

## Freihofer's man on the run

By **PETE IORIZZO**, Staff writer

[Click byline for more stories by writer.](#)

First published: Sunday, May 25, 2008

Troy - Regan is singing.

Freddie Freihofer, we think you're swell.

Freddie, we love the stories you tell.

Regan's voice is touching the jingle's highs and lows, growing louder with each verse, as he warbles "The Freddie Freihofer Show" song for a co-worker and a visitor to his Troy office.

Regan, the 55-year-old race director for the Freihofer's Run for Women, is giddy.

To those who know Regan best, he seems in a constant state of excitability. He says, "You can't stop moving, or you might as well die." Regan is in perpetual motion -- a dizzying dervish of activity slowed neither by the heap of papers that litters his desk nor the clumsy electronic organizer clipped to his belt.

Regan, like the elite runners who compete in his race, knows no pause button. For 365 days a year for the past 27 years, he has organized and promoted the Freihofer's, a 5-kilometer race through downtown Albany that attracts thousands of Everywomen and a handful of the world's best runners.

Under Regan's fostering, the 30-year-old race has blossomed from small community event to showcase of world-class ability, attended by tens of thousands. Like Regan, the race always has been pliable, ready for change. But to stop and analyze its past would contradict Regan's style. He always keeps his focus forward, on Saturday, the next Freihofer's.

He is getting excited.

We love your cookies, your bread and your cakes.

We love everything Freddie Freihofer bakes!

"That's how it goes, right?" he asks.

Regan is busy. Ten days before the race, Regan's schedule includes an hour-long conference call at 8 a.m., an interview with a reporter, another interview in a television studio, a meeting, some errands and tending to the 100 or so e-mails he receives each day.

But he's not complaining. Outside his wife, Terri, and teenage daughters, Claire and Lilly, the Freihofer's is his life's joy. Asked if he could imagine any other occupation, Regan pauses, then decides, "Well, nothing pops into my head, so I guess the answer is no."

There is irony in Regan's answer. His relationship with running and the Freihofer's began not with a courting but through simple serendipity.

A native of Troy and graduate of Hudson Valley Community College, Regan first worked in Connecticut as a welder in the navy's submarine program. He returned here in 1979 to take over a third-generation family business, Regan Washer and Appliance.

Around the same time, Regan fractured his back in a ski accident. Doctors suggested he strengthen it through running, kindling his lifelong love for the sport. By his mid-20s, Regan was running marathons -- at a pace of 6 minutes, 20 seconds a mile.

He became involved in organizing the short-lived Heritage Trail Marathon in the late 1970s and one year directed a 10k to go with it. Regan's 10k raised about \$4,000 for the Rensselaer County Big Brothers and Big Sisters program. His passion for running coupled with his natural enthusiasm gave him a knack for promotion.

A year later, Regan volunteered as a finish-line coordinator for the fledgling Freihofer's. This time he learned through failure. On a warm March morning, race organizers ran out of water, leaving hundreds of women suffering heatstroke. Dehydrated, overheated runners vomited all across Empire State Plaza.

"I promised myself that if I ever had an opportunity to have an effect on this, to make sure it never happens again, I'd take it," Regan says.

A year later, he did -- Freihofer's asked Regan to take over as race director.

Regan dodged other obstacles through the years. Mostly, he adapted. When the Freihofer's ceased to be the 10k national championship in 1990, Regan adopted the 5K national championship instead.

Three years ago, he opened prize money to international runners, turning the event global.

In 2005, the first year Regan attracted elite international runners, many committed and then pulled out because Regan invited a runner who previously had been suspended for doping. The problem grew a year later, when an elite runner ripped Regan and the event because that year Freihofer's didn't test for drugs.

Regan confronts controversy with the same full-speed-ahead approach. He admits now he made a mistake in 2006 by not spending a few thousand dollars for drug testing. But he refuses to regret.

"Look at the good that's come out of that," he says. "The realization of how important it is to test for drugs has sunk in. If I did it then, would that ever have sunk in? I don't know. Maybe the crisis just would have been delayed."

The race hardly is in crisis now. Regan's energy resonates through the 400-plus volunteers he helps organize and through the more than 3,000 runners expected to compete, his associates say.

"A lot of race directors, they're nice people, but they're very straight-laced and serious," says James O'Brien, who does color commentary for the Freihofer's on television.

"George can be involved in the details," O'Brien says. "But he also sees the big picture -- to have fun. If the race director isn't having fun, no one is having fun."

And Regan is having fun.

He plans to begin grooming his heir soon, though he expresses no plans to give up his job.

"Who," he asks, "could do this job better than me?"

Few boast his experience. A longtime national bigwig with USA Track and Field, Regan helped forge national and international change. In the 1980s, he was at the forefront of a successful movement to get the women's marathon into the Olympics.

Though Regan served on various men's committees as well, promoting women's racing became his focus. In 1980, he received The Athletic Congress women's long-distance running "Woman of the Year" Award, though the group called the honor a "service award" for the sake of the plaque that still hangs on Regan's office wall.

"George always had the growth of women's racing in mind," says Nina Kuscsik, winner of the 1972 Boston Marathon, who collaborated with Regan on various projects and committees. "He was an advocate and a supporter."

Regan continues to forecast change for the Freihofer's. He expects future races might look more like a festival, with even more sideshows and attractions.

"It puts a lot more pressure on us, but nothing stays static in life -- everything is moving," Regan says. "The race will change."

Regan will be there as it happens, a blur of motion in his own right.

Pete Iorizzo can be reached at 454-5425 or by e-mail at [piorizzo@timesunion.com](mailto:piorizzo@timesunion.com).

All Times Union materials copyright 1996-2008, Capital Newspapers Division of The Hearst Corporation, Albany, N.Y.

[HOME](#) | [CONTACT US](#) | [SUBSCRIBE TO NEWSPAPER](#) | [HOW TO ADVERTISE](#) | [PRIVACY RIGHTS](#) | [COPYRIGHT](#) | [CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT](#)

**HEARST** newspapers