



**MUSIC:**

Jen and John a labour of love for musical couple [P. 8](#)

**FOOD:**

Pumpkin, spices and waffles a delicious combination [P. 10](#)

**ON THE SCENE:**

India Supper Night raises money for school [P. 20](#)



# PASSING THE TORCH

REGINA MARATHON ORGANIZER DOUG RUSSELL HAD A LONG RUN AT THE HELM [P. 4](#)



# INDEX

## # ON THE COVER P. 4



Runners line up for the beginning of the Queen City Marathon in Regina in 2014. The marathon has grown from humble beginnings in 2001. QC FILE PHOTO BY TROY FLEECE.

## # TABLE OF CONTENTS

### READ MY BOOK — 2

Lisa Boehm uses mason jars to create quick, easy and healthy meals.

### COVER — 4

Doug Russell has run in one marathon, which he co-founded. The Queen City Marathon has grown since its inception in 2001.

### MUSIC — 8

Married musicians Jen Lane and John Antoniuk have performed on each other's albums, but their fans wondered when they record together. They have done that with Jen and John, which features just the two of them.

### FOOD — 10

Food writer Renee Kohlman whips up some waffles with a taste of autumn — pumpkin spice.

### IN THE CITY — 11

A moment in time: Photographer Michael Bell's shot that defines Regina.

### GARDENING — 12

Not all ornamental onions do well on the Canadian Prairies.

### EVENTS — 14

### OUTSIDE THE LINES — 19

Each week Stephanie McKay creates a timely illustration meant to please children of all ages.

### ON THE SCENE — 20

The 33rd India Supper Night, an annual fundraiser hosted by the India Canada Association of Saskatchewan.

### CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU — 21

### WINE — 22

Pinotage is a wine that has captured a market in Canada.

## # FOOD P. 10



Pumpkin Spice Whole Grain Waffles a fall treat. PHOTO BY RENEE KOHLMAN

### QC COVER PHOTO BY TROY FLEECE

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Literally walked up to the manager and said: 'How do you start a marathon?' — *Doug Russell*

## # QUEEN CITY MARATHON

# Russell's marathon run comes to an end

By Terrence McEachern

Doug Russell has run only one marathon.

As it turns out, that marathon is the one he co-founded and served as race director for nine years.

That race, now in its 15th year, was the inaugural Credit Union Queen City Marathon on Sept. 23, 2001.

"At its core, the marathon is about giving people a chance to achieve something for themselves and give them their moment of finish-line glory," says Russell, 53, who served as race director from 2005 to 2013.

Russell and a few friends got the idea to try and organize an official marathon one day in the winter of 2000 while jogging around Wascana Park.

The group realized that Regina was the only capital city in Canada without a marathon since the Molson Marathon ended in 1983.

So, they approached the recently opened Running Room store to get advice on how to set one up.

"Literally walked up to the manager and said: 'How do you start a marathon?'" Russell explains.

The advice and support they received was from Running Room founder John Stanton, who flew into Regina to meet the potential organizers.

"We never put anything on like this before. We had no experience. We were going into this a little bit blind," recalls Russell.

That inaugural year, Russell expected 600 race participants. Instead, 1,275 showed up.

"At that point, we were still doing last-minute, morning of the race registrations. Well, we were just overwhelmed with the response. So, we were just scrambling. We had no idea we were going to get that kind of response."

This year, 5,600 people participated in the event, which included the full 42.2 km marathon, a half-marathon (21.1 km), a relay, 10-km, 5-km and mini-marathon (1 km to 3 km)



Doug Russell, left, longtime QCM volunteer race director, and Shawn Weimer, volunteer race director, at the Running Room in Regina. QC FILE PHOTO BY TROY FLEECE

for kids between three and 14 years old.

Race participants can raise money for various charities. But the event's main charity is the Regina Leader-Post Raise-A-Reader Campaign. In 2014, Queen City Marathon Inc. presented Raise-A-Reader with

\$18,501.27 and more than \$40,000 to local community groups.

Russell, who now serves as a volunteer member of the board of directors organizing committee, notes a challenge each year is recruiting volunteers. A reason, he says, is that volunteers help out one year and but

then can't resist participating in the race the next.

"I suppose it's not a bad problem to have," he says.

Another concern that preoccupied his thoughts as race director, especially the night before the marathon, was the weather forecast.

"You don't want it too hot. You'd rather have it a little on the cool side. If it rains, how much is it going to rain? Is there spring flooding run-off from the fields? Are the underpasses now flooded? Because you don't want to have an unexpected swim portion (to the race)."



Fast. Slow. Somewhere in the middle. It doesn't matter. When you cross that finish line, that moment is yours and that medal they put around your neck is yours and the pride you take with you is yours. — Russell

One marathon that stands out for Russell was in 2011.

Besides it being a very hot day, spring flooding placed part of the course underwater, so a new route had to be measured again and recertified. But the night before the race, organizers were also presented with a unique challenge — a dead body was discovered at Wascana Lake near the course.

“So, part of our course was a crime investigation scene at the very last minute. Thankfully, the investigative unit was done before our runners had to take to that part of the course,” Russell says with a chuckle.

“We had special T-shirts made up for the committee, sort of the ‘I survived 2011.’”

The shirts, Russell further explains, had an animated picture of a runner with a tidal wave on one side and a blazing sun on the other. The runner is crossing the finish line, which is a strip of yellow police tape.

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Russell was born and raised in Regina. He started working part-time at CKCK TV (now CTV Regina) in 1978 while attending Martin Collegiate. He remained at the broadcaster for 23 years until moving on to Java Post Production in 2002.

