

WICKED 10th ANNIVERSARY

Thank you to Alison and Elaine for putting this night together- especially Alison for coming up with the idea, which is why this event is nicknamed "Alison's ball".

As one of the founders of the Club, along with Mike Toomey, I was asked to give some background of how the Wicked Running Club all began.

Back in 2002, a woman walked into my office at Salem Park & Recreation and wanted to start a running program. That woman was Jen Toomey who was ranked 3rd in the country, sponsored by New Balance and in training for the Olympics. I knew her husband Mike, also a runner, from Lynn English and from my Boys & Girls Club of Lynn road races. Obviously I thought her idea was a great one, and I said YES!

Mike & Jen's first clinic was held on Salem Common with about 20 participants, some of who remain members today. From that, Mike and I discussed starting a running Club in Salem, and held an informational meeting at Winter Island with about 50 people in attendance.

Thus, the Wicked Running Club was formed with Sherrie Feffer as our first President and about 20 members. Mike named the Club and designed our first logo- the famous black cat with the disjointed head – and coined our mission statement: "We walk, we run, we generally have fun".

In that first year, the Club grew to about 50 members through word of mouth and connections made from the running clinics. We were still a small Club, so most members knew each other.

Our weekly Club run was Saturdays at 8 am from Forest River Park, which always started with the 'circle of love'. All paces and distances were welcome as we tried to ensure that no one ran alone. I posted a sign that is still there today. Several offshoot runs developed, including a Monday night run started by John Mahoney called "slowest runner sets the pace". John kept that race going for many years and new members felt comfortable because of that run.

We added social events, and our first holiday party was at Winter Island. We held a yankee swap and Rachael Hunt gave out joke certificates like the Comeback Kid award and Wicked Stylish award. Everyone in the club wrote down something no-one would know about them and we tried to guess who it was- I shared that I was a dog judge, which stumped the room. These social events expanded to include summer family outing at Camp Naumkeag.

We eventually got our clothing line together with the help of Rich Tomlins who funded the initial inventory. Our first singlet was a Nike shirt with the black cat and the floating head. Over the years, the head found its way back to the neck, but the original singlet is still a collector's item. Around that time, I also proposed my famous "fine" for Wicked members who don't wear a logo shirt at a race.

Our first official Wicked Running Relay Team was at the Lake Winnepesaukee Relay in NH, consisting of then Salvation Army Director Scott Kelley, Rachel Hunt and her cousin Lucy Flood, Rich Tomlins, Beth O'Grady, Deana Hobbs, Charlie O'Donnell and myself. Over the years we grew to 6 teams, with some epic, but friendly, Club rivalries along the way.

The growing popularity of the Wicked Running Club increased interest in local running and brought racing back to the forefront in Salem. In 2003, I started the Wild Turkey 5 Mile run, now in its 11th year. The first race had 303 runners. Jenn shot the starters pistol and Mike won the race. He has never run again as he famously states he won't repeat a race he has already won once. In the old days, I would host "bag stuffing parties" which would get a huge member turnout. They were a lot of work, but also a lot of fun. Today, the Wild Turkey remains the largest road race on the North Shore.

A year or two later came the Derby Street Mile, and not long after that Wicked decided to start our own race. As I left for the meeting to pick a date, Beth said 'any date but January 1st please', and thus the annual New Years Day race became another holiday tradition. The name Frosty Four was the winning entry from Liz Touchette chosen from a Club contest.

As we grew, so did the outreach to our members and the community.

When Tim Short joined the Club, he went crazy setting up Wicked tables at every race for years, sometimes several races in one day. His enthusiasm for Wicked showed and the Club numbers took off. Eventually we exceeded 200 members.

Tim Short managed our website and social media, and Beth started the first stand-alone newsletter which became a big hit.

We started our scholarship committee, which awarded scholarships from the Frosty Four proceeds to deserving high school runners. That first year we gave out four \$500 scholarships, and it has since increased to a minimum of \$5000 total each year.

When you put on a race 10 years ago, everyone in Wicked would come. Wearing your singlet meant you had instant friends, and we'd greet each other "Hey Wicked!". Today, if you asked 10 people about their racing plans there are so many options you will likely get 10 different answers, but you will still hear the familiar cheer "GO WICKED!" at every race.

Over the years the Saturday morning group run sprouted some offshoots, including our Tu/Th morning Front Street run. Mia Poppe started a Thursday night run called No Rest for the Wicked, which starts on Salem Common and ends at the Engine House for pizza and beers, still going strong today.

One cold winter night, member Billy Shea told the Club about a new weekly race in Danvers. It looked like they pulled 8 big guys off bar stools to run. When I attended the 2nd week, they had grown to 12 runners. We all talked about how when the Lynn Woods Summer races began, this race will end. Well it never ended and continues to get strong numbers today. While it may not be an official Wicked run, many Wicked members attend regularly, and many D5K runners joined Wicked, thanks in part to some aggressive weekly recruiting by TR Ramsdell with the help of a few beers.

In short, this is how the Club was built:

A random visit to Park & Rec by Jen Toomey, a beer and an idea to start a running Club with Mike Toomey, the black cat logo with a disjointed head which eventually found its neck, weekly Wicked runs welcoming runners of all abilities and distances, and a great group of Club Members- many who have formed lifelong memberships through the Wicked Running Club.

Today we have about 300 members, many of who have made great progress in their running efforts over the years. Whether your goal was to improve your fitness, finish your first 5k race, a half marathon, a marathon, or even an ultra- odds are not only met or exceeded your goal, but you found a friend or two from wicked to help you along the way.

As we enter the next decade, I look forward to more members, more running goals achieved and more friendships formed.

Happy anniversary.... Go wicked!