

Run for life

Prisoners serve children while serving hard time

Penitentiary inmates ran for their lives Friday morning — but they weren't attempting to escape over the prison's ominous, gray walls.

They were running for terminally ill children, and they were running for their own mental, as well as physical, health.

Race organizer and marathon winner Danny Vrieling and about 50 other Oregon State Penitentiary inmates in Salem ran in a benefit marathon, half-marathon and 10-kilometer race on a mile course that wound through enclosed prison grounds — always under the watchful eye of tower guards.

Their efforts and inmates' pledges raised more than \$3,500 for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which grants terminally ill children their favorite wishes.

The inmates' donations will grant about four or five children their favorite wishes, said foundation vice-president Patricia

you're going to change," Angel Rodriguez said. But the running program and charity race give inmates the chance to do something positive and they may begin "realizing that crime ain't what it's all about.

Among the many conspicuous race supporters on hand that day was OSP Superintendent and fellow marathoner Hoyt Cupp, who thought the charity race was a "great thing.

"For a selfish reason, it's about the best thing. The (inmates) involved have an excellent attitude. I'm going to keep supporting this," Cupp said.

Other local celebrities attending the race included Oregon track coach Bill Dellinger and his top runner Jim Hill; marathon world record holder Alberto Salazar; marathon Canadian record holder Art Boileau; former Oregon steeplechaser Don Clary; Oregon State cross country coach Gary Sievers and several of his runners; Gov. Vic Atiyeh's assistant, Paul Phillips; and State Reps. Mary Burrows and Peter Courtney.

On race day, Cupp allowed inmates to run over a flat mile-long course around the fenced-in grounds, instead of having marathoners run about 130 times around the prison yard's 380-meter cinder track — which they did in the 1982 marathon.

All visitors' bags were searched in the front lobby and the large group was split into smaller groups to keep a close and accurate head count.

Then guards led the small groups through several iron doors. Finally, visitors reached the prison yard, where all inmates exercise.

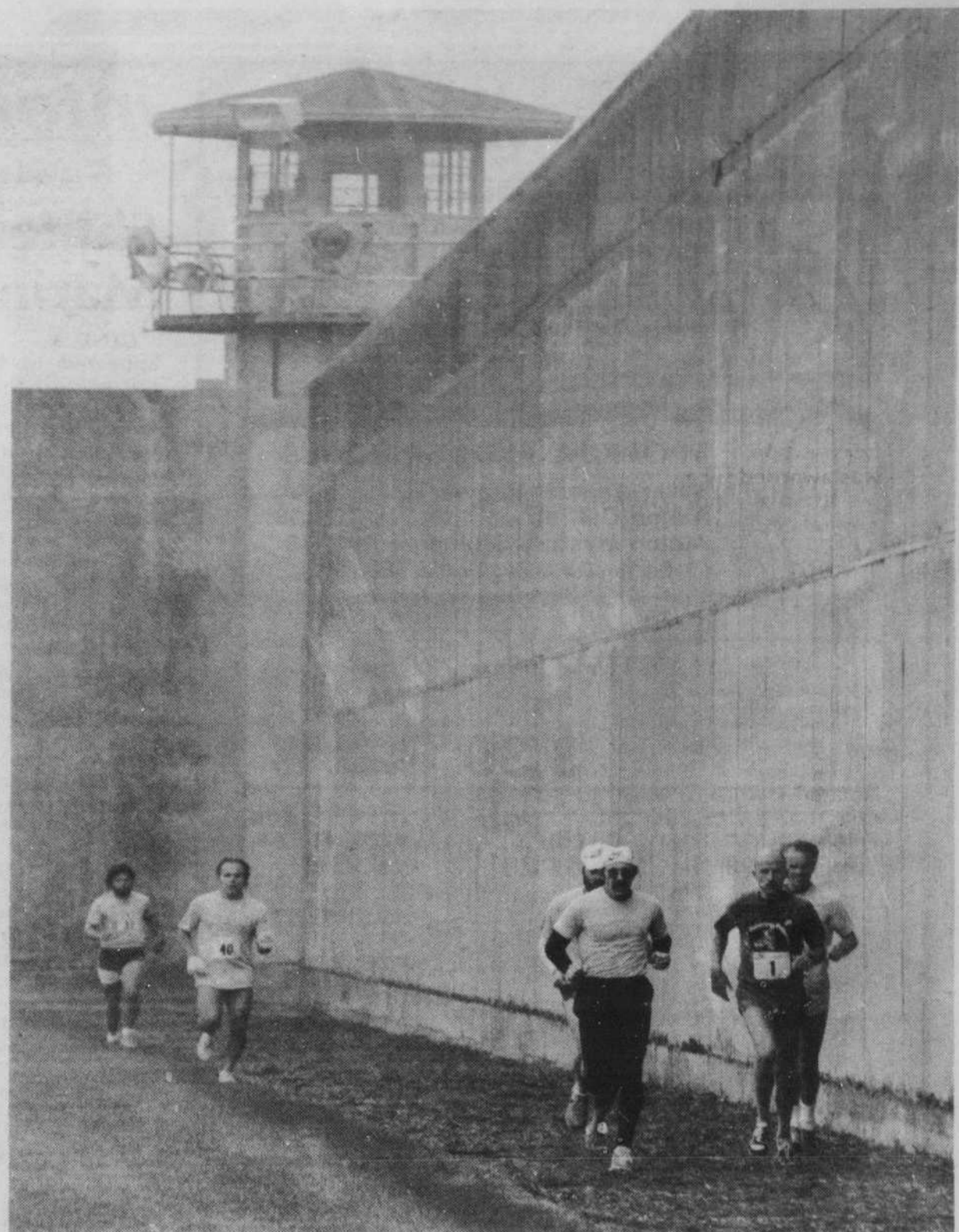
Along one wall, colorful hand-painted murals of nature scenes contrasted with predominantly gray walls and buildings that surround the prison yard.

