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David Solan: The medical tent is run like a triage center, very similar to an ER. An athlete is first evaluated when they cross the line. We have medical staff out there trying to determine what the issue may be. Then they'll see a triage nurse and that person will again take their vitals and try to figure out what department they need to go to.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Hey everybody and welcome to Set the Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners, presented by Peloton. I'm your host, Rob Simmelkjaer, the CEO of New York Roadrunners. And today we're going to go behind the scenes of some of New York Road Runners biggest races with some of the people who know them best, three members of this year's New York Road Runners Volunteer Hall of Fame at every single race. Becs Gentry, we always talk up the volunteers and-

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Becs Gentry: ... we do.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... now we get to talk to them. Some of the most loyal volunteers that we have ever had. And so as we welcome in Becs Gentry, my co-host and Peloton instructor, and this is going to be fun, Becs, because these races don't happen without the volunteers and it's going to be great to have a little time to speak to some of the legends in that space.

00:01:11

Becs Gentry: Absolutely. And they have been with New York Road Runners since Fred Lebow was running the organization. And it's so much history that we are about to hear about. We've got some funny stories and some real harking back to good times of running. I'm really excited for all of our listeners to hear from these three phenomenal humans.

00:01:35

Rob Simmelkjaer: I see some of these folks week in and week out. They've been doing it for years. So many of our volunteers, of course, come through the 9+ 1 Program and we love them. We love all of our volunteers. But these Hall of Famers are people who maybe started volunteering thinking it would be a one or a two-time thing, and they've just kept coming back year after year after year and we're so grateful to them. Looking forward to hearing some history and talking to them during, what is April Volunteer Month. That's right, it's Volunteer Appreciation Month in the month of April so excited to talk to them. And Becs, we had a bunch of

volunteers and runners out in Central Park this past weekend for the NYRR Retro 4- Miler.

00:02:17

Becs Gentry: I saw some outfits. I saw some outfits. I saw the New York Road Runners very fun Instagram video post. And the sun came out. That feels like a rarity in New York at the moment, so what a day for the 2025 New York Road Runners Retro 4- Miler. Wow.

00:02:36

Rob Simmelkjaer: It turned out to be a beautiful day. A lot of great spirit out there. People had a lot of fun. And the winners on Sunday, non- binary winner was Sean Rankin, Dashing Whippets, a time of 25.20. On the women's side, it was Alexandra Conway from Central Park Track Club Tracksmith 23.16 and the men's winner, Jeremy Arthur, Dashing Whippets Club, 20 minutes and 35 seconds. Some fast times-

00:03:01

Becs Gentry: Stellar times.

00:03:01

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... on a gorgeous day with some epic, epic fashion out there in Central Park. Congratulations to everybody who ran. It was a big race, about 8, 000 runners out there in Central Park.

00:03:14

Becs Gentry: (inaudible) .

00:03:14

Rob Simmelkjaer: Really, really nice day and glad everybody enjoyed themselves at the Retro Run. Becs, after we talk to our volunteers a little later in the show, Meb will be here with the Meb Minute, and today it's all about how to manage some rising temperatures. Thankfully, we're starting to see a little bit of warmth coming through.

00:03:31

Becs Gentry: Oh, yeah?

00:03:31

Rob Simmelkjaer: Just a little bit.

00:03:31

Becs Gentry: Really?

00:03:33

Rob Simmelkjaer: Just a little bit so far. But it's going to

get warmer, we know that will happen. And so how to manage those rising temperatures, that's what Meb will be talking about a little later on. But we've got volunteers coming at us.

00:03:46

Becs Gentry: Looking for new ways to keep you moving? Step into the strongest and fastest version of you with the Peloton app. Try a range of instructor-led workouts that push your current routine to the next level and track your progress in real-time metrics. Whether it's your first 5K or full marathon, Peloton has thousands of classes from outdoor runs, strength for runners, to yoga and stretching to choose from and support the runner you are. Try the app for free for 30 days. Download it now from the app store or Google Play. Terms apply. All access membership not included. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner for New York Road Runners.

