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## Keeping Their Streak Alive

**On 20th Anniversary - 20 runners who have run in every Long Beach Marathon since 1982 will do it again**

(Long Beach – Sept. 18, 2004) The word quit isn't in their vocabulary. Twenty "legacy runners" – nineteen in the full marathon and one in the half-marathon will be running to keep their streak alive in the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Long Beach International City Bank Marathon being held on Oct. 10th.

Why do they do it? For health reasons, dedication and camaraderie they say. Most plan to run as long as their bodies permit. However, members of this select group have had their trials and tribulations to keep their string of consecutive marathons intact. Accidents, injuries, weather, out of town business trips have hindered their ability to complete in the race, but somehow this close knit group of runners has found the willpower to keep their streak alive.

Unofficially – this group has run 23 Long Beach Marathons. Founded in 1982, the Marathon in Long Beach is the second oldest ongoing marathon in Southern California. Only the Palos Verdes Marathon is older. Run by volunteers for the first 14 years, the race eventually became too much work and was disbanded after 1996. It was resurrected again under professional management in 1999. During this 3 year hiatus, the legacy runners kept their streak going by running in an unofficial marathon called the Bob Fernald Memorial Marathon, which commemorated the late race director.

Injuries have been the bane of nearly ending the streak for many of the legacy runners. Newport Beach resident Philip Newberg was on the twenty-third mile of his tenth marathon, when he suddenly became light headed. Fellow legacy runner Ken Purucker saw his arms start to flail around. The ambulance report stated that "other runners saw him wander off the course while mumbling to himself." When Philip regained consciousness, he was in St. Mary's hospital with his family and friends there to support him. He thought he was going to die, but then thought he was much too young and fought to regain his consciousness. Hours later, he was feeling better and insisted on finishing the race. After convincing the doctor he was feeling better, he went back to the course around 6:00pm and walked the last three miles. At the end, he ran the last ten steps, one for each marathon he has completed in Long Beach. When he hit stop on his stopwatch, his time was 13:59:30, by far his longest and most expensive marathon to date.

In 1988, Long Beach resident David Purucker had a triple bi-pass surgery just six weeks before the race and was still able to keep his streak alive. At the end of that race, he and his friends went into the medical tent to have his heart rate checked by the nurse who did not believe that David had had a triple bi-pass just a few weeks before. The fresh scar on his chest was the only way he could prove he had recently had the operation.

Tom Davis from Huntington Beach currently needs knee replacement surgery. According to fellow Legacy Runner Philip Newberg, "he would summersault the whole thing if he had to." One year, Jim Warnemuende tore his rotator cuff and had to jog and walk to make it. He has since has bounced back and in 2002 won his age division. Long Beach resident John Sumpter vowed never to run the marathon again after his second race when he became violently sick for two weeks following the event. However, he kept doing it, and when he reached five, he wondered if he could reach ten and was pretty much "stuck" by that point. Michael Benov from Thousand Oaks, CA, broke three ribs just a couple of weeks before the 1995 marathon.

In other cases, pure logistics have made the streak difficult for some runners. Jim Warnemunde, originally from Torrance, CA, and a 35 year professor at Long Beach City College, now lives in Redding, CA, and makes the annual trip down to Long Beach every October. Legacy runner Michael Benov lived in Massachusetts for three years and the Bay area for nine years and would fly in every year to take part.

In a sad instance, Legacy runner Tom Frost who lives in Rancho Santa Margarita lost his daughter, Lisa, in the 9/11 attacks. In his case, running has helped him cope with this tragedy and tell Lisa's story. He honored Lisa's life when he ran the Olympic Torch at the Salt Lake City games in January 2002.

Keeping up their health and staying fit are among other motivating factors to keep on running. Ken Purucker and his brother David Purucker (both from Long Beach) started to run because their father had died of a heart attack and they wanted to get into shape. Ken disliked running at first, and saw running as a necessary evil. After starting to run marathons, he changed his perspective on running and now enjoys the camaraderie and competition.

Legacy runner Tom Pontac from Seal Beach is a member of "Leisure Leggers," a group of runners who live in the Seal Beach retirement community of Leisure World. According to Pontac "retirement is different than it used to be. Gone are the days when senior citizens watch the grass grow and now the words 'marathon' and 'senior citizen' can be used together. A person health should become first priority when you reach a certain age so that you can play with the grandchildren and enjoy life." Twelve Leisure Leggers will run in this year's marathon.

The camaraderie within this special group keeps them going each year. Newberg described the group as family where everyone is a hero to each other. They all support each other and want to do everything they can to help the others keep their streak alive. Long Beach resident Antoinette Hill says when training “all pretense melts away and you really get to know that person.”

How do these runners stay in the shape to compete every year and how long do they plan to keep the streak going? According to Huntington Beach resident Gordon Watson, “the key is to have targets.” Watson’s goals include running 25 Long Beach Marathons, run a total of 100 marathons, and keep running until he is 75 years old. According to Watson, “the hardest thing to accept is that I’m running slower and not get frustrated.”

Jim Warnemuende originally set a goal to run 50 Long Beach Marathons. He ran the first at age of 41 and planned to run until he was 91. However, with the marathon being cancelled for 3 years, he’s now revised his plans to run the marathon until he is 94.

76 year-old, Carlos Mora, from Long Beach is the oldest legacy runner. He says “the key is just to just finish the race.” Mora listens to his body to guide him how hard or soft he should run. Most all this group says they will run until they are no longer able.

In 2004, over 100,000 spectators, volunteers and celebrants are expected to line the course for this annual event to watch around 13,000 participants. The events include the Marathon, Half-Marathon, Inline Skating Marathon (both professional and recreational division), Marathon Bike Tour and 5K Run / Walk. For more information or to register, visit the event website at [www.runlongbeach.com](http://www.runlongbeach.com), or call 562-728-8829.

A two-day Marathon Expo is being held at the Long Beach Convention Center on Friday, Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>. The Expo will open at 2:00 PM to 7:00 PM on Friday, Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>. On Saturday, Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>, the Expo is open from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Over 30,000 are expected to attend over the two days. The Expo is FREE to the public and is the last opportunity to register for one of the Marathon events.

A "Beach Party" Finish Line Festival is being held at Shoreline Drive and Linden Ave. on the Marina Green on Race Day from 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The Festival is the gathering point to watch participants finish the race and offers live entertainment, vendor booths, food and beverages. The Boys & Girls Club of Long Beach will be serving a Pancake Breakfast to race participants, spectators and visitors from 7 am to 10 am. A donation of \$5 is requested. Upwards of 35,000 will visit the Festival on race day. It is also FREE to the public.

#### About International City Racing

Led by Olympic Gold Medalist Bob Seagren, International City Racing, Inc. (ICR) specializes exclusively in the development, management and implementation of road racing, endurance and fitness events.

In addition, ICR also provides race management for other events including the Arden Energy Challenge 5K & 10K on behalf of Arden Realty Inc., the largest commercial real estate company in Southern California and the Dana Point Turkey Trot for the Dana Point Chamber of Commerce. In its 27<sup>th</sup> year, and with over 9,000 participants The Dana Point Turkey Trot is one of the largest Thanksgiving Day runs in the nation. ICR has also created the National Collegiate Rivalry Run Series. The inaugural USC / UCLA Rivalry Run 5K was held on April 27, 2003.

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