

Our Summer Racing Adventures

by Steve & Maria Peters

Summer is over, school is back in session, and it's hard to believe that the races we had looked forward to for so long are now behind us. We set out at the start of the year to each increase our overall number of half marathons. Steve entered a friendly PTC runners' challenge to run a half marathon each month in 2011. Maria planned to quadruple her half marathons from 2010 (she ran her first half marathon at the 2010 VA Beach Rock 'n' Roll). As we planned our calendar for the year our goal was to reduce expenses and keep to a minimum the number of out-of-town races, but we found that June, July and August presented us with few local opportunities, so we decided to look at it as an adventure and try races and locations that were new to us. As we entered June, Steve had already completed 6 half marathons and Maria had completed 2 half marathons (she is now on track to run 6 this year!).

In June we discovered the **EX2 Off-Road Half Marathon and 10K**, a trail race held on 12 June at Prince William Forest Park near Triangle, VA. The race was small and very well organized. The park is beautiful and the running trails were clear. Unfortunately, due to a back injury while playing softball a few weeks before, Steve was unable to run the half marathon that day, but Maria absolutely enjoyed her first "off-road" 10K. We plan to register for the 2012 race so that Steve can try the half marathon.

July was our great summer adventure. We know lots of you have run the NYC Marathon, and someday we may as well, but we had a spectacular time running in one of the NY Road Runners (NYRR) Half-Marathon Series races, the **Queens Half Marathon** on 30 July. We left home the evening of the 27th, spent the night in Dover, DE, and checked into our hotel in Flushing at noon on the 28th. From there the adventure began. We walked or rode the subway everywhere. We explored the Brooklyn Promenade (best views of lower Manhattan), had lunch at the Brooklyn Heights Wine Bar (outstanding), walked across the Brooklyn Bridge, visited Chinatown and ate calamari in Little Italy. Then we took the Staten Island Ferry (free!) to Staten Island (we were told by friends that the Statue of Liberty and Manhattan skyline are best viewed from the ferry after dark. We walked around St. George and enjoyed an amazing dinner and drinks at Beso (Spanish Tapas) Restaurant, then took a late ferry back to Manhattan (our friends were right about the views!). Friday morning we explored Times Square and a nearby Street Festival, followed by a visit to the top of the Empire State Building, lunch at Heartland Brewery and Rotisserie (ground floor of the Empire State Building), went shoe-shopping for Maria at Macy's (an entire city block of shoes!!!), walked to the Flatiron Building, visited "Ground Zero" and the museum, all before heading up to Central Park to pick up our race packets at NYRR Headquarters and taking a quick walk into Central Park. After delicious pizza (carb loading) at Mimi's Pizza & Family Restaurant on Lexington Ave, we returned to Flushing to get a good night's rest before the race. We were able to walk from our hotel to the start line in Flushing Corona Park, where the USTA National Tennis Center is located. It was hot and humid but there were water stops nearly every mile. The course was a maze through the park, starting with a run around the Unisphere fountain and Fountain of the Planets, passing near Citi Field (where the NY Mets play) repeating a portion of the course, and finishing with another loop around the Unisphere fountain and past the pools. Overall we loved the course, but were disappointed that the race shirts weren't "technical" and there were no medals or "bling" at the finish.

line. We both ran a slow, plodding race in the humidity, realizing that we probably shouldn't have walked the 15 miles around NYC the days before. While we would recommend this race, next time we may try one of their other half marathons (Staten Island, Brooklyn, NYC, Manhattan) or the NYC Marathon. After walking back to our hotel (for some reason it took twice as long to get back!), and after a much-deserved nap, we cleaned up and headed back to the city where we enjoyed a very nice dinner at Hospoda (Czech beer and food) followed by Phantom of the Opera at the Majestic Theater. The drive home on Sunday was long but relaxing and gave us time off our feet to recover from a fantastic weekend.

Two weeks later on 13 August we were in Lynchburg, VA, to run the **Lynchburg Half Marathon and 5K**, put on by the Riverside Runners. It rained hard before the races, but the rain stopped just before the half marathon, giving us a nice cool morning to run. The 5K course was an out-and-back course starting and ending in Riverfront Park, the entire race being on the James River Heritage Trail. The half marathon was grueling, starting in Riverfront Park on the same trail and continuing through the woods for several miles, looping back on itself, then up a mile long very steep hill to circle (twice) the Central Virginia Training Center (a series of rolling hills), before returning back down the hill to repeat the first half of the route and back to the finish in Riverfront Park. Steve enjoyed the cheers from the many severely developmentally disabled spectators from the CVTC who came out with their nurses/aides to cheer for us. Though she didn't run a PR, Maria won her age group in the 5K. There were very nice technical running shirts for all (including female-sized shirts) and finisher's medals for all. After the race and clean-up at our hotel, we enjoyed lunch at Waterstone Pizza/Jefferson Street Brewery before heading home.

Our summer came to an end with a staple race... the **VA Beach Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon**. Many, if not all of you, have run this race before, so we won't dwell on it, but we both enjoyed this year's course change, which took us North on Pacific Avenue then South on Atlantic before crossing the bridge onto General Booth Boulevard. Having 3 ½ miles behind you after crossing the bridge does wonders for your psyche, especially when you realize that you'll hit 12 miles right after crossing the bridge on the return... that last 1.1 miles are so bad when you don't have to wind through town for another 2 miles before you get to the boardwalk. The weather was perfect, the water stops were plentiful, the music was good, the finish line was crossed and another medal was earned. A perfect end on Labor Day weekend for any runner's summer!