00:04:26

Rob Simmelkjaer: All of our volunteers at New York Road Runners events are incredibly important, but none are more important than our medical volunteers. And David Solan has spent more than 35 years safeguarding the health of runners as a medical volunteer with New York Road Runners becoming an essential part of the marathon's medical team since 1989. From his years at mile 25, helping runners push through that final mile, to coordinating care at the crucial finish line 10, David has guided thousands of athletes safely across the TCS New York City Marathon course. He's not only dedicated to countless race days to helping others, but also has mentored a new generation of medical volunteers sharing his expertise and passion. And this year David makes history as the first athletic trainer inducted into the New York Road Runners Volunteer Hall of Fame. David, it is great to have you with us. Welcome.

00:05:21

David Solan: Oh, thank you for the invite.

00:05:22

Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. Your contributions are massive, David. People who run our races all have the goal, of course, of not ending up in the medical tent. That's not a place anybody plans to visit when they train or show up at the starting line for a race, but some of them do. And that is one of the most important parts of our operations here at New York Road runners. At every race, David, I'll usually pop my head in there once or twice to see how things are going. And you started doing this back in 1989,

which is quite a run. If you can tell people listening, what has changed? What was it like in 1989 versus now in terms of what happens in our medical tents?

00:06:09

David Solan: It's funny because back in '89 when I first started I was at the 24-mile mark and I looked at our tent and the supplies that we had, and I think we had about 100 or 200 band-aids, maybe 100 gauze pads. And I'm thinking, wait a minute, this is the biggest event in the world and we're working on bare bones here. But it worked out well. We did what we had to do with what we had. After so many years out on the course, I decided to come indoors and luckily they invited me in the triage tent at the finish line, and that's really my home. My expertise is exertional heatstroke so they had me overseeing the heat deck, and that's really in my element right there.

00:06:57

Becs Gentry: Oh, my gosh, I cannot even begin to imagine the moments you've had, be it hopefully some joyful ones of seeing people come in and going back out and finishing off or to the, I'm sure very sad and heartbreaking moments over the past 35 years of doing this. Before I go any further, thank you. As somebody who runs these races, thank you for being out there and keeping us all safe.

00:07:25

David Solan: No, you're very welcome.

00:07:25

Becs Gentry: What is the one thing, I suppose, aside from the bare bones minute amount of bandages you had back in 1989, what has been something that's really surprised you about your experience in this role?

00:07:41

David Solan: Well, I'll tell you what, again, I'm going to refer back to the 24-mile mark. Most of the time when runners reach that point, they can make the rest of the way through and it's a lot of encouragement and clapping and keep going, keep going type thing. A lot of them want to come over and get stretched because their muscles start to go into spasm. But the key part is not to do that. You want to keep moving because once they stop and you start stretching, everything is going to seize and they're going to have difficulty getting back on the course.

Again, there's not really any critical issues at the 24-mile mark, it's mostly just encouraging runners and clapping and shouting their way and getting them to the line. When

you're at the finish line, however, that's when all the other things start taking place as far as whether it's a serious injury or just taking care of the things that they encountered over the course of the road to get them back out into the family circle and meeting up with their family. It could be something as simple as let's take care of some blisters and clean them up and get them out there. Or if it's a heat issue, we need to cool their core temperature down so they can join their family.

00:08:51

Becs Gentry: Wow. Wow. I am, wow. I'm in awe, I'm in absolute awe. And I love that. I hope our listeners really keyed into that, Rob, the stretching. When your muscles you feel like are going into spasm that close to the end don't necessarily stop. Because you do, David, you see so many people right on that final couple of miles pulling over to the side. And I love to cheer. If I'm not running, I love to cheer around the 24 to finish line area. And you're right, it is. It's, "Go, go, go, go. No, just don't stop. Keep going."

00:09:21

David Solan: Right.

00:09:21

Becs Gentry: But you see so many people coming and stopping and stretching their hamstrings and their calf muscles. And that's a great piece of medical knowledge there, listeners. Keep moving. Even if it's a walk, just keep moving. You can get to that finish line. Wow.

