

Running commentary

By Charlie Kanzig
Correspondent

I have to be honest up front on this column: I have run the Hood-to-Coast Relay a number of times and also helped guide high school runners for many years in the Portland-to-Coast High School Challenge that runs in conjunction with Hood-to-Coast. What I have never understood — until I talked to Kathy Kemper-Zanck and Chris Davenport — is why anyone would ever take part in the Portland-to-Coast WALK.

It takes more than a full 24 hours to complete (not counting travel), meaning that sleep, personal hygiene and normal meals are put on hold. It requires walking in the dead of night, on your own, for legs varying from four to nearly eight miles on highways and byways from downtown Portland, up and over the coast range, and down to the Pacific Ocean at Seaside.

And it costs over \$1,300 to enter!

Yet, after speaking to Kathy and Chris, who have been part of Portland-to-Coast for about two decades, it became abundantly clear just how little I understood about the layers of reasons a group of women have strung together a streak of over 20 years of laughter, adventure, and camaraderie through a walking relay covering 127 miles.

Kemper-Zanck got roped into the crew in 1998 when she was a teacher at Sisters Elementary School, and joined a group of school district employees who had started a group two years earlier. She has only missed three or four years over the span since.

Chris Davenport took part in the original team and

has served as team leader for many years since. She still works as an instructional assistant at Sisters Elementary School and sees the relay as a great way to conclude the summer before the new school year.

“I keep doing it because it’s such a great bonding time with the walking members and we do so much laughing. It’s always so exhausting, but always worth it,” said Davenport.

Kemper-Zanck concurs with her long-time teammate.

According to Kemper-Zanck, team members have changed over the years, but the camaraderie has not lessened.

“I describe it as the most miserable fun I have all year,” said Kemper-Zanck. “Hands-down, it’s the weekend I laugh the most all year long.”

She explained further, “It’s a girls’ weekend on steroids ... it’s all about teamwork, supporting each other, and bonding. Even if you don’t know someone in your van on Day 1, before it’s over you feel like you’ve known them for years. There is a bond because you feel like you have done something

epic.”

Given that the race starts Friday and takes teams through a full day and night at a minimum (Sisters Seeking Sea Level finished this year in just under 31 hours) there are plenty of opportunities for mishaps, memory-makers, and hijinks.

For example, the team lost Grace Porraz two years in a row on her nighttime leg, resulting in plastering the van the next year with signs asking “Have you seen Grace?” with her picture on it.

Kemper-Zanck remembered one year playing truth or dare with a van-mate, with the rule that they could not do anything that would be illegal or land someone in jail.

“Let’s just say we had a ball that night,” she said.

“It was always fun when the Sisters High School cross-country team would catch up with us in the middle of the night,” she said. “It seems like it was often my leg where we would see them at 3 or 4 in the morning.”

Completing the relay is a feat, so the after-party at the beach is something the women really look forward



PHOTO PROVIDED

Portland-to-Coast walkers Sisters Seeking Sealevel have been tackling the walking relay for more than two decades.

to each year. There are vendors, live music, and such a sense of relief and accomplishment, according to Kemper-Zanck.

The event has become so popular that a lottery system is now in place to determine teams’ acceptance, so Sisters Seeking Sealevel is playing the waiting game for now until the team selections are announced.

“We are hoping to get in for the 2019 relay. The organizer changed the registration date and made it earlier this year, so hopefully we get accepted. We will find out in November and are keeping our fingers crossed,” said Davenport.

Kemper-Zanck absolutely

loves Portland-to-Coast.

“The energy is off-the-charts,” she said. “If people have never participated in an event where thousands of people are on the same mission, living the similar fun and similar pain, it should be put on everyone’s bucket-list. It’s one of the chosen events in all of our lives that makes us feel like we have a good life outside of work.”

So, after years of questioning the sanity of people walking to the coast, I can now clearly see they do it for the exact same reasons as those of us who have run to the coast.

Truth is, we’re all a little zany.

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