

ROG 4 rescue successful, foundation set for future sustainability.

By VRJ

For 15 years the Running of the Green (Island) was an unqualified success, known for being the first competitive road race of the new year, a fast spectator friendly course, with festive team colors. There was a heightened anticipation for a new racing season and genuine relief of winters demise.

The race was directed for the first decade by HMRRRC Hall of Famer Ken Skinner who organized a win/ win partnership with USATF Adirondack to host a 4-mile championship race, introduce USATF team competition and an age-graded handicap division while utilizing the HMRRRC's vast resources and volunteer turnout to put forth a well organized event. The small community of Green Island was also an enthusiastic partner and used their public works department to keep the tight course safe and clear of vehicular traffic.

The initial race drew 264 finishers and was won by standout Utopian runner Jeff Brooks followed closely by Nick Conway, Peter Flynn, and Jamie Rodriquez, all under age 25. The woman's division went to Emily Bryans 32, who had recently moved to the area and began racing competitively. In subsequent years the race grew gradually while drawing very competitive fields with up to 400 participating.

ROG 4 champion Brooks would sustain injuries that forced him to retire from competitive road racing, but Conway, Rodriquez, and Bryans would go on to win multiple championships and dominate regional racing for a decade, while Flynn would win back to back Workforce Challenge races in a very stellar career.

Ed Gillen (3 years) Dave & Letticia Ruderman (2 years) would later direct the ROG 4 added chip timing, modified the course, and reinvested entry fees back into the race with creative new shirt designs, and glass steins as the popularity of the race grew significantly to reach 700 participants. By nearly any measure, this event was worthy of its USATF championship status, and year after year drew the deepest and most talented field of area runners during the entire spring season.

However, the adept management and marketing by race organizers and responding enthusiasm by runners who wanted to celebrate St Patrick's Day, ultimately led the small community of Green Island to insist on hard entry caps due to limited parking and other concerns. Once the popularity spigot was turned on, it was difficult to turn it off and a new race venue had to be found.

Fortunately Brian Northan stepped forward this past fall and agreed to take on the challenge of directing a new ROG 4 event, if a suitable venue could be found. HMRRRC stalwarts Tom and Marcia Adams suggested a course from Schalmont HS and made the connections with the school administration. Another important link was retired Rotterdam Police Officer and Schalmont XC coach Rich Kranick who helped with critical police contacts and volunteer support. The final school and police approval was not obtained until late January 2015. Registration opened February 1, and a press release followed making the rescue of the ROG 4 official. Then came arguably the most severe February in modern recorded weather history for the northeast with half of the days having sub 0F temperatures, near record

snowfall, and zero days above 32F. This delayed the measurement of the new course until 5 days prior to the race.

The running community was forced to train indoors on treadmills or bravely running outdoors in multiple layers on days where temperatures occasionally approached 15F. The few races normally held in February were either canceled or delayed leaving race fitness a real question for most runners as the new ROG 4 race approached.

Winter slowly gave way in the final days before the race, but not without one final scare, as ice and freezing rain fell early on race morning. Fortunately, temperatures gradually rose to 35F in the final hour prior to the race, and Schalmont public works crews and HMRRC volunteers helped spread salt along the course to make it safe for road racing.

The 4-mile course was superbly marked with cones and signs, and a 2-mile split mat was set up at the race midpoint within a nice residential Rotterdam neighborhood. The high school was a much more spacious venue for staging registration and awards, and there was a nice offering of hot and cold post race refreshments. The Rotterdam Police were very helpful in managing the quarter mile RT 7 corridor and leading the race. Despite initial concerns, there was ample room for parking. In this author's opinion, all of the above were improvements over the former venue.

18 USATF teams registered 72 competitive runners, and 15 complete teams finished the course. In total 90 USATF athletes participated among the 287 overall finishers...as the first race in Rotterdam mirrored the initial Green Island Race in year 2000.

The men's race was highlighted by a duel between Clarkson graduate Patrick Carroll 23 and seasoned racer Chuck Terry 32 who raced side by side at 5:15 per mile pace until Carroll edged clear the final quarter mile for the win by 5 seconds in 21:11. Carroll ran to an impressive 14th place finish (49:15) at his Stockade-athon debut last year showing a lot of upside potential if he can maintain a strong work ethic and stay healthy. It may have been destined that Patrick would win on this Irish holiday. A similar close duel took place for the final podium spot, as Richard Messina 26 edged Eric Young 23 by one second. Another close race occurred in the masters division as Bob Irwin 42 edged Volker Burkowski 43 22:12 to 22:22.

The women's race was won by one of the best racers within our Eastern New York USATF association. Sara Dunham 38 won her 3rd ROG 4 title impressively posting a 22:53 (5:44 pace) to draw away from Schalmont High School standout Julia Flower 16, during the second half of the race. Dunham had a 2 second edge on Flower at the 2-mile split, but increased her margin with every stride after that, as the superbly talented Flower who raced very hard early, could not sustain such a demanding pace in the race's final mile. Still Flower should be proud of her effort, as Dunham has arguably been this regions best female racer not named Megan Hogan the past 3 years. She has won both the MHR Marathon and Hannover Half Marathon, along with her 3 ROG 4 titles. She has also finished 5th the past 2 years at the Stockade-athon Road Race, behind such regional talents as Hogan, Maegan Krifchin, Hannah Davidson, and Sasha Verenka (NH). All of this accomplished since she returned to competitive road racing in her mid 30's after a stellar scholastic career.

Now at age 38, she is running as well as any point in her career with consistent racing results at a variety of distances from 5K to the occasional marathon.

Renee Tolan 40 led a strong field of accomplished female masters runners to finish 3rd overall in 24:13, followed by 7-time ROG 4 Champion Emily Bryans 47 (25:06) and Eric Corcoran 40 (25:26). Tolan was one of only 3 of the top 20 finishers to post a negative 2-mile split, while picking up the pace during the slightly tougher second half. Also negative splitting were Derrick Staley 56, who won the Age-graded division (88.%) and Tom Kracker 50, who finished just ahead of Tolan, 15th place overall.

There were 12 performances considered National Class (80%+) according to the Age-Graded tables with Judy Phelps (85.4%) earning the best female AG performance ahead of Dunham, Flower, & Bryans.

Despite reduced participation this year the race went off remarkably well after a lot of hard work from the race director and his organizing team, The foundation is set for a new era of the ROG 4, with a solid course, new spacious venue with easy access off the interstate and the potential to grow race participation gradually in future years. Perhaps the era of 25 LB Gold Plated Trophies is over, and a modest cash prize structure may be needed to encourage top area athletes to race locally. Perhaps bagpipers could be enticed to play or green eggs and ham added to the refreshment menu to add to the St Patrick's Day theme. But that is for the new race director to figure out over the coming year.

For now, I am just thankful that the 2015 ROG 4 race happened and the turnout and competition reminded me of that original race held on Green Island 16 years ago. Since then, many memorable races have occurred at the ROG 4, and thankfully many more to come.