00:09:35

David Solan: Exactly. There were times when I walked with a person almost to the 25-mile mark, just to keep them moving and keep them walking. I didn't want them to stop on the side.

00:09:42

Becs Gentry: Did you hand them over to another medical professional?

00:09:45

David Solan: Yes. We radioed ahead to the 25-mile mark and they picked up from there.

00:09:49

Becs Gentry: Cool.

00:09:50

Rob Simmelkjaer: David, what has kept you coming back year

after year after year to be a medical volunteer? And it's not just you, there's a community of medical volunteers out there. I've had a chance to meet many of them over the years. They play such a vital role in our setup and the way we put these races on safely. Of course, we've got a professional staff, we've got a great medical partner now in CrowdRx, which is setting up the infrastructure for our medical care. But the volunteers play a big role. What keeps you coming back year after year?

00:10:25

David Solan: I'm glad you asked that because that's a question that people ask me from year to year. And starting with my family. "Why do you keep doing this? They're not paying you. As a matter of fact, you're paying money for travel, for food, you're working a 14 to 15 hour day and you're at the end of your career. You don't need this as a resume booster. Why do you keep doing this?" Friends ask the same thing, "I don't understand why you're doing this."

And my why is for the runners. When you're on the course, it's that runner that says, "This is my first race. All I want to do is finish. Can you help me finish?" And there's communication while you're taking care of the runner, there's some communication there and runners that say, "I have a friend that passed and I'm running this for my friend." When you're in the tent, it's the person that says, it's a lot of distress, and they say, "Am I going to die? Don't let me die." Or the runner says, "I just want to join my family after the race." And that's my why.

Now, for the runners, the runners also have a why and their why is I want to finish the race. We feed off each other. The runner wants to finish a race, we help them finish a race. Everyone goes home happy.

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Becs Gentry: Wow. Is there any runner, I'm sure there's a lot, over 35 years you can't imagine, but is there anything that stands out? Any person that stands out in your mind when you're relaying this story?

00:12:02

David Solan: One person in particular. Back in 2006, I had the opportunity to meet Paul Tergat and Paul won the race in 2005. And the way I encountered him was, I'm at the 24-mile mark and someone radioed over to see if anybody wanted to volunteer for USADA. I had no idea what I'd be doing, but I said, "Yeah, I'll do it." I took a walk over to the finish line and I got the assignment of the second runner that crossed the line and they said, "My job is to identify yourself to the runner, stay with that runner until they

produce a sample for us and then your job is done." It happened to be Paul Tergat and since he won the previous year, the media was all around Paul.

We went back to the New York Road Runner's headquarters and Paul was having something to eat and my instructions were, I couldn't communicate with Paul, I had to be completely neutral. And he called me over and he said, "Would you like a photo with me?" And I said, "I really can't take any pictures with you, Mr. Tergat." And he said, "No, you call me Paul." He said, "But there are no rules saying that I can't take a photo with you." He called over one of the security guys in the building, handed him my cell phone and said, "I would like to take a picture with my friend, David," So I have a photo with Paul Tergat. And that was a really, really neat day for me.

00:13:28

Becs Gentry: Oh, that's a wonderful story. Wow.

00:13:30

Rob Simmelkjaer: Very cool. And if you've ever met Paul Tergat, you will not be surprised at that story because he was such an incredibly personable guy, and I'm not at all surprised he would want to make that moment for you. That is really, really cool. You've been in the finish line tent in recent years, David, and it's a different vibe there a lot of the time. The runners have finished the race, so they got that done. But that is where we do see a lot of the more acute situations. For whatever reason, people push really hard to that finish line, and that's where things oftentimes get serious. Things happen all along the course, but from what I've seen in my 2.5 years here, the finish line tent can be a busy place. Can you talk about the sequence of events? What happens when a runner comes into the finish line medical tent and what that care sequence looks like?

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David Solan: Okay, well, first of all, I can say that the medical tent is run like a triage center, very similar to an ER. An athlete is first evaluated when they cross the line, we have medical staff out there trying to determine what the issue may be. They go into a wheelchair most of the time and come into the tent that way. Then they'll see a triage nurse and that person will again take their vitals and try to figure out what department they need to go to, whether it's an ICU area, whether it's heat deck, whether it's orthopedic issue, and then they would move that person into that particular department.

The tent is so large, I'm not sure what goes on in the other areas because I'm focused on heat deck. And for a lot

of the time I'm just sitting there waiting for someone to come in. Probably the first third of the race I would say, or first third of the day, we don't really see much heat issues because the runners are fast, they're trained and they come across the line and they're on their way, they're going home. We see a lot of the heat with the middle third. These are the runners who are out there for quite a long time, they're usually the recreational runner.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: You're talking maybe four hours to five, 5.5 hours finishing time?

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David Solan: Right. And they're trying to beat their PR, so they're really trying to push and they generate a lot of core heat. The last third, again, it drops off. We don't see much heat with the last third because in that group, if they get tired, what do they do? They slow down and they start walking so they don't give themselves an opportunity to generate the heat. It's really the middle part of the day that it really gets crazy in the heat tent.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And what happens when someone, David, does come in with a heat condition, a heat stroke, what do you do? How do you treat that person?

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David Solan: Okay, so first you want to make a differential diagnosis to make sure it is a heat issue. And by doing that, we do a temperature check. We do a rectal temp because that's the most valid way of checking core temperature. And if they're elevated above 105, then we bring them right over to the dunk tank and they'll go right into some cold water, usually around 50 degrees or so of water. The thermometer stays in them until we see that it drops below 102, and once it reaches 102, we pull them out of the tub because we don't want them overshooting and now having their temperature drop too low. It's this fine science of when do you go in and when do you come out type thing.

00:17:08

Rob Simmelkjaer: And I've seen those tubs with the ice water in them and seen people get dunked and it's amazing the difference it makes. Those folks come in in really bad shape and they almost just about always walk out of there after being cooled down. It's incredible. And Becs, if that's not enough incentive for anybody out there to train and make sure they're ready for the marathon, I think David just gave

it. If you come in overheated, first you're going to have your temperature taken rectally, which is not what anybody plans to do when they show up-

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David Solan: Nope.

00:17:39

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... at the starting line and then you're going to get dunked in a bucket of cold water.

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David Solan: None of that sounds fun.

00:17:44

Rob Simmelkjaer: I would say for most people that's a strong incentive to not end up in the medical tent.

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David Solan: And I need to add, people will say, "Well, why do you do the temperature? Why can't you just stick them in the tub?" Well, there are a lot of similar signs with the central nervous system dysfunction such as hypoglycemia. You can have very similar signs and you might put someone in the tub who's actually having a hypoglycemic episode, so you want to make sure you're doing the proper treatment with them.

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Becs Gentry: Oh, my gosh, so many things, so much quick thinking. As you say, it's triage. It truly is an emergency room.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: David, you are the first athletic trainer ever to be inducted into New York Road Runner's Volunteer Hall of Fame. What does that mean to you?

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David Solan: I'm in awe and I'm excited and I'm humbled, and not because it's me, but just because an athletic trainer has been recognized. There were a few other halls of fame over the years that I've been inducted into and they were athletic training halls of fame, and it was for my advocacy for the profession, it's for what I've done to promote the profession, to make improvements in the profession. But this particular Hall of Fame is an outside group, it's not an athletic training group, and they're looking at my years of service and what I've done to help the New York Road Runners.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: 100%. And you have done a lot-

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David Solan: A lot.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... and we are very excited to recognize you, your fellow volunteer Hall of Famers. And David, I hope there are many more years of you coming out and volunteering for us-

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David Solan: Absolutely.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... in those medical tents. Don't rest on your accomplishments now, we want to keep you coming back.

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David Solan: It's funny because when I was notified of this, I started looking back at some old photos that I had and I came across one article from a local newspaper here, and it was back in 2008 and the article said, Athletic Trainer Is In For The Long Haul. Little did I know back in 2008, this was the long haul.

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Becs Gentry: That's fantastic. Oh, my gosh. Well, keep that long haul going. Thank you so much, David. It's been a pleasure to talk to you and learn from you and I hope to see you out at the next race.

