

Most people in Portland were probably still sleeping, enjoying their morning coffee or sitting down to breakfast at 7 a.m. on Oct. 1. Wherever they were, they were most likely comfy and cozy when the gun sounded to start the 29th annual Portland Marathon. That includes most of the 40 plus people who would work the 21st mile aid station sponsored by The Associates that day.

But for a dozen BPA people, that Sunday started out anything *but* comfy and cozy. Or even warm. Or just dry.

We were the BPA contingent who would run and walk *in* the marathon. It may be judged as the “best organized in North America” and most welcoming to walkers, but Portland’s 2000-edition marathon didn’t start out too friendly or inviting.

About 30 minutes before the start, the skies opened up with a downpour that filled some streets to overflowing their curbs. I was driving toward downtown with a fellow walker at the time and I muttered a little prayer of thanks that we had been spared that deluge. “A good thing we didn’t get to the starting line too early this year,” I thought.

As I turned onto Burnside Street toward the river, traffic came to a near standstill. At Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, a swift current of water covered the wide intersection at least half a foot deep. My thanks then turned to an entreaty. “Maybe this rain can stop and we’ll have clear skies, or at least no rain the rest of the day,” I hoped, almost out loud.

By the time I found a place to park along Southwest 2nd Avenue, the rain had stopped. We had several blocks to walk to the start – a nice little warm-up for the event.

Light sprinkles began to fall midway to the starting line by city hall. By the time we got there the skies unleashed the second downpour of the morning. This time we weren’t spared. It was barely 10 minutes until the marathon start and nearly 8,000 of us stood there getting drenched.

Just before 7 a.m. the rain stopped. “A reprieve after all,” I thought as I sloshed across the starting line, seven minutes after the gun sounded.

Somewhere in this bobbing throng of wet and questionably sane people were 11 other BPA folks who had entered the marathon. Half of us ran it and half walked it – seven men and five women in all from Portland and Vancouver and from most of BPA’s major work groups.

I wondered if any of the others were having second thoughts. I had done this for the six previous years, but this was the first time I really wondered if I had made a good choice.

Shortly after the start we had a slight scare with some sprinkles. “What difference does it make now,” I thought. “We couldn’t get much wetter.” But the sprinkles tapered off and the marathon throng spread out along the downtown streets.

We were just getting warmed up – and the sound of hundreds of shoes sloshing on the street was growing faint – when the skies opened up again. I regretted my previous sarcasm. We were 45 minutes into the marathon and we got one more thorough soaking.

But this one wasn’t as heavy or as long as the last one. And that one hadn’t been as bad as the one before it. “Maybe it will let up completely – soon,” I thought, now respectfully hopeful instead of sarcastic. The audible sound of sloshing increased only slightly after this shorter downpour, and it soon disappeared entirely.

By this time, across the city and the Willamette River to the North, BPA and Kiwanis Club volunteers were setting up The Associates’ 21st mile aid station. The earliest few volunteers got some rain

A bit of marathon madness – and “shoes off” to volunteers



Do volunteers or marathoners have more fun? It’s hard to tell by these shots at The Associates 21st mile aid station in the Portland Marathon. (1) Kristina Rohe and Joe Bebee poise with water ready to hand to passing marathoners. (2) Sonya Baskerville still has a smile in her first-ever marathon. (3) Three BPA women in the center rally volunteers for a quick group shot – (left to right) Suzy Sivyver, Kathe Donaldson and Jenny Roehm. Photos by Don Davey

between 7:30 and 8. But most of the 30 plus BPA and related volunteers during the day missed the downpours. Still we couldn’t hold their good fortune against them.

The aid station along North Willamette Boulevard overlooks Swan Island and has a great view of the Fremont Bridge and city skyline to the south. It’s always a welcome sight to marathoners. For one thing, it means there’s just five miles to go. It’s also a welcome stop for people with blisters or sore muscles or who need to catch a breath.

But it’s more than that – especially to BPA marathoners who may see a familiar face or two. BPA volunteers hand water, Gatorade and snacks to marathoners. They’re ready with bandages and first-aid kits to help anyone in need. And most important, they encourage folks and give us a pat on the back.

The 21st mile aid station wins an award from the marathon organization nearly every year. And the volunteers always seem to have fun. By the time the marathoners got to the 21st mile this year, most were dried out – from the rainfall at least.

The dreary early morning start was now in the past – 40,000 paces ago. Aid station volunteers had smiles, cool drinks and pats on the back to boost our spirits for the final leg.

As I strode down Interstate Avenue toward the Steel Bridge, my thoughts turned toward the cold Popsicles that will taste so good at the finish. A sure sign of a warmed up marathoner.

Rain? What rain? I think I’ll do this again next year.

— by Jack Odgaard, editor

Volunteers “win” again for marathoners, BPA

Don Davey of Energy Efficiency has been a Portland Marathon volunteer for 10 years. In that time he has served as team captain for The Associates (Northwest Federal Employees Assn.) that sponsors the marathon’s 21st mile aid station with the South Riverside and Ross Island Kiwanis clubs.

BPA employees, family, friends and retirees make up the bulk of volunteers who work throughout the day. Since it’s four-fifths of the way from the start, the 21st mile station is one of the longest worked aid stops on the route.

Davey and the early workers show up before 8 a.m. to start setting up. They unfold tables, set up chairs, unload and set out stacks of paper cups, and fill huge coolers with water, Gatorade and ice. They unpack first-aid supplies and towels, and set out snacks. They’re ready for the first marathoners by 8:40 a.m.

Between then and 9 o’clock, the first wheelchair racers come by, then the fastest runners. By 9 a.m., a steady stream of runners passes. The line swells and large packs and small bunches pass at intervals until well past 1 p.m. Race walkers, slower runners, joggers and walkers of various paces come by.

Portland is one of the first marathons in the world to expand specifically for walkers. That in itself means the

course needs to stay open almost twice as long. So volunteers will be at the 21st mile up until 3:30 p.m. — or whenever the last marathoners come by.

World and U.S. race officials each year vote Portland among the best marathons. And the Portland Marathon consistently votes BPA’s 21st mile aid station as one of its best. This year the BPA station won the Walkers’ Choice Award.

Davey attended the annual marathon dinner on Nov. 9. Channel 2 news anchor and emcee Paul Linnman presented the awards.

Davey accepted the BPA award and said the volunteers were especially deserving this year. “Looking out the window that Sunday morning, it would have been very easy for you to just chuck it in,” he wrote the workers. “Instead, you came out and really helped the aid station shine for the marathoners.”

Davey said there was a lot of talk at the dinner about the rain. “No one could recall having such a heavy downpour in 29 years as we had at the start this year,” he said.

The aid station award went on the marathon display in the headquarters lobby last month and is now in the cafeteria trophy case. But the 10 hours that BPA volunteers were on display before thousands of people at the marathon will last a long time in community good will, Davey said.



KATU TV news anchor Paul Linnman (left) presents the Walkers’ Choice award to BPA’s Don Davey for the 21st mile aid station in the Portland Marathon this year. The Associates sponsors the station and BPA and Kiwanis Club volunteers staff it.