

Stepping It Up

Race directors are listening to the running community.

CARA McLAURIN ESAU

Back in my day, we had to walk to and from school, uphill both directions, in 15 feet of snow. Even worse, we had to do any necessary research at the library using actual *books*. And it was painstaking. If we needed to seek opinions from others, we had to conduct surveys in person or on the phone. Now such labor is no longer necessary—not even among the race directors of popular marathons when they are brainstorming their latest medal designs. Some wise race directors do the same as young whippersnappers do these days: they turn to social media outlets for help. Social media is proving to be a boon for race directors (RDs) who want to improve their medal design to win the hearts and loyalties of their runners.

Staying ahead of the pack

The competition in 2013 was a two-horse race, with A1A Lauderdale's sea horse edging past Surf City by a nose to become the first two-time number one medal. Innovative finisher's-medal designs emerged more than ever in 2013, and you, the plugged-in running community, had much to do with it. Known for its locket-style medals, A1A makes effective use of social media in its medal design. A1A has a loyal Facebook following, and the fans eagerly await the unveiling of medal ideas along with the opportunity to vote online for their favorites. According to race director Matt Lorraine, the race committee developed a shortlist of medal ideas—a sea horse, starfish, dolphin, and palm tree—that were then put to a vote on Facebook. After narrowing the list down to two options, they created the designs, posted them again, and took another vote. The sea horse easily won.

A1A's locket also won the hearts of our panel. One panelist enthusiastically said, "This marathon has taken the locket idea and elevated it to new heights year after year. The sea horses are beautiful and add an artistic flare. And the locket thing is just nifty." Brass with gold on the outside and silver with gold on the inside, two sea horses encircle the locket. Inside are palm trees, starfish, and of course runners, with the words "A1A finisher." According to Lorraine, "Uniqueness

has always been a main goal . . . we work hard at setting the bar higher. Having the ocean as our backdrop helps to fuel the creative ideas. Mother Nature has blessed us with so many things to emulate: seashells, crabs, sea horses, turtles.”

It’s a good thing that A1A has a whole network of runners contributing to ideas because, unlike most races, the race committee’s goal is to come up with a new idea every year. Most races either use the same medal or they tweak their existing design, but for A1A, it’s entirely different each time with just one theme in common: sea life. A1A has a picturesque course that starts in the downtown Fort Lauderdale area and follows along the ocean for miles with breathtaking, unobstructed views to its famous finish. Its motto, “Where the Ocean Is Your Finish Line,” hints at the beautiful end of the course—right at the beach.

The 2013 running was the eighth year of the A1A Marathon. Its inaugural date was supposed to have been the third weekend of November 2005. Instead, a hurricane—extremely rare for November—blew out the event that year, and it had to be rescheduled to Presidents’ Day weekend 2006. The timing was ideal for runners who wanted to make the race into a minivacation, since most people have that Monday off. Thus it has been run on Presidents’ Day weekend every year since then. Runners love this race—the scenery, the swag, the postrace party, and, of course, the amazing medals! Lorraine says, “People can’t resist picking up the medals, opening them, and closing them. Usually people will call over their friends to come and check them out.”

In honor of Boston

Another major winner is the Mother Road Marathon (MRM), scoring #5 among the winning medals. In 2010, MRM’s medal was voted #20—pretty impressive for its inaugural year. In 2013, MRM stepped into the spotlight with its innovative design—a right shoe featuring real laces. Our panel loved those laces! Those who ran MRM loved the medals too, proclaiming that it was the “coolest-looking medal I’ve gotten so far” and “the most unique medal ever.”

MRM runs through three states, all along historic Route 66. Runners’ feet actually touch the original Route 66 pavement that has never been resurfaced since its construction in 1926. Race director Carrie Puffinbarger and her team love it when runners select MRM as their first marathon or half-marathon, and they recognize such runners with a first-timer charm that can be added to the finisher’s medal. Puffinbarger says, “We always strive to have a unique design that is appealing to the runners as well as relevant to the history of our course. This year we looked at a play on ‘Get your kicks on Route 66.’” The race committee had intended to present 2014 finishers with a left shoe to match the 2013 right shoe. Sadly, though, the race was supported solely by a municipality that was losing money on the event, and thus MRM has been discontinued for now. Puffinbarger hopes

to find partnership opportunities to resurrect the race. The loyal MRM runners are holding out for that left shoe.

Whether it was subconscious or an intentional tribute, several 2013 marathons used Boston colors in their medal designs. A definite theme emerges when you gather together the medallions of Pikes Peak, Quad Cities, Glass City, Ventura, Portland, and, of course, MRM. The proud and beloved Boston colors—blue and gold—remind runners of the tragedy of the 2013 Boston Marathon, the courage of athletes and spectators who were there, and the solidarity we share in the running community. The reverse side of Tupelo’s medal reads, “TRC Remembers Boston.” Race director Mike Lail says, “My plan was simple. Remember those who were there . . . it was just the right thing to do.” The Portland Marathon, whose artful medal has been in the top 25 for five consecutive years, also commemorated Boston with its theme song “Sweet Caroline” and a moment of silence during which, among the thousands gathered at the start of the race, you could hear a pin drop.

Indeed, the devastating bombing on April 15, 2013, shocked all Americans, but runners felt a particular connection, a special sorrow, and a desire to stand with Bostonians—or, more accurately, to run alongside them. The tragic event stirred in us our love for the oldest continuously run marathon in the world, our passion for the sport of running, and our deeply felt patriotism. If you are one of those social media whippersnappers, you probably experienced and participated in the outflow of emotion and support on websites. If you are not involved in the techie world, you can see how our panel demonstrated the love of country and of Boston (standing at #12) in voting for the top 25 medals of 2013.

In honor of our military

Medals that reflected patriotism and service resonated with our panel. It was the first year that the finisher’s medals of four military marathons were in our top 25. In fact, each branch of the military was represented among the winners. In its 38th year, the Marine Corps Marathon was chosen #4, with its bold eagle, globe, and anchor. This is the fourth time the Marine Corps Marathon has been in our top four. The inaugural Navy Marathon wowed the panel, coming it at an impressive #9. Its medal features stars and stripes, an eagle, and a Navy vessel, and it bears the phrase, “Running for a Cause.”

With the US flag as a backdrop, an airplane soars across the brilliant gold medallion that the finishers of the Air Force Marathon received. It ranked #21, and panelist Brian Kelly said, “There is something to be said for the reverence to service and nationalism in the medal.” The Soldier Marathon (#25) features dog tags on a chain and a soldier saluting. Our panel loved the creativity. According to panelist Noah Moore, “I would totally wear this one around for days after a race. The dog tags are really unique and make this a top medal.”

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Another race with an extremely popular medal that shouts love of country is the Space Coast Marathon. Always a beautiful medal, it has been in our top 25 for three years, but in 2013, its sparkling red stars, white clouds, and blue skies made a majestic, patriotic statement.

In the running

Not all winning medals tugged at our heartstrings; some tickled our funny bones. Flying Pig (#3) has been in the top 25 for five consecutive years. It consistently endears itself not just because, well, it's a cute flying pig but also because of the reverse side—the hind end, which panelists get a kick out of every year. Another *five for five* medal is Surf City's. With sunshine, palm trees, and tropical flowers, all mounted on a surfboard, this medal makes us want to hit the beach, even if we don't know how to surf.

Many medals stepped it up in 2013; some have been among the top 25 in the past, and some won for the first time. Running for the Bay has been in the top 25 since its inception in 2010, coming in this time at #20. Panelists loved Mississippi Blues (#6) for the fourth straight year with its guitar and, as a clever touch, a real guitar pick. As everyone knows, "Disney does all things well," and that includes its medals; Disney was #8. Newport (#25) and Detroit (#22) have both been in the top 25 four times out of the five that the contest has been running. The newcomers to the list included Day of the Dead (#10), Dust Bowl (#14), Maui (#15), and Catalina Island (#19).

As recently as 1982, only two marathons presented their runners with finisher's medals: Boston and New York City. My goodness, how things have changed! Here we are, just 30 years later, with hundreds of marathons awarding medals to their finishers. And they are not mere tokens: 2013 was possibly the best year yet in producing high-quality medals full of creativity, color, patriotism, and cleverness. RDs are tapping into the insights of runners through social media and really paying attention to what runners love in a design, and as a result medals are more beautiful—and more exciting to earn—than ever. Healthy competition is thriving in the world of medal making; just like the athletes themselves, race directors are stepping it up.

