

Peers help motivate us to workout

By Bill Shaw

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Friday, about 4 p.m. The temperature is 57 degrees, the northwest wind is blowing at 14 mph, a light rain falls and I am breathlessly headed up a hill in Hot Springs, Ark. My wife and I are on a short vacation. I had planned to run Friday morning, but the sky opened up in a deluge, and I dared not run in unfamiliar territory on slippery streets.

I never miss a run on a vacation. I have run in Jamaica, the Bahamas, in Puerto Rico and everywhere I have traveled in Texas and throughout the states, including along the rim of the Grand Canyon and in Washington, D.C., where I realized I was lost when I saw the Jefferson Memorial across the Potomac and had to ask directions back to my hotel. I also got lost on a run in San Antonio, and I ran in circles scanning the skyline for the Tower of the Americas to find my hotel next to it.

I didn't get lost Friday. I ran a straight out and back route despite the temptation to explore some of the roads and streets along Lake Hamilton, which our hotel is adjacent to.

In my four-day stay in Hot Springs, I saw only four other runners, one solo male, one solo woman and a couple of women running together.

I thought about those runners I saw here in Hot Springs and speculated Friday night as I drifted into dreamland about what drove those runners and me to the streets. The answer I came up is support and encouragement from their running peers, particularly the pair of ladies I saw running.

Runners, cyclists, swimmers and others trying to get into an exercise regimen or to start one often fail for a lack of a support group. Their peers are not

“into” exercise and sometimes even make fun of the beginner or “born-again,” aspiring athlete, particularly if he or she is average, older or mediocre, like me.

In our area, we have two active support groups, a long-established group, the Brazosport Area Road Runners Association and the newly established Lake Jackson/Freeport Area Triathletes.

Both BARRA and LJFAT welcome athletes of all ages, abilities and experiences. Some of the charter members of LJFAT don't even have bicycles, but they aspire to be baptized into the unique fraternity of triathletes.

BARRA members vary in age from teens to senior citizens and abilities from slow to fast walkers to top finishers in local and area races. Members can find a group that will challenge

them but not discourage them by leaving them in the dust. BARRA members meet at the Brazosport College running trail every Saturday morning at 7 a.m. on the northeast side of the campus near the tennis courts; beginners are welcome. BARRA is on the Web at www.barrahome.net.

LJFAT holds track sessions at the Lake Jackson Intermediate School track on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. Runners of all speeds are welcome. Child care is available, but let LJFAT know if you plan to attend with a child so support can be provided. LJFAT plans swimming clinics and bicycle rides of varying distances. Check www.ljfat.com for information, updates, a blog and a bulletin board.

Saturday, BARRA will sponsor its monthly social. We shall start with a run on the college trail at 7 a.m. and then move to a classroom in The Center for the Arts and Sciences for snacks and a game of Jeopardy to challenge the strength of the minds of those with strong legs.

BARRA and LJFAT welcome all comers and offer the support you need to discover the athlete within you. Please join us.

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



