

## SMALL TOWN RACE PROMOTION

Generally, most small town road races in Oklahoma rely on the larger metro areas such as Oklahoma City and Tulsa to provide the bulk of runners for their fields. There is nothing wrong with this system except that races seem to have the same runners and same winners. That is until recently. Many of the runners are becoming much more selective and racing less often. Which may mean a race a month or it may be limited to one or two a year. More often than not runners are picking the exceptional races, that is, those with the promotion and the ones that offer something extra. As a consequence some of the smaller events, no matter how well organized, and these include running club races in the two largest cities, have seen smaller fields. The trend seems to be that the bigger races are growing and some of the small ones and even those in between are shrinking.

The races that are of poor quality do not have a chance of growing, not in today's atmosphere of super organization, prize money and the freebies that are offered by so many of the promoters.

Small towns do have some advantages in the promotion area that are not being used in many cases. The bulk of racing fields should come from that particular area. It should be an annual event in which the people of that city look forward to each year. The secret is how to get the local people to participate.

Listed below are some suggestions that have worked:

- Approach the schools in your area. This can be done through the physical education teachers. A good example of the success of this is the Wildflower Run in Bristow. You may wish to distribute brochures, if possible, in the schools or offer a prize to the school with the largest participation on a percentage basis from each grade or from each school. Consider a short race such as 2 km for kids only or keep it a fun run. Offer reduced or group entry fees. The best example of promoting a kids fun run is in Spokane, Washington, where a 3 km race for kids 12 and under has been held the last several years. Each runner receives a t-shirt and prizes are given to schools with the largest number of percentage finishers. Over 10,000 kids participate in this event!
- Contact the local media for help. One way is to persuade them to be sponsors of your event. The newspaper and radio are essential in promoting a race.
- Approach the local dignitaries such as the mayor, chief of police, fire chief or anyone else with a high position in your city. Promote competition among these individuals on a friendly basis.
- Tie your event in with founder's day or some other special event.
- Offer gift certificates from local merchants both to the race winners and in a drawing for all participants.
- Establish a short walk in conjunction with your event. You will be surprised how many will turn out. Make it a short distance and over a scenic route and make an effort to contact the older group. Or establish a walk category within the run.
- Donate the proceeds of your event, if any, to a non profit which directly benefits your city.
- Make a strong effort to make your event attractive to every single individual in your city or area.