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David Solan: Oh, great.

00:20:04

Rob Simmelkjaer: But not in the medical tent, right Becs?

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Becs Gentry: No, no, no, no, no.

00:20:06

David Solan: That's right.

00:20:08

Becs Gentry: On the course passing you by with a wave.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's right. I want to see David on his way

into work, not while he's working.

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David Solan: That's right. Or you can always stop by to say hello, that's okay.

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Becs Gentry: Yes, absolutely. Those two.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: David Solan, thank you very much and congratulations.

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David Solan: Thanks again.

00:20:26

Rob Simmelkjaer: Our next volunteer Hall of Famer has been a New York Road Runners volunteer since 1979, first stepping up when an injury kept him from running the marathon. Over the years, Larry Sillen has handed out bib, he's hauled water from fire hydrants and even helped Fred Lebow create early signage for New York Road Runners Run to Work Program, which I can't wait to hear about. Now, 80 years old, Larry is a familiar face at Open Runs across the city, especially at Marine Park where he grew up. With more than 90 volunteer shifts, logged at Open Runs alone, Larry's commitment and signature bell have made him a cornerstone of the NYRR community. This year, he is being inducted into the Volunteer Hall of Fame, recognition for a lifetime of showing up. Larry, thank you for showing up here. And let's hear that bell.

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Becs Gentry: There we go.

00:21:17

Rob Simmelkjaer: There we go. What's going on, Larry?

00:21:20

Larry Sillen: Awesome.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's great to have you with us. Congratulations on the Hall of Fame induction.

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Becs Gentry: Congratulations.

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Larry Sillen: I was so surprised about it. Just doing what I love to do, volunteer all my life.

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Becs Gentry: Wow.

00:21:31

Larry Sillen: It's great.

00:21:31

Becs Gentry: You are unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable. I cannot believe that I'm sitting here getting to talk to you having seen you at races and now hearing a lot of your stories. Since 1979, you were sidelined by plantar fasciitis, is that right?

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Larry Sillen: Yeah.

00:21:52

Becs Gentry: And so you decided to not just stay home and rest, you were like, no, I'm not going to rest. I'm going to go and volunteer at the marathon instead. And you did both the expo and the water stations, is that correct?

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Larry Sillen: Yes, it is.

00:22:07

Becs Gentry: Wow.

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Larry Sillen: The water station was very hard, but we did it.

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Becs Gentry: You did. And what was that like?

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Larry Sillen: I remember bringing buckets, trash cans of water from one side of the other without being run into by the runners. That was hard. You got to cross the roadway to get to the water fountain and put the water into the buckets and all that, and then come back and start filling the cups for the runners.

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Becs Gentry: Wow. And so there were some close calls that day, but you managed it. I have almost a comedic Warner Brothers style skit in my mind. A cartoon of you just with the water dodging everybody. What an experience.

00:22:55

Rob Simmelkjaer: You started there and then what kept you volunteering, Larry? You started because you couldn't run, but I assume the plantar fasciitis went away, but the desire to volunteer did not go away. Why did you keep coming back to volunteer again and again?

00:23:12

Larry Sillen: Because I enjoyed myself doing it, cheering on the runners and all that stuff. I felt like I was actually running when I volunteered. When I am course martial, I have my bell and I use it and cheer on the runners. And every time I volunteer I lose my voice because I'm yelling so much.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it. And I know how much the runners appreciate that. We all need to hear that encouragement-

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Becs Gentry: It does.

00:23:43

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... even from total strangers. Makes a big difference. Okay, I have to ask you about this Run to Work program that you worked with Fred Lebow to design signage for. What was that? What was the Run to Work program and how were you involved?

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Larry Sillen: Back in '79, Fred used to have the bib pick up at the Y on 63rd Street, and I was there to pick up a bib for a race. And I saw Fred in the hallway and I went over to him and I told him that I work at an advertising agency and if I could help in any way. So he told me he had this thought about Run to Work program and I kind of liked it and he needed me to actually help him with the logo, which was a stick figure of a runner holding a briefcase. And what he had problems with was putting the type around the outside of the emblem. So he asked me to ask one of my patriots at the advertising agency that I worked for to put the type around it, which I asked a friend, his name was Joe Morales. That's the name of my friend.

