

## Race a tradition on holiday

By Bill Shaw

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**W**hat's hotter than a firecracker on the Fourth of July?

It's the 32nd annual Brazosport Area Road Runners Association Firecracker 4, on Tuesday, July 4, a long-standing Independence Day tradition of the Brazosport Area.

The early history of the Firecracker 4 remains shrouded in mystery. Sportswriter Steven Jeffress reported in the July 3, 1988, issue of *The Facts* that Hal Stockton organized the Lake Jackson Running Club and a race on July 4, 1974. Nine runners started at the Lake Jackson police station in the sweltering afternoon. Sam Cox and Sam Senturia finished first and second in an estimated six-mile run.

An unknown number finished the contest the second year. The third annual contest in 1976 became 4 on the 4th at 4, a four-miler on July 4 at 4 p.m. Twelve unknown runners participated.

In the fourth annual contest, Bryan Stockton finished first in the male

competition in 23:45; Carolyn Schupp finished first in the female competition in 36:32.

Cooler heads prevailed in 1978. Race organizers set a 9 a.m. start time. Stockton and Schupp were repeat winners in 23:50 and 30:52 in a pack of 128 runners.

In 1981, Dunbar Park became the Firecracker 4 starting point for the four-mile route through residential Lake Jackson. The earlier start attracted 128 runners.

I ran my first Firecracker 4 in 1987. I began covering the race for *The Facts* in 1991.

In 1996, BARRA officially took over the contest, and USA Track & Field credentialed certifier Will Lindgren certified the race distance set up in 1996.

Former Brazoswood cross-country runner Jeremy Dye set the certified course record, 21:33, in the first year of certification. Dye's record stood until 2003, when Gabriel Rodriguez finished the route in 20:37.

Melissa Hurta of Jones Creek dominated the female competition beginning in 1993. Hurta won the four-miler four

times. She set the certified course record, 24:23, in 1997.

From 1998 to 2005, Susan Walters of Willis dominated the female competition with six first overall finishes in seven years. Last year Walters, just turned 40, finished first overall in 25:52 and broke the female masters (40 plus) record. Hurta, however, still holds the fastest overall time for a female runner.

Race records did not include masters runners until 2002. Walters holds the female masters record, and Brett Puderbaugh of Clute posted the fastest male masters time, 23:40, in 2000.

The Firecracker 4 is the only four-miler in the area. The extra mile tests 5K runners a bit more just as the Belmont tests the three-year old colts more than the other triple-crown races. The heat is a challenge, too. The temperature is usually in the 90s with equal or higher humidity.

Grant Parker of West Columbia finished first overall in the male competition last year in 23:18, Walters first in the overall female competition in 25:52. Out of towners Osbaldo Castillo (24:34) and Cindy

Sosa (30:24) finished first in the masters competition.

Last year the contest included a one-mile walk. Some walkers complained the distance was too short. Two walkers did the four-mile distance. BARRA extended the walk to two miles for this year's contest.

BASF sponsors a Kids K for youngsters 12 and under. Participants receive T-shirts and a finishers medals.

Online registration is available at active.com. Registration forms are

available at local fitness centers, on the BARRA Website Brazosport.edu/~BARRA and on my Web billshawsite.net.

Registration remains open until 7 a. m. on race day. The Kids K starts at 7:15, the run and walk simultaneously at 7:30 a. m.

The Firecracker 4 is a tradition and a family affair. It's a good way to start the celebration of our nation's independence. I hope to see you at the starting line.

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