

# TOMMY TOY FUND RUN OFFERS GOOD TIME FOR A GOOD CAUSE

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

Despite the fact that I have not competed in a road race in over six years, running continues to have a major impact on my life. I have family that runs; tons of friends that are runners. I've met plenty of terrific people through my involvement with the sport. There is a strong bond of camaraderie amongst runners, especially in Southeastern Connecticut where traditions run deep and running events are numerous. Yet with the absence of a consistent training routine and race schedule and the addition of new responsibilities, the opportunities to bond with fellow runners are much less frequent than they used to be. So with the approach of the holiday season setting in, one event that I look forward to each and every year is the Tommy Toy Fund Run, which takes place on Friday evening, December 5<sup>th</sup> beginning and ending at Billy Wilson's Ageing Still. The event offers an opportunity to partake in a terrific cause, help others that may be much less fortunate, and enjoy the company of friends. And while the majority of the crowd at Billy Wilson's will be runners, there is no competitive racing involved. A casually-paced group run with Santa Claus and the donations of a new, unwrapped toy is all that is required to be a part of the festivities.

The Norwich Bulletin has a long-established history with the Tommy Toy Fund, having been a part of the event since December 1973. The Tommy Toy Fund concept began with a letter written to the Editor of the Bulletin from a little girl who explained that her Mother did not have enough money to purchase Christmas gifts. The girl claimed that she realized the circumstances but that her little brother Tommy was too young to understand. The Bulletin's Editor would tell of her story on the editorial pages of the paper, and the concept was born. Since that time, the Tommy Toy Fund has collected toys and donations from generous contributors in an effort to provide an enjoyable Christmas experience for families that are less fortunate. The Tommy Toy Fund Run is part of that tradition that helps provide a Merry Christmas for many children who would have no Christmas.

The Mohegan Striders Association, a 300+ member running club based in Norwich, has been actively involved in the Tommy Toy Fund Run event since its inception. Tim Kane of Preston has served as the Mohegan Striders President from 1995 through this year. Kane, 51, recently stepped down from office after 14 years of service. He will continue to be an integral part of the Club, and the Tommy Toy Fund Run is an annual event that Kane plans to attend each year. "The Tommy Toy Fund Run pre-dates my days as Club President, so you know it's really old," joked Kane. He emphasizes that the event is not a competitive running event and is open to everyone, regardless of ability. "The first rule is that no one runs in front of Santa," says Kane of the 1.5 mile group run that moves along at a very pedestrian pace and insures that no stragglers are left behind. Kane also emphasized the value associated with the club supporting such a worthwhile event. "It's probably the most visible way that the Mohegan Striders interact with the City of Norwich and with the Southeastern Connecticut community", said Kane. "There are many people who have participated in the event for a lot of years. Everyone feels pretty good about it. It's a great way to get involved and help people who really need the help this time of the year."

Mohegan Striders Vice President Mike Fusaro of Norwich has participated in the Tommy Toy Fund Run event since his collegiate days competing for the University of Connecticut. The opportunity to socialize with fellow runners and do something worthwhile for the community is what brings Fusaro to Billy Wilson's for the event. "I always looked forward to the Tommy Toy Fund Run," said Fusaro. "It's a great way to get together with friends from the running community in a non-competitive environment while supporting a great cause. Donating toys for needy families is an easy way to get into the Christmas spirit."

On Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, join the Mohegan Striders in association with Billy Wilson's Ageing Still for this year's Tommy Toy Fund Run. The even consists of a group run through the streets of downtown Norwich led by Santa Claus, with a 1.5 mile loop course beginning in front of Billy Wilson's at 57 Broadway at 7:00pm sharp. Check out [www.moheganstriders.org](http://www.moheganstriders.org) or contact Billy Wilson's at 887-8733 for more information. The entry fee is an unwrapped toy, and the event is open to the public. Be sure to make an effort to get out and enjoy this evening for a great cause.

## Racing Roundup

Brendan Adkins of Old Lyme (26:22) and Melissa Perkins-Banas of Norwich (29:34) were winners at the EBAC Fall Challenge 4.75 Mile Road Race in New London on November 8<sup>th</sup>. Adkins outdistanced Christopher Kane of Waterford, who earned top masters honors in 26:42. Perkins-Banas finished 10<sup>th</sup> overall, ahead of Niantic's Jessica Cini (31:32). The Electric Boat Athletic Club defeated Pfizer Corporation for top corporate team honors. There were 192 finishers.....The 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Manchester Road Race, Connecticut's oldest road race event, will take place on Thanksgiving Day. Both defending champion Andrew Letherby of Australia and 2007 runner-up Martin Fagan, a former Providence College All-American, are again expected to compete for top honors. Defending Women's champion Amy Yoder-Begley, a 2008 Olympian at 10,000 meters, had registered but will not compete due to injury. 1984 Olympic Marathon Champion Joan Benoit Samuelson is serving as the event's honorary chairperson and is also expected to compete. The race begins on Main Street at 10:00am

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