

SPELLMAN HONORED BY HALL OF FAME

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

Charlie Spellman didn't plan to commit to running the show for that long. But like the individuals who donate their time to volunteer organizations are aware, it's easy to get started yet difficult to walk away. So when Spellman agreed to coordinate the Norwich Reaction Department's Summer Race Series back in 1991, he never thought that it would take 15 years to finally step down from the responsibly. "I was participating in the Rec Runs," recalls Spellman, "and they were looking for someone to help out. I was there each week anyway, so I volunteered". 15 years later, Spellman finally turned in his clipboard and stopwatch at the end of the 2005 series. He continues to participate in the races, knowing that his efforts made a difference.

Because of those volunteer efforts, Spellman will be honored at tonight's Norwich Sports Hall of Fame induction dinner by receiving the Joseph Kaptiena Service Award. The award is presented to an individual or group that provides outstanding service to the Norwich sports community. Spellman certainly meets that criteria. "I wanted to give back to the running community," explained Spellman of his decision to initially volunteer for the task. A 1980 Norwich Free Academy graduate who ran track for the Wildcats, Spellman was living in Norwich at the time and had done some casual running after college just to stay in shape. When a friend talked him into running the challenging Woodstock (CT) 10K Road Race in Memorial Day, Spellman agreed. After the race, he was in pain. But he was hooked. Spellman continued to participate in area road races and joined the Mohegan Striders Association. With his newly acquired Race Director duties, he became an integral part of the club. And despite the challenges for time commitments that accompany work, marriage, and children, Spellman continued to be a part of the event every Thursday evening in July and August.

Spellman, who now resides in Rocky Hill with his wife Michelle and two children (C.J., 11, and Victoria, 8), remained committed to helping out with the event year after year even after his move. "I never found it to be a burden to come down," said Spellman of his Thursday evening trek from his Rocky Hill home to Mohegan Park. "I enjoyed doing it. It was a great way to stay connected to the running community". Spellman would often arrive early and run the course solo, tackling his evening workout and reviewing the course for safety purposes at the same time. At the finish line, Spellman would record every finisher's time and place and get the information to the Norwich Bulletin that same night. The races consistently drew 40 or 50 runners each week. Since relocating from its former Kelly Middle School start to the current location in the center of Mohegan Park and the addition of kid's races, attendance has nearly doubled and rivals some road races in both quality and quantity of runners.

Spellman still continues to make the trip to Norwich for the Rec Runs each summer. Now he enjoys the freedom of running in the kid's race with C.J. and just enjoying the camaraderie of his fellow runners. And he continues to assist with volunteer duties when needed. Spellman promotes the event as an avenue for runners to get the training in while at the same time, enjoy the company of fellow runners. "It's not just a competitive race," explains Spellman of the Norwich Recreation Race Series concept. "There's a social aspect." Spellman is also quick to credit an outstanding support staff and a loyal crowd of runners for allowing things to run so smoothly for the 15 years he was at the helm. "I had a lot of help over the years," says Spellman. It was great to see a lot of the same faces running each week over those 15 years".

The Norwich Sports Hall of Fame induction dinner will take place this evening beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Norwich. Contact Bill Sullivan at 889-1834 for ticket information or visit the organization's web site at www.norwichsportshalloffame.org for more information. Congratulations to Charlie Spellman, this year's inductees, and all of the award recipients on their recognition.

The Norwich Recreation Races begin on Thursday, July 5th and runs for eight consecutive Thursday evenings concluding on August 23rd. There is a ½ Mile Kid's Run beginning promptly at 6:30pm, followed by a 1 Mile Fun Run at 6:45pm. The 3 Mile Run begins at 7:00pm. All race begin and end in the center of Mohegan Park (adjacent to the water Fountain). There is no cost to participate. Contact the Norwich Recreation Department at 823-3791 for more information.

Race Update

There's a new road race in the area next month, back with a familiar name but with a new twist. From the folks who delivered the former "Up Against the Wall 5K" race in New London, the event returns with a new location and a new cause. This year's race will take place on Sunday, June 10th, beginning at 10:00am from the Montville Polish Club. The event, with proceeds benefiting the Montville Lions Club, will be professional timed by SNERRO and feature prizes for all division winners, a large post-race raffle, food, and live music. The newly-designed race course has two hills on the way out and is fast on the way back. Call (860) 848-8059 for more race information.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@sbcglobal.net.