00:25:22

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, Joe.

00:25:24

Larry Sillen: And he helped and he put it together and then he gave it to Fred and he was very happy. I lived in Brooklyn Heights and I worked at 50th and Madison where the agency was. And I started running to work and that's why I joined the New York Health and Racquet Club so I could go there before I got to work and take a shower, so I'd feel comfortable during the day, which I did. Sometimes I run home from work. I have two workouts.

00:25:59

Becs Gentry: Brilliant.

00:25:59

Larry Sillen: And that was good. We were getting ready for the marathon in 1979, which I couldn't do, but I did the marathon the next year, but I race walked it.

00:26:11

Rob Simmelkjaer: Beautiful, beautiful.

00:26:13

Becs Gentry: Still did it. You still did it. Larry, you also had apparently a very early and strong connection with Dick Traum.

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Larry Sillen: Yes, I did.

00:26:21

Becs Gentry: Can you tell us a little bit about that relationship?

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Larry Sillen: Well, I went to a running camp at Lake Tahoe and met some of the people from Runners World because it was Jeff Galloway's running camp and he did some writing for Runners World. Andy Burfoot and his wife came to the camp and it was really an interesting session and all that. And I said to Amby, "I'm a photographer, is there any freelance I could do?" And he said, "Okay, just give me your name, address and telephone number." And I think it was before we had email, so he'd have to send me a letter or something. I don't remember what it was back then.

But anyway, he got in touch with me or someone from the group got in touch with me asking me to take pictures of this group that just started. But he gave me the name of the person to get in touch with and it was Dick Traum. And I had seen Dick Traum in a video that someone produced, and it was where he was running the 1976 marathon and being passed by Bill Rodgers. Dick used to get an early start.

Dick probably was involved with the New York Road Runners from an early time because he was able to get an early start.

After the Road Runners asked me to take a photo of the team, which I did in front of our building on 89th Street, way back when where we used to pick up our bibs and all that, and the organization was there too. And afterwards I took pictures there and then we went to the Central Park at 98th Street off of Fifth Avenue, the Engineers Gate, the World Famous Engineers gate. And we would go, I took pictures there and Dick said, "Let me get your telephone number," and we became friends ever since then. And I realized I could volunteer as a guide for an athlete or actually take photos for the team, which I did almost to '19, or actually two years ago I decided, or three years ago, I decided to be more of an athlete than their photographer so I got more involved in volunteering and doing that. And then I discovered Open Run.

00:29:33

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's right. That's right. Which we'll get to in a second. But Dick Traum, of course, those who know, know that he was a founder of Achilles, which we all know and love in New York Road Runners was an early New York Roadrunners advocate for athletes with disabilities and obviously just a legendary figure in New York running and passed away within the last year or so. We miss Dick, and I'm sure you miss Dick. He was a special guy. Larry, you mentioned Open Run. You have volunteered over 90 times with Open Run. Of course that's New York Road Runners free running program in parks around the city week in and week out. And you've been doing it in Marine Park, which is where you grew up. What has kept you coming back to Open Run and to Marine Park year after year?

00:30:23

Larry Sillen: Well, it's fun to be there. Everybody is so nice and friendly and you make new friends and stuff like that. I'd see them at the races all the time and they know I always love to take pictures with my phone. And what I do is I've photographed every single Open Run that I've been at so I got a long chain of Open Runs on Facebook. If anybody wants to see them, they're free, I put them up there because... And lately I've been sending them to the actual Open Run on Facebook. I go to Canarsie Park on Saturday, Marine Park on Sunday and Brooklyn Bridge Park on Tuesday nights. And then Thursday night I go to Achilles, Brooklyn, which on Thursday is our 10th anniversary of forming a chapter there. I'm proud to be there at the first one.

00:31:32

Becs Gentry: Larry, you certainly run a lot. Oh my gosh. It has been such a pleasure to have you on the show to talk about all the things you have done and all the things you continue to do for the running community. It's a true inspiration. And I know there are hundreds and thousands of people around the world who are grateful to you and we can't wait to see you being honored into that Volunteer Hall of Fame.

