

# LONARDELLI A THURSDAY EVENING REGULAR

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

Picture another warm and somewhat humid Thursday night in July or August as a group of nearly 50 runners negotiate the first turn onto the main road through Norwich's Mohegan Park. A familiar face appears on the corner, clearing traffic and reading split times approximately 150 meters into the 3 mile recreation race course. The same face again appears as runners pass through the intersection towards the 2 mile mark for one final loop around the pond. And again as they approach the finish, these runners see the same familiar figure there to guide them to the finish line safely. That face is none other than Norwich native Joe Lonardelli, and for every Thursday evening in July and August, he has been an integral part of Norwich's running community.

The 68 year-old Lonardelli was born and raised in Norwich. As a youth and during his years attending Norwich Free Academy, Lonardelli was active in baseball, basketball, and tennis. He continues to be involved in the Norwich recreation scene, spending over 25 years with the Southern New England Tennis Championships, and even serving as a bowling instructor at the Norwich Ten Pin. It was back in July of 1981 when Lonardelli, spending a relaxing summer evening as a tennis match spectator, was approached by the Mohegan Striders longtime membership Secretary Bob Carbray. Carbray explained to Lonardelli that they were conducting a recreation race at Kelly Junior High School and were looking for a volunteer. "He said that they were having a race and asked me if I would help out," Lonardelli fondly remembers. That was over 20 years ago, and he's been helping out ever since. Lonardelli's participation with running and with the Mohegan Striders organization, who along with the City of Norwich co-sponsor the summer race series, has been one of supportive service ever since. Like clockwork, Lonardelli is there ready to go every Thursday, and has only missed three races in that entire time span. Lonardelli assists the SNERRO organization as well with a number of their race timing efforts in Norwich, like the Rose City Challenge, the Reliance House 5K, and the Downtown Merchants Road Race. He also serves as the right hand man to Norwich's Kevin Crowley, assisting with a number of youth road race and track events in Norwich. The Striders honored Lonardelli for his dedication and support in July 1991 by naming him as the club's fifth honorary lifetime member. He was also inducted into the Norwich Sports Hall of Fame earlier this year.

Joe Lonardelli retired from the Norwich Public Works department in 1988 after thirty years of loyal service. He continues to dedicate his time and efforts to the sport of running in Norwich. "I know a lot of people," Lonardelli explains modestly, "and I have plenty of time." Those efforts are truly appreciated, especially by anyone who has ever assisted with or participated in road race events. "Without Joe, much of what goes on would not take place," says Crowley of Lonardelli's contributions to his youth events. The running world needs more people like Joe Lonardelli.

## Racing Roundup

The summer road racing season is coming to a close. The fall seems to always give runners that last opportunity to capitalize on their summer training efforts, hopefully rewarding us with some milder conditions to run and race in. Chad Johnson of Canterbury (15:34) and Joan McGuire of Newington (23:38) were winners at the Brooklyn Fair 5K on August 26<sup>th</sup>.....At the Sneekers Run in Groton later that same day, Waterford's Steve Herrera put in a solid day's work, claiming the 2 mile race in a course record 9:53, then clocking 26:21 (less than an hour later) to win the 5 mile event as well, fending off training partner Chadwick Brown (26:29) of Uncasville and Rhode Island's Norm Bouthiller (26:31). It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive 2 Mile/5 Mile double victory for Herrera at Sneekers. East Hartford's Heather Gardiner finished an impressive 4<sup>th</sup> place overall in 29:18 to claim the women's title. Susan Faber (2<sup>nd</sup> female in 31:21) and Kris-Anne Kane (3<sup>rd</sup> in 31:28) also posted top 10 overall finishes. Gardiner's win, although a surprise to many in attendance at the Sneekers event, shouldn't have been. The 23 year-old Gardiner won the MedSpan Corporate 5K (17:54) in Hartford earlier in August and had run 17:46 in a 5K in Clinton a week earlier.....The Harry "O" Youth Fun Run, sponsored by People's Bank, will take place in downtown Norwich on Thursday evening, September 6<sup>th</sup> starting at 6:00pm from the YMCA. The youth event is free and open to kids up to age 14. Contact the Norwich YMCA for more information and expect to see Joe Lonardelli there handing out ribbons to the kids at the finish line, a volunteer job he has held for the past sixteen years as well.

## This month in history

September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1985 – Norwich's Kevin Crowley, who had established one of the state's top cross-country programs while at Montville High School, trades in his orange and black colors to replace Gene McGrath as Norwich Free Academy's head cross country coach. Crowley, who at Montville had produced six consecutive Class M and three consecutive State Open girls' titles when he left in 1984, joins NFA after one fall season as a volunteer assistant for the Wildcats. McGrath, in his 20-year tenure, had compiled a 153-60 record along with a Class LL and a State Open Championship to his credit. Crowley, who continues to be active in various youth running programs today, is instrumental in returning a strong running tradition to NFA, organizing an alumni race event attracting nearly 70 runners from past Wildcat cross-country teams.

**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).**