Medal submissions for 2014

Race directors, please e-mail close-up pictures of your marathon medals to medals@marathonandbeyond.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 e-mail and ask us for our mailing address.

The 2013 Winners

Top Canadian Medal. Quebec City

Canadian honorable mention: Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary

U.S. honorable mention: Gopher Attack, Leading Ladies', Miami, Myrtle Beach, OC, Providence, Reggae, RnR San Antonio, Texas, and Top of Utah

25. Two-way tie:

Soldier. I would totally wear this one around for days after a race. The dog tags are really unique and make this a top medal. The extra touch of using dog-tag chains was super cool. —*Noah Moore*

Newport, Oregon. It always has a special meaning when your medal is a locally made product. —*Chuck Mikkelson*

24. E. T. Full Moon Midnight. Two words: glowing alien! This is such a cool medal. It fits the race theme, and it's just a freaky-looking medal. Love it! —*Noah Moore*

23. Wisconsin. The Blues Brother Cheese Head represents the blending of two iconic images and works perfectly to represent this Wisconsin-based Chicago-area marathon. Anyway, the green glass specs are ultra cool! —*Rob Rayder*

22. Detroit. I thought its artwork depicted the culture and history of the city—very nicely presented on a silver surface. Sort of rugged, like the city. —*Ted Barber*

21. Air Force. Another traditional medal with great detail. There is something to be said for the reverence to service and nationalism in the medal. —*Brian Kelly*

20. Running for the Bay. It is so stunningly beautiful when you first see it in the sunlight, you literally can't take your eyes off it. It shines with a brilliant blue glass



inlay that makes you believe that somehow a little piece of the bay is right there in front of you. When a finisher's medal can carry you away to another time and place every time you look at it, you know you have something special in your hands. It's that kind of reaction that makes Running for the Bay more than just any old piece of metal and glass. When this medal sparkles, it makes magic happen.—*Rob Rayder*

19. Catalina Island. I like the race medals that are getting away from metal. This is an awesome, colorful medal. And when you finish the Catalina Marathon, you've earned it.—*Steve Mackel*

18. Austin. Uniquely Texas. It integrates a mixture of urban and wildness.—*Yoshiko Jo*

17. Portland. To me, each arrow represents pieces of the athlete. The four arrows are not only directed at the center but also “inward,” which is where we must draw so much of our strength from. I think this medal sums all the “points” it takes to get to the center of who we are as endurance athletes, as well as to that finish line. I really like this medal.—*April Hartsok*

16. Big Sur. The handcrafted clay look and the apparently hand-painted lettering make this medal unique and attractive.—*Ron Little*

15. Maui. The island is well represented on this medal with the tail and palm tree.—*Kathy Swan*

14. Dust Bowl Series. The art on the front is hauntingly beautiful, but the five attached state icons on the back make this medal stand out for the accomplishment that it represents.—*Ron Little*

13. Space Coast. This marathon has taken the shuttle idea and elevated it to new heights with the first in a multiyear tribute to famous space shuttles. This first tribute medal is dedicated to the Columbia. The colors are vibrant. The



size is impressive. It is a worthy medal as a tribute both to the Columbia and to the spirit of the marathon.

—Rob Rayder

- 12. Boston.** I think that everyone would be excited and proud to earn one of these medals. Especially after the tragic events last year, I know more and more people are striving to run Boston and show that they are “Boston Strong.”—*Mary Klene*

- 11. RnR New Orleans.** It’s a party on your neck! The Mardi Gras beads sealed the deal and put this medal in the top 10 for me.—*Ron Little*

- 10. Day of the Dead Series.** Artfully captures the celebration of Dia de los Muertos.—*Deena Kastor*

- 9. Navy.** It has a little bit of everything: colors, a hanging piece, and it symbolizes America.—*Steve Mackel*

- 8. Disney.** Disney always finds a way to do all things well. And who else represents the current marathon trend of having fun than Mickey himself?—*Brian Kelly*

- 7. Little Rock.** One cannot help but feel lucky when looking at the horseshoe on this medal. Love the blue rhinestones!—*Kathy Swan*

- 6. Mississippi Blues.** Once again this down-home Southern race, held in the heart of the Delta, has captured the spirit of the Blues. The design is creative, with the ribbon serving as the guitar strap and an actual pick suspended from the base. It almost makes me wish I learned how to play the guitar.—*Rob Rayder*

- 5. Mother Road.** I love the real laces and color on this one. It’s the most unique design I have ever seen.—*Ted Barber*

- 4. Marine Corps.** The eagle, globe, and anchor says Marine Corps.—*Dick Lipsey*



3. Flying Pig. It makes me feel like pigs can really fly. Seeing the hind side, this one would probably pass me.

—*Chuck Mikkelsen*

2. Surf City. I love how this medal is so uniquely different from all the rest. I'm sure many people want to do this race just to get this particular medal.