00:32:00

Larry Sillen: Thank you.

00:32:00

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you, Larry. Congratulations.

00:32:02

Larry Sillen: You're welcome.

00:32:03

Rob Simmelkjaer: One more bell ring. Come on. One more.

00:32:05

Becs Gentry: One more.

00:32:05

Rob Simmelkjaer: There we go. All right.

00:32:05

Larry Sillen: Go volunteers.

00:32:10

Rob Simmelkjaer: There you go.

00:32:10

Larry Sillen: We love volunteers.

00:32:13

Rob Simmelkjaer: Larry Sillen.

00:32:14

Larry Sillen: Good thing.

00:32:14

Rob Simmelkjaer: Larry Sillen. Thanks so much, Larry.

00:32:16

Larry Sillen: You're welcome.

00:32:18

Rob Simmelkjaer: Nancy Chu is the force behind one of New York Road Runner's most vibrant volunteer communities. As the Open Run captain at Cunningham Park and the leader of the CuningHammers Run Club, Nancy has built a network rooted in encouragement and consistency. She's introduced countless people to the joy of running and volunteering, especially during the pandemic when her presence became a lifeline for community connection. Whether she's leading a water station or sending updates to her team, Nancy shows up with purpose. This year she's being honored as a 2025 Volunteer Hall of Fame inductee, recognized not just for what she's done, but for the community that she has inspired. Nancy Chu, welcome. Congratulations on being a member of the-

00:33:03

Becs Gentry: Congratulations.

00:33:03

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... Volunteer Hall of Fame.

00:33:05

Nancy Chu: Thank you. Thank you so much for the opportunity for doing all this for the community.

00:33:11

Becs Gentry: Nancy, you are an incredible human. We are so honored to have you here to talk to us today. You are the Open Run captain at Cunningham Park and you lead the CuningHammers. Can you tell us how that role started and what your goals were when you first got involved?

00:33:32

Nancy Chu: First when I first start running, and the very first race that I did with New York Road Runners was to run at one J. P. Morgan Chase back in 2016. I don't know how it was, so when I finished it felt really good and satisfying, especially when I never ran before. After that, I was asking myself now what? What to do? I kept searching and searching and that's when I found out there was a new Open Run launching at Cunningham Park back in May 2016. And the timing was perfect, it was right after I finished the (inaudible). And first running, still imitating though, I wasn't really a runner and more a jog/walk person, I was nervous to join the run with other runners, so instead I choose to volunteer.

I showed up Sunday after Sunday and after (inaudible), the Open Run operation opened me the role as a run director, back then called director and right now called captain. I didn't know what to expect, all I knew was it made me

happy seeing this group of people, individuals every Sunday learning their running story and experience. And sometimes even sharing (inaudible) too.

As for the CuningHammers, it wasn't something I created myself. I just helped coordinate between (inaudible). And the name came from Cunningham Park Open Running Community. It was started by the Open Run captains, actually, Horace and Annie and a few regular runners who began adding more new ones. One week for them it just wasn't enough, so they add more runs to the week and I joined them soon after. From the year 2017 to 2014 people keep encouraging me to make it official, a official group to New York Road Runner.

00:35:43

Rob Simmelkjaer: An official club.

00:35:43

Nancy Chu: I reached out to New York Road Runner and with the help of the club coordinator, Neil, we got it done quickly and we are the CuningHammer Running Club now.

00:36:00

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it. I love it. And that club, the CuningHammers, you not only run together, but you volunteer together as a group. And what's different about volunteering with a group like that versus just showing up and doing it on your own?

00:36:18

Nancy Chu: As a group it's really motivating and especially for the sign people. I am one of those to begin with. And that even volunteering solo is a great way to meet people too and learn from each other about our learning experience, sharing all the information, going places to run. It's fun.

00:36:41

Becs Gentry: Nancy, you have been described by a runner as the glue of Cunningham. Can you share what you do week to week that helps build and sustain such a beautiful, tight-knit community?

