

# TEAM PFIZER FINDS STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

Back in 1994, Mike Boucher was an avid runner and an employee of the Pfizer Corporation at Pfizer's Global Research and Development headquarters in Groton. Little did he know at the time that what had begun as a simple invitation to a few fellow employees to join him for a lunchtime run to the neighboring Avery Point campus and back would evolve into an organized group of Pfizer employees competing monthly in road races as one of the top corporate teams in all of New England and New York. Back then, a total of 24 runners wearing the now-familiar Pfizer team colors competed in the Team Pfizer's inaugural event. Then in 1998, fellow employee Dave Hammond, along with Boucher and a half-dozen others, injected some serious organization into the Pfizer Corporate Running Team. Hammond, a Business Operations Manager at Pfizer and an experienced distance runner, was instrumental in taking Team Pfizer to the next level. Organized group workouts, weekend training runs, a web site, and a formal team racing and workout schedule all became part of the Pfizer distance running tradition. Today, Mike Boucher is still an avid runner and an employee of the Pfizer Corporation. But he has no problem finding company for his lunchtime runs. Team Pfizer now boasts over 150 members that compete in eight team events from Stamford, CT to Rhode Island to New York City.

Organization and participation are the Pfizer team's forte. Considered one of the leading employee-friendly companies in Southeastern Connecticut, the Pfizer Corporation believes that the positive effects of being involved with a sport like running produces a better employee. Team Pfizer has adopted four of the eight Core Values of the corporation: Leadership, Community, Performance, and Teamwork. Although these values were created and intended for the workplace environment, they are also adaptable to the Pfizer Running Team. The teams' balanced demographics are evident, with members ranging from entry level workers to white collar executives, a 55:45% male to female ratio, and race times varying from 5:30 pace to 10:00 or more per mile. "Run Hard, Have Fun", the Team Pfizer slogan, says it all. The "Pfizer Grand Prix" series, a program set up with management support from the Community Affairs Department and the Fitness Center, encourages employees to get involved in running, enter and compete in a series of races, and bring family and friends along to the events. Team Pfizer has also been active in volunteering at local events and has implemented a Kids Fun Run as a vehicle for encouraging family participation.

While the Pfizer team certainly touts participation as it's top priority, the team has also produced some impressive performances on the roads. Turning in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place team finishes, Team Pfizer qualified three teams in the 1994 Chemical Bank Corporate Challenge Race in Stamford to qualify for the prestigious Chemical Bank Corporate Race in New York City. Team Pfizer returned in 1995 to qualify five teams. "We promote the Stamford race as our Olympics," explains Hammond. "Our goal is to earn a trip to New York. In terms of accomplishment, we want to send a big group of runners." The men's team was also invited to the Millrose Games to compete in the corporate division of the 4x400-meter relay. Not to be outdone, their women's team was also invited to Millrose two years later. In 1999, Pfizer placed a team in the top 10 of all three team categories (Men's, Women's, and Mixed team) in New York City.

Team Pfizer also builds strength and incentive in numbers, shedding any stereotype of the lonely long-distance runner. Training includes anywhere from one to twenty people running together at lunch, Tuesday evening track workout sessions, Thursday's of harder intervals on the roads, and organized group long runs from various locations on the weekends. Communication is through e-mail and via the Pfizer Team website. And their impressive numbers in terms of participation has injected new life into the local road racing scene. "It's easy to admire the running community," says Hammond. "There is a definite running subculture, and runners are people with a strong values system. It's the best group of people you'll ever meet."

## **In the News**

Running and racing in downtown Norwich just won't be the same without Harry J. Ogulnick. The longtime Norwich businessman and city supporter recently passed away at the age of 91. A loyal supporter of NFA cross-country and track, Ogulnick sponsored the Downtown Norwich Merchants Road Race in the city. Years later, a children's run was added to the event, which continues today. The annual birthday bash that was held in his honor each year at Billy Wilson's Ageing Still was a popular get-together for the man best known as "Harry-O". His presence and his contributions to the city will certainly be missed.

## **This month in history**

August 6th, 1983 – Race Director Jack Dempsey announces that national caliber runner Odis Sanders of Long Island, New York has scratched from the field of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual John J. Kelly-Schaefer 11.6 Mile Road Race due to a nagging hip injury. But after talking with Kelly less than 24 hours before the race, Sanders has a change of heart. The 24 year old Sanders, with a 2:14 marathon best to his credit, pulls away from the pack at the one mile mark and breezes to the finish in a course record 57:46.6 (an outstanding 4:58 per mile pace), bettering Amby Burfoot's 1976 mark by 22 seconds. New Milford's Bob Hensley, who had run 2:16:50 at the Boston Marathon months earlier, settles for second in 59:01, with Wayne Jacob (59:53) in 3<sup>rd</sup> and defending champion Jim Flynn 4<sup>th</sup> (60:01). In the women's race, Jane Wetzel of Sudbury, Massachusetts successfully defends her title, finishing 55<sup>th</sup> overall in 69:11.6, a women's course record time. Ridgefield's John Dugdale wins the men's masters division, while Bacon Academy Senior Darrin Eisman (65:23) and Danbury's Jane Demarco (76:43) win the high school division. Former Boston Marathon winner and Olympian Johnny J. Kelly, for whom the race is named, wins his second consecutive grandmaster (50+) title in 1:13.59. There are 594 finishers, compared to the first race back in 1963, where there were a total of 18 entrants. The Kelly Race remains the second oldest road race in Connecticut and still charges no entry fee to compete.

**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@netzero.net](mailto:kdcsikorski@netzero.net).**