I love how it is an actual minisurfboard to go with the name and site of the marathon.—*Mary Klene*

1. A1A Lauderdale. I love the locket-style design, for it's what lies inside that becomes our strength in a marathon. The medal represents where our passion begins!

—*Jennifer Chadoir*



Our 2013 panel

Ted Barber started running regularly for fitness at the age of 47. In 2008 he ran his first half-marathon and has since run about 20 halves. In 2009 Ted ran Portland as his first marathon. He since completed three other marathons. Ted enjoys relays as well and will be running his seventh consecutive Hood to Coast relay in 2014. His wonder dog, Nola, is his regular training partner.

Brian Bellairs began running 5Ks in his late 40s to get in shape and find opportunity to compete. After he began coaching middle-school track, he signed up for his first marathon—mistakenly on Mount Hood! He then ran the Portland Marathon and qualified for Boston, which he ran with his daughter. Within 18 months, Bellairs completed nine marathons. He is a top realtor in Oregon and finds early-morning runs a great stress reducer.

A single mother of five children, **Jennifer Chadoir** began running eight years ago on her early-morning walk. Dealing with serious problems in her life, she found that the walk became cathartic and she began to run, bundled in a winter coat, jeans, and boots. She found running empowering and signed up for a half-

marathon. Running has become Jennifer's passion, and she is now a competitive athlete, placing first woman in many of her races.

Dawn Ciccone is an accomplished athlete and nutritional health counselor and has finished 18 marathons. In 2006, Dawn was struck head-on by an SUV while running. Told she would never walk normally or run again, she decided to prove the prognosis wrong and was able to resume racing and win her age division again. Her inspiring story is chronicled at *inbetweenathlete.com*.

Magdalena Donahue is an Olympic Trials marathoner and a graduate student working on a PhD in geology at the University of New Mexico. Inspired by her father, 1980 Olympic Trials champion Anthony Sandoval, Magdalena competed for the University of Oregon. A member of the Brooks ID (Inspire Daily) project and Powerbar Team Elite, she is excited to focus on returning to elite competition following the birth of her daughter.

A TV show host and model, **April Hartsook** is an Ironman athlete and ultradistance runner and cyclist. A personal trainer and life coach, she is an ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) ambassador for the Blazeman Foundation. At age 46, April has completed more than 25 marathons, 50 half-marathons, and 100 other endurance events across the world.

Lindsey Jasper began running at the age of 9 in local track meets. In high school she discovered her love for long-distance running. She has finished 20 marathons and is transitioning to ultraraces. A member of the Brooks ID team, she coaches high school cross-country in Dubuque, Iowa.

Originally from Japan, **Yoshiko Jo** is a professor at Swarthmore College. She has run the NYC marathon 12 times as a guide for blind Japanese runners. She has completed more than 100 marathons and ultramarathons and was first female finisher in the New Jersey 100-miler and the C&O Canal 100-miler in 2013.

Deena Kastor won the bronze medal in the 2004 Olympic Marathon and was the 2005 winner of the Bank of America Chicago Marathon and the 2006 winner of the Virgin London Marathon. She holds 24 US national titles in cross-country, track, and road racing and currently holds 10 American records from 5K to the marathon. Since 2008, Deena has been on the USA Track & Field Board of Directors, and she is currently the president of the Mammoth Track Club in Mammoth Lakes, California.

Brian Kelly began running at the age of 38 to lose weight. Eight years later and 100 pounds lighter, Brian is still running. He persevered through three lower-leg stress fractures to complete the first of 13 marathons and has cut 48 minutes from his PR, now at 3:01:12. The proud father of two girls, Brian has been married for 20 years.

Mary Klene started running in seventh grade. She has finished 20 marathons, including Boston four times, and aims for many more. Mary competed four years at the University of New Hampshire. An assistant coach for a women's cross-country team for eight years, she now has a 6-month-old daughter. Mary works as a full-time second-grade teacher.

