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Run clubs gaining popularity

Group runs get you going when you don't want to.

*By Stephen Meyers
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A group of about 15 runners gathered in the back of the running store Wednesday evening, lacing up their shoes and casually talking with one another.

The runners, some young, some old, and more women than men, met at Runners Roost, No. 112, 2720 Council Tree Ave., Fort Collins, for their weekly Wednesday group run in south Fort Collins.

Among the group was a couple of Runners Roost racing team members, Ellie Peterson and Karen Bertasso. The pair finished 1-2 among women at this spring's Colorado Marathon and meet each week — or as often as they can — for the group run that attracts marathon winners and more novice runners like you and me.

"It can maybe be intimidating at first, but runners of all abilities show up to these," said Lynelle Lopez, a self-described, "slow" runner. "You'll find somebody to run and chat with and it's a lot of fun."

Bertasso moved to Fort Collins a year ago from New York, where she was a member of a large running club. Immediately, she started looking for group runs in Fort Collins.

"It definitely helped me meet people. Otherwise, I wouldn't know who to run with or where to go," said Bertasso, who met Peterson through weekly group runs. "It's also nice to have commitment. When you know that she's going to be here at 6, then you better be here, too."

While running is traditionally known as a solitary sport spent pounding the pavement alone with only your thoughts, there are benefits, many say, to running in a group, or joining a running club.

Thirty percent of responders to a recent Runner's World poll said they met their current running partner through a running club.

Fort Collins has a few running clubs, most notably the Fort Collins Running Club, which has been around since the early 1970s. For trail runners, there's the Fort Collins Trail Runners, which organizes the gnarly twice-monthly run up Towers Road in Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Read on for a Q&A with Felix Wong, the webmaster of and member of board of directors for the Fort Collins Running Club, on the benefits of joining a local running club, or jumping in for a group run.

Question: How did you get involved with the Fort Collins Running Club?

Answer: I have been a member of the FCRC for over seven years. When I first moved to the Fort, I was doing four or five marathons per year and was looking for people to train and stay motivated with. I was also searching for local low-key, low-cost races where I could test my speed each month. The FCRC provided both with lots of enthusiastic, encouraging folks and its signature Tortoise & Hare Race Series.

Q: How many members does the Fort Collins Running Club have?

A: Just under 250.

Q: Does the FCRC hold weekly runs?

A: The FCRC does host weekly runs that are seasonal. Right now we host a Thursday evening run at Cottonwood Glen Park, generally of 4-6 miles. It is more of a social run than a suffer fest. Usually no one is dropped or abandoned, especially newbies.

Q: What are those runs every week at the CSU track?

A: Jane Welzel organizes Tuesday night track workouts at the CSU Jack Christiansen Track, though it's not with the FCRC. Those are great as well, with dozens of people showing up for intense interval and sprint workouts. It can be difficult to call upon your reserves of guts and glory and push your body to its limits while running alone — especially when it is still 90 degrees outside — but is much more doable, and dare I say often fun, with other people.

Q: What are the benefits of joining a running club?

A: Joining a running club helps you stay motivated as enthusiasm by other runners is contagious. You can also tap into member's wealth of knowledge and ask for advice, be it for training, gear or recommended races.

In the FCRC's case, being a member also provides discounts to local running stores and select races, which pay for the \$20 annual membership fee very quickly. Being a member also gives you free entry into the Tortoise & Hare Race Series, which even includes breakfast.

Q: "But I'm not fast." I'm sure you hear that a lot. What do you say to people who might be intimidated by other runners?

A: I tell people who are afraid they are not "fast enough" that there is usually a great diversity of runners in any club — from the super speedy to total turtles —and that it is usually easy to find someone who runs at your pace (or would be willing to do so). Most runners know when there is a time to be social and when to be competitive, and a training run with newbies is generally not the time for the latter.

Sometimes the training runs are out-and-back so if a runner was lagging, he or she could just turn around early and the faster ones will eventually catch up. Some clubs even have a no-drop policy.

Q: What questions should people consider before joining a club, or going on a group run?

A: Questions people should consider before joining a club include what terrain they want to run on (e.g., the FCRC primarily runs on roads whereas there are other clubs that run mainly on dirt and rocky trails), their running goals (e.g., short vs. long distances; fitness vs. competition), fees and benefits, etc.

Xplore reporter Stephen Meyers covers the outdoors and recreation for the Coloradoan. Follow him on Twitter @stemeyer or Facebook.com/meyersreports.

Additional Facts

Local running clubs and group runs

Fort Collins Running Club

About: The original running club in Fort Collins, it organizes the Tortoise & Hare series of "handicap" races which allow racers of all abilities to compete.

Group runs: Seasonal. Currently, Thursday evening runs at Cottonwood Glen Park, generally of 4-6 miles.

Dues: \$20 for a single, \$30 for a couple and \$5 for each additional family member. Provides discounts to local running stores and select races.

Info: <http://fortcollinsrunningclub.org/>

Fort Collins Trail Runners

About: Organized by ultrarunners Nick Clark and Pete Stevenson, this group hits the trails in Horsetooth Mountain Open Space and Lory State Park.

Group runs: Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Tuesday is the more popular. It is the Trailhead to Trailhead Run from Reservoir Ridge, followed by burgers and beer at Trailhead Tavern in downtown Fort Collins. Thursdays alternate between Towers Road time trials and social runs beginning at

Pineridge Natural Area.

Dues: None

Info: <http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/FortCollinsTrailRunners/info>

The Fort Collins Running Meetup Group

About: Run through the popular social site, Meetup, this group meets at different times throughout the year to bring together runners of all abilities.

Dues: None

Info: www.meetup.com/running-207/

Jane Welzel's "Track Tuesdays"

About: Jane Welzel is a two-time Olympic Marathon Trials competitor and still trains like one. These training runs will kick your butt. About 30-50 people attend the weekly track workouts.

When: 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays

Where: CSU Jack Christensen Track. In late October/November, the runs shift to Grandview Cemetery

Info: <https://sites.google.com/site/janewelzel/bacon-strip>

Runner's Roost Wednesday runs

About: Generally, the runs are 4-6 miles run on road and bike paths, with about 15-30 people participating.

When: 6 p.m. Wednesdays

Where: Alternate every other week between Runner's Roost and Coopersmiths in Old Town, hmm, wonder why?

Info: www.runnersroost.com

Altitude Running Saturday runs

About: For the early weekend risers, these group runs feature several route options from 3 to 11 miles.

When: 8 a.m. Saturdays

Where: Altitude Running , 150 E. Harmony Road, Fort Collins

Info: www.altituderunning.com