Other inmates, all wearing blue jeans, went about their usual work duties. A few privileged ones spent the morning quietly seated on a nearby bench, staring at the strangers, especially the women — an uncommon sight in the all-male prison.

Others stared through cell bars down at the strangers, jeering at them. Most inmates did not see the race.

One photographer was reprimanded sharply by a tower guard when he pointed his camera toward the tower. "Point that camera where it's supposed to be," the guard snapped.

Vrieling's winning time of 2:47:32 won't



Marathon runners pass under a guard tower in the Oregon State Penitentiary in a benefit race Friday.

threaten Salazar, who ran a few miles with the inmates Friday.

Vrieling's efforts, though, have turned a few pleasantly surprised heads.

"I think what he has done is phenomenal," said Make-A-Wish Foundation Pres. Fran Boyd. "He's helping children. And it's beautiful."

With a wiry body and intense eyes, Vrieling looks like a runner. His stilted walk before the 26-mile race belied the fluid strides he showed throughout the entire marathon.

It was Vrieling's second marathon. He finished his first in nearly three and a half hours. He hopes to run his third marathon in two and a half hours.

Vrieling said he was a smoker before he took up running about two years ago. He was also one of the "pen's" hotheads, according to several of his friends.

"Danny was one of the biggest troublemakers in here. He was always in the hole (solitary confinement). Now he's a model citizen," said R.G. Anderson-Wyckoff, who helped organize the race. Anderson-Wyckoff owns Phidippide's, a Salem running store, and sells running shoes and shorts at cost to the inmates. He also hosts several running clinics each month "behind the walls."

"Anybody who runs knows they get a positive mental lift from it. And the reason most of these guys got in here is because they feel negatively about themselves," Anderson-Wyckoff said.

"Running has changed my life," Vrieling said after his victory. "Before, I didn't know what it was really like to feel good. When I quit smoking and started jogging, it felt good." Along with cigarettes, Vrieling said he once was addicted to heroin.

In nine months, the OSP Running Program has become the prison's most popular athletic club, with more than 50 members, Vrieling said. Dellinger and well-known running coaches Arthur Lydiard and Jeff Galloway give running clinics behind the walls.

Several inmates said running helps break "idle time," relieve tension and negative feelings. Running gives them something to strive for, they said.

One such inmate is Gary Sanchez, who weighed 275 pounds and could jog only one lap around the prison track last year. Today Sanchez weighs 180 pounds and finished the half-marathon victoriously bellowing a four-letter word.

"There's a lot of negative things happening in here. But through this (the running program), people become aware of their health their diet, their soul. And I've done something, my own time, my own thing. It gives you discipline," Sanchez said.

"It relieves the pressure," Steve Danforth said of running. "This is a negative environment. Running takes the pressure away. Running gives us a chance to be free."

Yet even more important to Vrieling and other inmates are their contributions to the children. Many inmates said they wanted to give children chances they felt they'd never had as children.

"We need the community to help us. And we need to help the community. It's basic human understanding. They (the inmates) realize the kids are our future, so if they can keep the kids out of trouble, they're doing something positive."

**Story by Joan Herman
Photos by Dave Kao**



Alberto Salazar signs an inmate's shirt.

Honeycutt. So far, the Oregon branch of the national foundation has given children trips to Disneyland and arranged to have them meet their favorite television celebrities, Honeycutt said.

Helping the children is also a way for inmates to help erode negative stereotypes many people have about them, Thomas Cremeem said.

"These people (the inmates) have been categorized as criminals. Over a period of time of being conditioned like this, they really forget who they are. They're asleep," Cremeem said.

"The automatic reaction (of society) is that once you're a criminal, there's no way



Race winner and prison inmate Danny Vrieling celebrates by showing off the trophy.

self SERVE WORD PROCESSING

- IBM personal computers and featuring...
- Epson RX-80 printers Perfect Writer™ Software
- Diablo 630 printer

Open 7 Days **kinko's copies**

860 E 13th 344-7894

The Little Ocean

This week's specials:

- Small Gold Barbs 79¢
- Medium Julii Cat \$1.99
- 20 gal. aquarium, Reg. \$49.99 Now \$39.99
- 15% off accessories with purchase of tank

1920 Franklin Blvd. Next to Radio Shack 687-0682