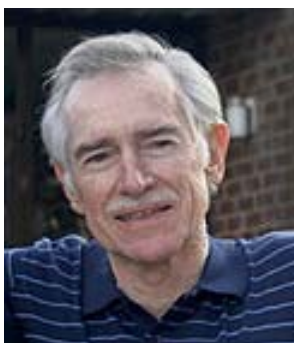


## Firecracker showing no signs of cooling off

*The Facts*

Published June 25, 2007

The late Hal Stockton probably had no idea the informal run he and nine runners ran on the sweltering afternoon of July 4, 1974, were establishing a tradition. In 1976, Stockton and Lake Jackson Running Club members punished themselves celebrating the nation's bicentennial by moving the race to Dunbar Park and branding it "4 on the 4<sup>th</sup> at 4"—four miles on the Fourth of July at 4 p. m.



Cooler heads prevailed in 1978; start time moved to the early morning. In 1996 the Brazosport Area Road Runners Association (BARRA) reorganized the Lake Jackson Running Club. Will Lindgren, a USA Track & Field course designer, accurately measured a certified course beginning near Dunbar Park, winding through shady areas in Lake Jackson, and ending at the pavilion. Over the past decade, BASF has sponsored a non-competitive Kids Run for youngsters 12 and under. Walkers have been welcomed to the race recently with a two-mile walk.

The tradition continues Wednesday, July 4, at Dunbar Park in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Firecracker 4, this year with a

special guest, Hal Stockton's son Bryan, who is flying in from Richardson, Texas.

"It's been 29 years since I ran my last Firecracker 4," said Stockton in an e-mail. "I'm really looking forward to running this race. I greatly appreciate the efforts of you and others in BARRA to keep this race going after my father moved to Wyoming in 1980."

I ran my first Firecracker 4 in 1987. I was a mere youngster of 48, most likely the closest to my "born-again runner" prime. I finished in 31:57, a 7:55 mile average. I can't believe that I ever could run that fast, but it's in the official race results.

At the height of the running boom in 1983, the Firecracker 4 drew a record 225 runners. Last year's contest drew 96 participants, 71 runners and 25 walkers.

Houstonian Gabriel Rodriguez posted the certified course record in 1996; he finished the four-mile distance in 20:37, a sizzling 5:09 race pace in the sweltering July heat. Jones Creek local Melissa Hurta holds the female record; she finished in 24:23, a 6:06 mile pace, in 1997. Former Clute runner Brett Puderbaugh posted the 23:40 male masters (40 and over) record in 2000 with a 5:55 pace.

In 2006, Susan Walters of Wallis finished her seventh consecutive Firecracker 4 as

either the top overall female runner or the top female masters runner in 25:31, a 6:23 pace, and broke the female masters course record.

Grant Parker finished first overall in the Firecracker 4 for the second consecutive year last year in 23:59. Lauren Smith of Brazoswood finished first for the females in 25:01, and Jorge Alvarado of Houston finished first in the male masters competition in 25:20.

Last year's walkers made good time on a long course of two and a quarter miles rather than two, a glitch we hope to correct this year. The top male walkers were Matthew Whitehead, 10, in 28:55; Colby Astor, 4, in 39:30; and Craig Welsch, 58, in 42:47. The top female walkers were Toyah Allen, 16, in 33:01; Margie Daniels, 57, in 33:04; and Margie Skaggs, 46, in 33:30.

Celebrate Independence Day with an early morning run or walk before you grill the hot dogs and burgers. Entry forms are available at local physical fitness centers or on the BARRA Web site [www.barrahome.net](http://www.barrahome.net). Register on line at [www.active.com](http://www.active.com), or just show up at the Dunbar Park on race day.

Packet pickup and race-day registration begin at 6 a. m., with the Kids Run at 7:15 a. m. and the run/walk start at 7:30 a. m.

Hope to see you at the starting line.

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