00:36:56

Nancy Chu: I was surprised with that phrase, the glue. I never thought of myself that way. And maybe it's from just talking to people, sharing race information and tips, and making sure new-comers felt included in all the conversation we have about races, volunteer. That might just help them.

00:37:19

Becs Gentry: Amazing.

00:37:20

Rob Simmelkjaer: It's great. I know that a lot of people found your group during the pandemic, which, Nancy, is something I hear all the time. I've met so many runners who went to Open Run during the pandemic and needed to find, people move their bodies. And that was happening in Cunningham Park as well. What was it like during that pandemic? How did you keep people engaged? What was it like when you would have new people coming to that group during that time?

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Nancy Chu: I think Open Run is the best place to introduce someone to running, walking, especially during the pandemic, people were afraid to go indoor, any activity indoor. Open Run is outside and it's the best place to meet up and stay connected.

00:38:11

Rob Simmelkjaer: And those connections have lasted for a long time and that's thanks to the work of volunteers like you, which is amazing. Nancy, I know you're a runner as well. You've run a lot of Road Runner's races. Is there one that you would say has been meaningful to you or your favorite race that you've run?

00:38:28

Nancy Chu: There is no specific races that is meaningful. Every one of them, it's unique, especially with the people that you are running with. All the feeling after all the pain, after, it's all different, it is in the memory.

00:38:50

Rob Simmelkjaer: No, it's great. When you're getting out there, you experience it as a runner, you experience it as a volunteer as well. It's a beautiful thing. What was your reaction, Nancy, when you heard you were being inducted into the Volunteer Hall of Fame? What does that mean to you?

00:39:09

Nancy Chu: Honestly, at first I was like, it wasn't me. It wasn't just me, it's about everyone around me and Cunningham Park, CunninghamHammer, it's been a team effort that support me and helped me to do more. It motivates me a lot to just go out and do what I like. And I like seeing people and without Cunningham Park, Open Run and CunninghamHammer and the Volunteer Leaders Group, without them, I am really nobody.

00:39:41

Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, you're definitely not a nobody to Road Runners to the runners who you help get together every week. You've made a real impact in their lives. And that's the thing about volunteering, it has an impact on the volunteer's life as much as it does the people that they help. Right, Nancy? And that's what I love to hear about. What impact do you think it's had on your life being a volunteer as frequently as you have been?

00:40:07

Nancy Chu: It kept me going and make me happy. That is the most important thing. And life is tough, and that is the moment that I escape from the regular stressful life. And that may make me go on, which is very nice. I'm happy to be part of it.

00:40:25

Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, we're happy to have you as a part of it and we're happy to welcome you to the Volunteer Hall of Fame. Congratulations. Thank you so much for joining us to talk a little bit about it on Set the Pace, and can't wait to see you inducted very soon into that Hall of Fame and see you at another event soon.

00:40:43

Nancy Chu: Thank you so much for the opportunity and recognition.

00:40:46

Rob Simmelkjaer: And now it's time for today's Meb Minute. Take it away, Meb.

00:40:50

Meb: Successful people have routine. Run early in the morning or evening to avoid heat and reduce dehydration risk. Stay hydrated throughout the day and replenish electrolyte on long runs. Adjust pace expectation. Heat increases efforts so focus on effort rather than speed. Wear moist clothing, sunscreen and a hat for sun protection. Personally, if you running on the road and you see a water fountain, make sure you stop there, get water and make sure you put water on your top of your head, on your back of your neck and your palm of your hand. And make sure you wet the hat because it will keep you cooler for a longer period.

00:41:31

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right, that does it for another episode of Set the Pace. We want to thank our guests today, three of our 2025 inductees to the New York Road Runners Volunteer Hall of Fame, David Solan, Larry Sillen and Nancy Chu.

New York Road Runners is a nonprofit organization with a vision to build healthier lives and stronger communities through the transformative power of running. The support of members and donors like you helps us achieve our mission to transform the health and well-being of our communities through inclusive and accessible running experiences, empowering all to achieve their potential. Learn more and contribute at nyrr.org/donate.