

KELLY RACE NOW A 40 YEAR TRADITION

By DON SIKORSKI
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Even if running 11.6 miles in August's heat and humidity doesn't sound all that appealing, at least the price is right. And being part of a 40 year storied running tradition is well worth the effort. You'll have your chance to be a part of it all on Saturday, August 3rd as the 40th Annual Ocean Beach / John J. Kelley 11.6 Mile Road race takes place beginning and ending at Ocean Beach Park in New London.

Back in 1963, the City of New London collaborated with Schafer Beer Day at Ocean Beach Park to organize a road race. Local distance running standout Johnny J. Kelley (nicknamed "The Younger" Kelley due to the Johnny A. Kelley of many consecutive Boston marathons fame), would go on to win the inaugural race, and the city of New London paid tribute to Kelley in 1974 by naming the event after him. It's only fitting that, on the race's 40th anniversary, Kelley himself would be inducted into the Distance Running Hall of Fame in Utica, New York earlier this month. Kelley, a national high school mile recorder holder while competing for New London's Bulkeley High in 1948, possesses an impressive running resume, including two Olympic marathons, a win at the 1957 Boston Marathon, and 8 consecutive National AAU Marathon Championships. "A runner of John Kelley's stature comes along once in a lifetime," explains Kelley Race Director Way Hedding of Niantic. "And it's lucky for us to have him right here in our back yard to pay tribute to." Hedding himself, a 1968 New London High School graduate and seasoned road racing veteran, revealed his early ambition of competing in the Ocean Beach / Kelley race after his high school years. In now his 14th consecutive year as the race's Director, Hedding has proved to be one of the main reasons for the race's success. Asked why the Kelley race remains a staple of distance running in Southeastern Connecticut, Hedding offers a number of reasons. "Ocean Beach Park is a seashore paradise", Hedding promotes. "Bring your bathing suits. Another draw is the mystique associated without the race itself and all the great names that have competed at the Kelley race. It's also the oldest shoreline road race in the state. The course (designed by 1968 Boston Marathon winner Amby Burfoot) winds through the picturesque neighborhoods of New London and Waterford, with plenty of water stops along the way. And we're very fortunate and honored to have someone like Johnny Kelley to honor for our race." Hedding has shown the ability to promote a road race, attracting both he masses of mid-pack runners as well as a quality race field up front. "We always treat the last runners that finish the race just as importantly as the first runners," says Hedding. "Nearly every runner's name is announced as they cross the finish line, recognizing them for the hard earned effort." Hedding is also not opposed to joining his fellow running companions for a cold beer or two at the Port N' Starboard deck after the race, another selling point of the event. Any way you look at it, the Ocean Beach / Kelley race should be a part of your summer running plans.

The Ocean Beach / Kelley Road race features complimentary refreshments, professional split and finish timing by SNERRO, and age division awards on the boardwalk following the race. Starting time is 9:00am sharp, leaving the runner's plenty of quality beach time, and there's plenty of parking available at Ocean Beach Park. Applications are available at the Ocean Beach Office, Kelley's Pace in Mystic Village, or at the Run In Store in Rocky Hill. Race day entries are also accepted and volunteers for water stops are always needed. Call the Race Hotline at (860) 739-9927 for more race or volunteer information. And don't miss being a part of running history.

Racing Roundup

- The area's three top runners over the past few seasons, Canterbury's Chad Johnson, Waterford's Stephen Herrera, and Uncasville's Chadwick Brown, have all continued to run well at a variety of distances. At the Firecracker Mile USATF State Championship race in Harwinton on July 6th, Johnson claimed his fifth consecutive state win of the year (adding to his 5K, 12K, 10 mile, and Half-Marathon state titles). Johnson's time of 4:31 on the uphill course was good enough for a 4-second win over Chris Chisholm of the Hartford Track Club. Herrera, who a week earlier had won the Cannonball Run One Mile race in Preston, claimed 5th place overall, while Brown, still recovering from a bout of plantar faciitis from late May, returned to racing to finish 9th.
- Hartford's Gideon Mutisya, a 38 year-old Kenyan runner who has resided in Connecticut for the past few years, should be able to claim the award for the fastest combined race efforts in the shortest period of time this season. Mutisya won the Independence Day 5K in Milford on the 4th of July, posting a time of 15:28. Two days later, Mutisya placed 3rd behind Johnson and Chisholm in Harwinton with his 4:40 clocking, then went on to comfortably win the Enfield 5K Road Race later that same evening in 15:41. Mutisya, a former winner at the prestigious Litchfield Hills Road Race, likes to race often, and should pose quite a threat as a Master's runner around the state if he can maintain his same level of effort at age 40.

This Month in History

July 15th, 1990 – For almost 5 miles, all eyes were focused on Jerry Lawson's golden orange spiked hairdo. The 24 year old Lawson returned to Southington, Connecticut from his Florida home with the goal of defending his TAC Connecticut State 12K Championship title from a year ago, and the day's overcast, humid weather was much to his liking. Lawson's Jacksonville training grounds had prepped him sufficiently for Connecticut's summer heat, but the absence of hills in Florida proved to be Lawson's undoing, as Terryville's Tom Paskus, a 5K specialist at Dartmouth College, overtook Lawson just after a series of hills at the 5 mile mark and held on to win the 12K (7.4 mile) race in 36:33. The Mohegan Striders Men's Open Team claimed the team title over rival Top Gun Running on Top Gun's home course. Brothers Joe (5th) and Patrick Swift (12th), along with Ed Zubritsky (16th), Kevin Pigeon (22nd), and Jon Bell (24th), were the top scorers for the Striders team. Oxford's Sue Faber won the women's race in 42:13, while West Harford's Tom Foran finished well ahead of the 392-runner field to win the wheelchair division in a record time of 30:06.

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