

[Celebrations](#) | [Travel](#) | [Food](#) | [NeXt](#) | [Home & Garden](#) | [Health](#) | [Lifestyle News](#) | [Golden Years](#) | [Religion](#) | [Parade](#) | [Columns](#)

[Dining](#) | [Movies & TV](#) | [Music](#) | [Art & Theater](#) | [Entertainment News](#) | [Books & Literature](#) | [Gusto](#)

[News & Opinion](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment & Lifestyles](#)

[Home](#)

News Library

Helping African-Americans get in step

Published on April 6, 2008

Author: Budd Bailey

© The Buffalo News Inc.

There's often something missing when a road race is held in almost any location in Western New York, or for that matter in many places around the country: runners of color.

That's a surprise to some. There are few economic barriers to African-American participation in running; running shoes and gym clothes are all that's needed. For those looking for role models, they can simply turn on the television and see black males dominating international marathons.

"Unfortunately, we glamorize the sprint sports a lot more -- basketball, football, track events in which athletes run less than one lap," **Tony Reed** said.

Reed, a Dallas resident, is trying to do something about all that. He's the co-founder and national director of the National Black Marathoners Association, which has been building up its membership numbers over the past seven years or so.

"When new members join, when they first find out about us, their first comments are usually 'I thought I was the only person [of color] out there running.' They were shocked and surprised to see others. It's literally a support group for African-American runners," Reed said. The association's biggest goal is to help fight some frightening statistics concerning health issues. More than 10 percent of all adult African-Americans have diabetes. African-Americans are 2.4 times as likely to suffer strokes than whites, and the rate of high blood pressure in African-Americans is among the highest in the world.

"When new members join, or when they get together and talk, about 90 percent either suffered or had a family member suffer from high blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma or any other disease related to a lack of activity," said Reed, the first black person to complete marathons on seven continents. "They have seen the impact on quality of life, and made a conscious decision not to go that route."

The idea for an association dates to 2001, when Reed was giving a presentation to the Black Data Processing Association.

"I mentioned that I had a goal of running 50 marathons before the age of 50," he recalled. "I had run 46 or 47. Charlotte Simmons of Atlanta was in the audience. She was president of the South Fulton Running Partners. She grabbed me and pulled me into a group of other black runners. They had never met a black person who had run that many marathons. We talked about how great it would be to get together and go running, and many committed themselves to running with me for that 50th marathon."

The organization was formed shortly after that.

"One of the things we did is that we wanted to take away anyone's excuse for not joining the organization," Reed said. "We literally fund the entire organization -- pay for the Web site, set up at conferences -- it all comes out of our pockets."

Any donations go directly into the group's scholarship program, which awards grants to high school runners in cross country or in track who run events of at least 1,500 meters.

The group also tries to meet once a year at a "multi-race marathon" -- one that also includes races such as a half-marathon or 10 kilometers -- to encourage participation. Earlier this year the group -- all clad in red shirts and black shorts -- met in Arizona for the Lost Dutchman Marathon.

"While I was running the St. Louis marathon in 2004, they routed the marathon course past the housing projects I used to live in," Reed said. "Some of the black kids ran along with me. It got me to thinking about the impact of seeing a group of blacks wearing red shirts and black shorts. Spectators couldn't help but notice they'd be running as a team.

"When we had our [group] run for the first time [2005], we really weren't sure how many would show up. As people showed up, it put a huge smile to our faces. It was great. At our first one, we had about 15 people from all around the country. When we ran in Cleveland last year, we had close to 150."

Reed puts the current membership roster at about 900. More information on the group is available at blackmarathoners.org.

Race calendar

*Bemus Point 5K, Long Point State Park Bath House, 9 a.m. today, 488-0788.

*Canisius College Shoes for the Shelter Run (The Buffalo News Runner of the Year Race), 5K, 2001 Main St., noon today, 888-2977.

*Feel the Spirit 5K, 921 Cleveland Drive, Cheektowaga, 11 a.m. April 12, 380-0231.

*Franklin Krohn 5K Memorial Run, SUNY Fredonia, noon April 13.

*Anew Run, 5K, 83 South Main St., Jamestown, 9:30 a.m. April 19, 661-3894.

*Niagara County Bicentennial Heritage Run, 5K, 7340 Campbell Blvd., Pendleton, 10 a.m. April 19, 439-7324.

*Young Life 5K, S4999 McKinley Parkway, Hamburg, 11 a.m. April 19, 572-1625.

e-mail: bbailey@buffnews.com

The membership of the National Black Marathoners Association came out in force in Cleveland last year.

Search again: