

Volunteer at Planting Fields

PLANTING FIELDS FOUNDATION SEEKS VOLUNTEERS AT PLANTING FIELDS ARBORETUM STATE HISTORIC PARK AND COE HALL FOR THE 2016 SEASON

Expand your knowledge and experience while making a meaningful contribution to this Gold Coast estate. Consider joining the volunteer staff at Planting Fields. Interpreters are needed for Coe Hall, which is open March 26th – October 31st from 11:30AM – 3:30PM.

Other volunteer opportunities include reception, gift shop and gardening.



A commitment of approximately four to five hours per week is requested during the season. An orientation program will be held in March followed by ongoing education and hands on training. Please call Elsa Eisenberg at (516) 922-8670 or email eeisenberg@plantingfields.org. A volunteer application form can be printed from our website at www.plantingfields.org

**PLANTING FIELDS ARBORETUM
STATE HISTORIC PARK**
1395 Planting Fields Rd., Oyster Bay, NY 11771
www.plantingfields.org



THE COLUMN

Fast and steady wins the race within a race



John Hanc

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Forty-five years after quitting the high school football team, I finally earned my varsity letter.

OK, so it's not the green, embroidered "V" from Valley Stream North High School. In fact, I never even made it to junior varsity.

In the summer of 1970, the beginning of my sophomore year, I had gone out for football, fueled by unrealistic visions of gridiron glory. But I didn't like coaches yelling at me, or suffocating under a helmet in the late August sun. Hanging out with friends, who, like me, were adopting longer hairstyles, sounded like a much better alternative — and besides, I was never going to be a starter.

Eight years after college, when I began running, there seemed no connection with my aborted athletic career in high school. The 3-mile, after-work jogs along the Charles River in Boston, where I was living, were for fitness.

The foray in football had been for . . . what? Glory? Competition? Who cared about that rah-rah stuff anyway?

It turned out I did. After moving back to Long Island, I entered a road race. Then I decided to test my mettle in the 26.2-mile marathon distance. In 1985, I went to Washington, D.C., and ran the Marine Corps Marathon. I walked much of the last six miles, and swore I'd never do another.

Thirty years later, at age 60, and with many completed marathons behind me, I was back at the same race, and this time I was, as the Marines like to say, "mission ready." My objective was to win the 60-64 age group for men. Unlike with football, I stuck with running, and through the years I'd discovered age-group competition: In road racing, there's not just one overall male and female winner. There are also hotly contested awards given to the top male and female finishers in each group batched in five-year increments, from 15 to 75 (15-19, 20-24, etc.).

The idea of a 50- or 60-year-old still competing in athletics would have been almost unheard of when I was in high school. In a 2014 article in *Running Times*, headlined "How Running Changed Old Age," historian Roger Robinson wrote that track races involving "Masters" athletes 40 and older began popping up as early as the mid-1960s. According to Robinson, the first road race that offered awards for older age groups was a 13-mile event held in upstate Rome in 1971 — the year

after I quit the football team.

These races-within-races now are a fixture at most running events. Somehow, over the years, I, the kid who dropped out of organized sports at age 15, had become one of those competitive, middle-age, Type A runners. Thanks to the opportunities afforded by age-group competition, I actually had a chance to win in Washington. This was not because of any innate talent — there are local guys my age who are faster than me — but simply because, through conservative but consistent training, my times haven't slowed down quite as much. Thus, while my times at age 35 were mediocre, those times at age 60 aren't half bad.

Based on my race times for shorter distances, I knew I had a shot at winning my new 60-64 year age group at the Marine Corps race in 2015. But it wasn't going to be easy: I trained hard, employed the services of an online coach, and with the help of my (mostly younger) training buddies here on Long Island, I got myself in the best possible shape.

On Oct. 25, I lined up with 23,000 others near Arlington National Cemetery for the start of the race, which winds its way 26.2 miles back and forth across the Potomac, through the District of Columbia and finishes next to the Marine Corps War Memorial, often referred to as the Iwo Jima Memorial. It was perfect marathon weather — cool, overcast — and thanks to my coach, I was well prepared. I crossed the finish line in 3 hours, 16 minutes, 30 seconds, about a half-hour faster than my clueless first effort in 1985.

Within an hour, I got a text from one of my running buddies, with a screen shot of the age group results that had just been posted online. "You did it!" she wrote.

I felt like I'd just won the Heisman Trophy. I even decided to make a trip back to D.C. six weeks later to attend the race's award ceremony, held at the U.S. Navy Memorial auditorium, just off the Capitol Mall. There, a Marine colonel with a chest full of ribbons handed me my first-place plaque.

He smiled for the camera. I smiled, thinking that at the unlikely age of 60, I had finally made the varsity.

“I crossed the finish line in 3 hours, 16 minutes, 30 seconds, about a half-hour faster than my clueless first effort in 1985.”



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