

Volunteers make things happen

By Bill Shaw

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Imagine a mob of runners lined up for a road race with no designated starter, with no cones marking the course, with no cyclist to guide the lead runners, with no mile markers or volunteers to call out split times, with no water tables along the route, with no volunteers working the finish line to determine the order of finish and individual times.

Imagine no emergency vehicle or paramedics standing by in case of heat stroke, exhaustion or other injuries. Imagine no food, fruit, refreshments or water at the finish line.

You can't.

A road race without volunteers is impossible. Runners expect full volunteer support when they pay their registration fees and are disappointed and downright angry when volunteers are not where they want them to be.

"Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the Earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience and just plain loving one another," said the late writer and humorist Erma Brombeck.

What makes a race successful is the spirit of volunteerism. In fact, what makes any event — a church auction, fish fry or barbeque, an athletic club fund drive, a fund-raising event for

someone in need — is the spirit of volunteerism.

The 32nd annual Independence Day Firecracker 4 had some glitches and minor problems, but it was a success thanks to Brazosport Area Road Runners Association volunteers, most of whom showed up at Dunbar Park between 5 and 5:30 a.m. on a holiday. Almost 40 percent of the active BARRA members volunteered to make the race a success. According to my math, which is sometimes suspect, the ratio of runners to volunteers was eight to one.

"There are three kinds of people," said Casey Stengel: "Those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who say, 'what happened?'"

Volunteers make things happen.

Running is a solitary sport most of the time. We run and train alone. A race is a social event as well as a contest. But in a race, a runner is solitary and into self until he crosses the finish line. Running solitary and racing keeps one into self. Some runners remain solitary and isolated and into self and give nothing back to the sport they love.

When runners or athletes give back to their sports of choice through volunteering, they reflect their passion for those sports or activities. The volunteers' unselfish dedication to those sports of choice perpetuate the sports.

Our "busyness" in our individual chaotic worlds lead to isolation unless we give our time, talents and resources to others

because to be human is to be inextricably bound to other humans.

"We cannot live for ourselves alone," said Hermann Melville. "Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results."

Only those who volunteer reap the "results" and realize and feel connected to others by "invisible threads."

The greatest beneficiary of the spirit of volunteerism is the volunteer. In the words of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "He who does nothing for others does nothing for himself."

Give to the sports or activities you love. Volunteer.

Running footnote: This column is a milestone and special for me: it is consecutive column 500. Since April 1994, first once a week then later every other week, I have sat at the computer and crunched out a column on running. I hope to crunch out at least another 100 before my computer screen goes dark. Thanks to all my readers, runners and nonrunners, for reading my work.

Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in The Facts.

