

## West Columbian repeats win in Firecracker 4

By Bill Shaw

*The Facts*

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**L**AKE JACKSON — Grant Parker finished first overall for the second consecutive year in the 32nd annual Brazosport Area Road Runners Association Firecracker 4, youngster Lauren Smith finished first in the female competition and Susie Walters romped to her seventh consecutive victory and broke her previous female masters record.

Using his usual strategy, Parker, 24, of West Columbia took the lead from the start in the pack of 108 runners and never relinquished it through residential Lake Jackson to the finish line in Dunbar Park.

"I had a challenger at about a mile and a half, but he didn't stay with me," Parker said. "I knew there were other people behind me, but I was pretty much in first all the way in."

Parker crossed the finish line in 23:59, a 5:59 average mile pace. He finished 41 seconds slower than last year and 3:22 off the contest record.

The second-place finisher, Bret Ramsey, trailed Parker in by nine seconds in 24:08.

"Grant led the whole race; at mile five, I was about fifth," said Ramsey, 33, of Richmond. "I moved up to see if I could stay the same pace with him. By the third mile, he had a pretty good gap. I almost caught him with a quarter of a mile left, but he started sprinting, and my legs gave out."

Brazoswood sophomore Lauren Smith, 15, finished third overall and first in the open female competition in 25:01, a 6:15 race pace.

"I tried to stay pretty close to the third or fourth place guy," said Smith. "Weston (Caceres) and I were close in the third and fourth miles, but I surged ahead of Weston at the finish."

Caceres fell back to sixth overall as Jeff Dean of Lake



*Grant Parker of West Columbia sprints in to win his second consecutive Firecracker 4 title. Photo by Bill Shaw.*

Jackson and male masters (40-plus) runner Jorge Alvarado of Houston tried to catch Smith.

Dean, 27, finished nine seconds behind Smith in 25:10 to win third place overall in the men's competition; Alvarado trailed Dean by 10 seconds in 25:20 to win the top trophy in the male masters competition. He finished 1:40 off the male masters record.

"I was a decent way back after the first mile and in sixth place," said Dean. "I passed two after the second mile and then another and I was right there with the first-place runner."

"I was fifth overall for a while

and then in third," said Alvarado. "Right before the third mile, a young girl (Smith) and a boy (Dean) passed me. I just tried to finish and hang on to my place."

Caceres finished sixth overall, just one second ahead of Susie Walters, 41, of Wallis, the top masters female finisher. Walters crossed the line in 25:31, a 6:23 pace; she broke the female masters record she set last year by 21 seconds.

"It was a good race for me," Walters said. "I knew what a good runner Lauren is, so I tried to keep her in sight. "I figured if I were close to her, I would have a decent time."

Wendy Parker, 28, finished 13th overall and had to settle for second in the overall female competition for the second consecutive year, but she beat her last year's time by 44 seconds in 27:20.

"The frontrunners took off and were up there, so I didn't see them much at all," Parker said. "I was happy with my time;

I was shooting for 27:30, so I was satisfied."

Tiffany Whipple, 25, of Lake Jackson finished 27th overall and third in the overall female competition in 29:12.

"I was over two minutes behind Wendy," Whipple said. "I started in the back of the pack and paced myself."

Kevin Regis, 47, of Lake Jackson finished eighth overall, 35 seconds behind Walters to place second in the male masters competition in 26:06. Regis finished the 2005 Firecracker 4 third in the masters competition



*Lauren Smith of Brazoswood High School finished first in the overall female competition. Photo by Bill Shaw*

in a faster 26:02.

"I ran the first mile too fast and struggled through the next three," said Regis.

John Rinck, 42, of Lake Jackson, finished ninth behind Regis in 26:47 to win third in the male masters competition.

"I was happy to finish," said Rinck. "This is the first time I have run the race, and I noticed the good sportsmanship."

Rounding out the female masters competition, Sabra Harvey, 57, of Houston and Lindie Nanninga, 49, of Galveston, finished, respectively, 21st and 25th in 28:34 and 29:07 for second and third places.

Marine Cpl. Adam Diaz, 22, an Iraqi War veteran, celebrated Independence Day by running the Firecracker 4 holding an American flag. Diaz finished the four miles in 31:53 to win second in his age group.

Toyah Allen finished first in the extended two-mile walk, which was closer to two and a quarter miles, in 33:01; Margie Daniels,

57, finished second in 33:04. Ken Skaggs, 53, finished first for the men just one second in front of his wife, Margie Skaggs. Ken won first in the male competition in 33:29, while Margie won third in the female competition in 33:30.

Youngsters Matthew Whitehead, 10, and Colby Astor, 4, finished 15th and 16th overall and second and third in the male walkers competition in 38:55 and 39:30.

Texas Gulf Bank, Billy's Garage, Ralph and D? and D?, Donna Quarles Photography and ConocoPhillips were major sponsors and contributors to this year's contest.

Tony Moody, BARRA president, and other race committee members were pleased with the turnout, especially with the threat of thundershowers and competition with other races in the area. Tuesday's morning storm held off until everyone finished the course and enjoyed refreshments in the shelter of the Dunbar Park pavilion.



*Susie Walters of Wallis finished first in the female masters competition and broke her previous record. Photo by Bill Shaw*



*Firecracker 4 winners, from left to right, Grant Parker, first overall male; Bret Ramsey, second overall male; Jeff Dean, third overall male; second row, Lauren Smith, first overall female; Wendy Parker, second overall female; Tiffany Whipple, third overall female; back row, Jorge Alvarado, first male masters; Susie Walters, first female masters; Kevin Regis, second male masters; Sabra Harvey, second female masters; John Rinck, third male masters; and Lindie Nanninga, third female masters.*