Dick Lipsey has been copyeditor of this magazine since meeting publisher Jan Seeley at the 2001 Atlanta Marathon. He is retired from careers as an Army infantry officer and as an Associated Press reporter and editor. He ran his first marathon in 1980 and is still trying to complete the 50-states circuit. He completed the 2012 JFK 50-mile, three years after receiving a cardiac pacemaker that allowed him to resume running.

Ron Little began running nine years ago and soon fell in love with it; he has completed 20 road marathons and almost as many trail ultramarathons. For two years, Ron was assistant director of the Half Moon Bay International Marathon. He is married and the father of a wonderful daughter.

Steve Mackel has completed more than 30 marathons, including Athens and Berlin, and numerous ultramarathons and triathlons. He is a senior ChiRunning instructor and the head coach of the Sole Runners Full and Half-Marathon Training Programs. His favorite accomplishment in 2013 was reaching the summit of Mount Whitney.

Eddie Marion-Gerula of Winnipeg, Manitoba, started running three years ago because of the influence of his wife, Brenda. They joined the Regent Running Room, a running club in Canada, and have been adding up the miles ever since. Eddie also enjoys connecting with other runners on social media such as Canadian Runners, a Facebook group.

When **Danie Matusik**, a mother of five, began running in September 2011 to get into shape, she couldn't run even two miles! She ran her first full marathon in August 2012 and has since completed 18 half-marathons, 30 full marathons (including Boston twice), three 50Ks, a 50-miler, and various other distances.

Cathy Merra has founded and coached several youth cross-country teams in New Hampshire. She finished fourth in the 50-54 age group in the 2009 Boston Marathon in 3:11:59 and again placed fourth in 2010 in 3:10:04. She is currently the head coach of the Merrimack High School girls' cross-country team.

Chuck Mikkelsen started running about 10 years ago as a way to spend more time with his wife. He got involved with the Oklahoma City Running Club marathon training program and eventually became vice-president, president, and a board member. He has completed more than 30 marathons and is almost halfway to running a marathon in all 50 states.

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Noah Moore began running six years ago and has lost more than 100 pounds. He became a certified running coach and now coaches the MooreOnRunners. He has completed more than 20 marathons and ultramarathons. Noah's greatest accomplishment is being the father of the late Peyton Moore, who, in nine short years, motivated and inspired countless runners.

Louise Rachlis started running at age 50 in Ottawa, Canada. She has completed many half-marathons, the 30K Around the Bay in Hamilton (eight times), and the Beck's Light Challenge in Tampa along with 30 marathons. She is the author of three books: *A Matter of Dreams*, *20 Steps*, and *Feeling Good: Life Lessons from My Friends*. Louise has also contributed to *Marathon Stories* by Linda Wagar and to *Chicken Soup for the Soul: O Canada The Wonders of Winter: 101 Stories About Bad Weather, Good Times, and Great Sports*.

Robert Rayder, MD, started photographing various medical conditions as part of his teaching mission for the University of Tennessee. At age of 40, Rob undertook long-distance running. In the five years since, Rob has run 86 marathon and ultramarathons. When Paul Gentry launched his website, *262medals.com*, Rob saw an opportunity to combine his two passions into a single endeavor. Rob partnered with Paul (and Cara McLaurin Esau) in a collaboration that would ultimately culminate in *Marathon & Beyond's* annual Top 25 marathon medals contest. Rob has taken many thousands of pictures of countless different medals from all over. His collection of finishers' medals has grown to be one of the largest in the world.

Keith Reynolds is a software developer who realized that years of sitting in front of a monitor had to be balanced with activity. Keith completed 12 half-marathons in two years and ran his first marathon—the Rock 'n' Roll Savannah Marathon—on his birthday in November 2013.

Larry Savitch is a personal trainer from Florida, New York, who began running in his late 30s. In the 11 years since, he has run more than 110 races from 5K to 26.2 miles. He has completed 20 half-marathons and three marathons, including the 2013 NYC marathon.

Kathy Swan began running at 40 when girlfriends from her church encouraged her to finish a 5K. She has now completed several 10Ks and half-marathons with the same inspirational girlfriends. Kathy ran her first marathon and destination race in March 2013. 

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