to 60 miles weekly. Having participated in eight marathons, he continues to try to improve his

marathon pace. The father of five children, Ryan juggles family and work along with running and other hobbies. He loves to eat and live healthily.

Maricar Korff (New Jersey) is a high school chemistry teacher by day and a marathon woman on weekends. Often seen at marathons wearing her Statue of Liberty hat, Maricar is known as the Liberty Lady. She has run 91 marathons and is aiming for 100. She runs to inspire her students and to teach them about amazing people she meets. “Lady Liberty” always appreciates good bling at races.

Doug Kurtis (Michigan) holds the world record for the most sub-2:20 marathons. He completed 202 marathons, having won 40 of them. At age 42, Doug was the masters winner of the Boston Marathon, with a time of 2:15:47. Additionally, he has served as a director for two races in Detroit, a course designer for several races, and an event director for Metro Detroit Youth Day. A writer for running columns and magazines, Doug is also a frequent speaker. His honors include membership in the RRCA Hall of Fame (1998) and being named the #1 Michigan Amateur Athlete of All Time (2001).

Real estate agent **Maria Leightley** (Virginia) started running only four years ago when a group of friends—all working mothers—celebrated a milestone birthday and decided it was time to take care of themselves for a change. First they trained for a 5K, then a 10K, next a 10-miler and a half-marathon, and before they knew it, the whole group was running a full marathon. Next month Maria will run in Puerto Rico with the “Hot Mamas.” Her dream is to still be running marathons with them when she is in her 70s.

A high school art teacher, **Hannah Merle** (Kansas) started running consistently in 2006, when she completed her first half-marathon. Since then she has raced several other half-marathons and nine marathons, with NYC being her favorite. Hannah recently finished the Columbus Marathon. Her love for running has become one of her passions. Hannah’s motto is this: Live to run, run to live.

Allie S. Moore (Utah) started running in eighth grade and immediately fell in love with the sport. She enjoys training and racing year-round for every distance, from the 5K to the marathon, though she prefers the marathon. Allie has completed 24 marathons to date—most memorably, the Boston Marathon in 2008. She loves to travel and see new places, especially if she can do it on foot, in the form of a race!

A mother of two girls, **Robin Nichols** (Massachusetts) has been running for five years. She has finished 18 marathons and has qualified for Boston twice. Currently, Robin is training for her first Ironman, which she will complete in July before starting graduate school in the fall. Robin is an active blogger at www.westfordmommy.com.

A chemist and sales manager, **Mark Payne** (Utah) was a competitive runner in elementary school. Thirty-three years later, at the urging of his wife, he decided to get back into the sport. After 19 attempts, Mark improved his marathon time from 4:22:05 to 2:43:16. He trains with the Utah-based Runagades Running Team and is an active blogger on Fastrunningblog.com. He has two young boys with a third on the way, and he is trying hard to stay ahead of them in footraces.

Robert Rayder, MD, has run over 70 marathons and ultras since his first in 2008. He unabashedly runs races that either are the most insane or offer the best bling. Rob started his photographic career by taking shots of challenging medical conditions that required special close-ups and unique lighting conditions as part of his role as a clinical professor of medicine for the University of Tennessee. He now uses those same skills to photograph finishers' medals from all over North America. Rob lives in Memphis with his three children and his wife, Christina, whose bravery and poise while battling breast cancer is more inspirational than any marathon ever could be.

Lisa Rini (Virginia) ran her first race, a local 5K, in 2008. Surprisingly, she placed third in her age group. One year later, she ran her first marathon (Marine Corps Marathon) and came close to qualifying for Boston. In 2010, she did indeed qualify, and she brought home her first Boston marathon finisher's medal in 2011. Lisa is proud to be a Brooks I.D. (Inspire Daily) member. She has two children, ages 9 and 7, and she is a busy blogger, active also in social media.

An expert on running, form, and fitness, **Ryan Smith** (Kentucky) completed both his BA and MS at the University of Kentucky with an emphasis on exercise physiology. A running coach and certified personal trainer, Ryan is also a professional in functional movement screening. Currently serving as vice president of the Runners' Club of Greater Cincinnati, Ryan is active in running and triathlon communities, in teaching proper running form through clinics, and in private training.

Marshall Ulrich (Colorado) is an elite extreme-endurance athlete and an accomplished speaker, author, trainer, and guide. Called the "Endurance King" by *Outside* magazine, he has finished 126 ultramarathons averaging over 125 miles each, climbed to the top of the highest mountain on every continent, and completed 12 expedition-length adventure races. At the age of 57, Marshall clocked the third-fastest run across America—from San Francisco to New York City—which he wrote about in his book, *Running on Empty*. He is a record four-time winner of the Badwater Ultramarathon and has crossed Death Valley on foot, in July, a record 25 times.

Marathon Maniac **Steve Walters** (Oregon) is the editor of the Maniac newsletter. He has run more than 175 marathons and ultramarathons, of which 54 marathons were in one year. Steve's current quest is to run a marathon in all 50 states within five years. Thus, his nickname is "Marathon Freak."

Despite being born with a clubfoot, **Matthew Weaver** (Oklahoma) was very athletic in high school as a swimmer and, during his military service, as a runner. Over the course of seven years of not running, however, Matthew gained excessive weight, getting to over 300 pounds. Three years ago, he returned to running and now leads groups for local running stores. He has run several marathons, almost a dozen half-marathons, and two triathlons in the last year. 

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