

Giving time to keep time

Glover, Freihofer's volunteers watch clocks, secure finish

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First published: Tuesday, May 27, 2008

The 1985 Freihofer's Run for Women ended in a tie -- at least as far anyone could tell. Betty Springs and Francie Larrieu-Smith crossed the line with so little separation that, without the aid of video replay or photographs, race officials couldn't say who finished first. The runners split the prize money.

"It was just that close," said Pat Glover, the Freihofer's longtime finish-line coordinator.

Glover has seen plenty of other memorable finishes from his Madison Avenue perch. He recalls watching Lynn Jennings motor away from the pack year after year to finish far ahead of the field. And he remembers the excitement of Cheri Goddard-Kenah, of Saratoga Springs, edging Libbie Hickman in 1999.

This Saturday, Glover and his team of about 70 other volunteers plan to be back patrolling the Freihofer's 28-foot long finish line. As the crew responsible for logging finish times, sidestepping chaos as 3,000-plus women cross the line and delivering water, they're some of the event's most valuable personnel.

"Over the years the event really has built up from what used to be a small women's event to a national or even world-class event," Glover said. "Anytime you're a part of something as big as that, it's a neat feeling."

Volunteers like Glover comprise the vast majority of the Freihofer's production team. Kathy Carrigan Chant, the Freihofer's volunteer coordinator for the past 27 years, expects this year's race to include more than 400 volunteers. Chant is among them.

Volunteers handle everything from stuffing envelopes in the months before the race to enforcing rules at the start and finish lines. Only George Regan, the event's director, and a handful of staff members are full-time paid employees.

"There are volunteers who've been involved with this race more than 20 years," Chant said. "We have a very faithful group. There's a lot of camaraderie. Maybe we only see them once a year, but they'll come to put out refreshments or stuff the packets."

The 61-year-old Glover, a Clifton Park resident who serves as vice president of long-distance running for USA Track and Field Adirondack, began volunteering for the Freihofer's near its inception in 1978. He's since seen the technology used to record times undergo major improvements.

For years, Glover and his crew scrambled, with their stopwatches in tow, to match up runners with their appropriate times. The scene became hectic around the 25-minute mark, when hundreds of runners finished within seconds of each other.

"We're concerned with not just the big shots but getting everybody else across the line," Glover said. "The concentration is much greater when you have people doing 7 1/2- to 10-minute miles."

After the 1985 race, Glover helped install video cameras above the finish line, to ensure no more ties. By 2000, the Freihofer's switched to a product called ChampionChip, a computer chip attached to runners' shoelaces that records times as they cross a wire laid across the finish.

"Our job has gotten significantly easier because of the chip," Glover said.

Now, one of Glover's greatest responsibilities is crowd control. He and other finish-line volunteers help move runners outside the finish-line area after they cross, avoiding logjams. A crew also distributes water to all Freihofer's finishers.

Because he sees only the last few hundred yards of the race live, Glover said he watches the race on videotape during the annual volunteer party. He also recruits new volunteers all the time, telling them, "I can offer you the best seats in the house."

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