In addition to balancing work commitments, Russell realized early on that trying to do both — participate and organize the race — is extremely difficult.

“I sort of had to make a choice to pick one or the other because they both take up so much time. I picked organizing because there is far less lactic acid buildup on the organizing side,” he says with a smile.

Russell finished his only marathon to date at 4:33:30 — well below the course record set by Brendan Lundy's 2:34:33 last year. Lundy won again this year, finishing only two minutes slower than in 2014.

Russell describes his marathon experience as a “very internalized, almost selfish kind of event.”

But he admires the marathon for its “egalitarian” nature.

“When you are standing near the starting line of a race, you're in your



Iain Fyfe, left, and Brendan Lundy lead at the beginning of the Credit Union Queen City Marathon in Wascana Centre on Sept. 13. Lundy finished the marathon first; Fyfe came in second. QC PHOTO BY MICHAEL BELL

running shorts and running shirt and running shoes, and everyone else around you is wearing the same thing. You could work at one job and the person standing next to you

could work at another job and there is no levels of status ... You're all just runners,” says Russell.

“Fast. Slow. Somewhere in the middle. It doesn't matter. When you

cross that finish line, that moment is yours and that medal they put around your neck is yours and the pride you take with you is yours. And, no one is ever going to take that

away from you.”

Russell is hoping to find the time to run in next year's marathon.

Continued on Page 6



We looked at the wider pathways (and) we looked at trying to design a course that could get us from the 5,000 number to the 10,000 number without too many changes. — Shawn Weimer



Doug Russell, an organizer and one of the founders of the Queen City Marathon, holds a memento of the marathon he ran. QC PHOTO BY TROY FLEECE

“Quite honestly, I miss that feeling of coming across the finish line. You can’t duplicate it. It’s a one-of-a-kind experience.”

The marathon’s start line was originally at Douglas Park. It eventually moved to the T.C. Douglas Building, but this year, the course was redesigned and the start line moved to the Conexus Arts Centre. Given that the marathon is recognized as a qualifying race for the Boston Marathon, the 42.2 km course had to be re-certified by Athletics Canada.

To do so, the course had to be measured by volunteers on bicycles with a Jones Counter (deemed more accurate than GPS) attached to a wheel.

Russell says it took volunteers 60 to 80 hours to measure the new course.

“That’s how marathon courses are measured and certified all over the world.”

Besides course and starting point changes this year, the event had a more memorable change after the April 15, 2013, Boston Marathon bombings. Some of the new security measures implemented include using clear, plastic bags for clothing and an increased police presence (uniformed and plain clothed) at the event.

“Certainly, we had to start thinking more about our event from a security standpoint. We made some changes that year that are still in effect for this year ... to try and protect our participants,” says Russell.

Ted Jaleta is an accomplished distance runner and a member of the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame. In 1997, Runners World Magazine ranked Jaleta seventh in the world in the Masters Division for distance running.

Jaleta ran the full marathon in 2012 and 2013, finishing second and third, respectively. He didn’t run the race this year, but did scout it out the new course. Compared to previous courses, Jaleta says this year’s had more twists and turns.

The general public may not be bothered by this, but for a runner mindful of time, Jaleta notes the course could be an issue. Also, the number of road closures on race day could bother some people in the community.

Even so, Jaleta says what stands out about the QCM is the commitment from the community and from volunteers.

Jaleta’s wife Mary Jo participated this year as well as about 20 members of the Jaleta Pacers running group. Ted says he might run next year.



Shawn Weimer, Queen City Marathon race director, stands outside the Conexus Arts Centre in Regina. QC FILE PHOTO BY TROY FLEECE



There's no way we'd be where we are today without the work (Russell) put in (and) without the volunteers he recruited.  
— Weimer



The first Queen City Marathon took place on Sept. 23, 2001. QC FILE PHOTO BY BRYAN SCHLOSSER

In the two years that Jaleta ran the full QCM, Russell was race director. Jaleta describes Russell as an "extraordinary citizen" for his leadership and work on the marathon over the years. He even recalls seeing Russell at the starting line of this year's race.

"We need people like him," Jaleta says.

...

Russell was preceded as race director by Bill Pratt (twice) and Mi-

chele Roland Semenchuck.

After nine years as the helm, Russell passed the duties to Shawn Weimer in 2014, a longtime volunteer and six-time race participant.

Weimer says when he accepted the job, it was apparent that in order to grow the event, the race director position could no longer remain a part-time, weekends and evenings commitment.

As a result, Weimer became the event's first full-time, paid race director this year.

Similar to Russell, Weimer admits he doesn't have time to participate in the race and as serve as its director. To accommodate for this, Weimer and about 20 members of the organizing committee met for the first time on Labour Day and ran the 5-km portion of the race.

"So, we were able to participate in our own Queen City Marathon race," Weimer explains. "That was kind of a new thing for us and will likely be an ongoing tradition from this point for the race committee."

Weimer also believes this year's course redesign will help with his goal of growing the two-day event to 10,000 participants within the next five years.

"We looked at the wider pathways (and) we looked at trying to design a course that could get us from the 5,000 number to the 10,000 number without too many changes," Weimer says.

But the plan is also to continue to expand the event for families and children on the Saturday of the

weekend with more competitive races on Sunday.

"The success of the Saturday this year, I think, will absolutely grow and continue at almost an exponential rate in the next couple of years."

Russell's work over the years, says Weimer, laid the foundation to continue to expand the race.

"There's no way we'd be where we are today without the work he put in (and) without the volunteers he recruited."