

RRCA 101: WHAT IS THE ROAD RUNNERS CLUB OF AMERICA?

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So, what is that logo at the lower right hand corner of the NOTC web site? What does it stand for, what do they do, and why should I care? I sometimes get questions from people within the running community asking about RRCA, and what I do as a representative for Louisiana.

The Road Runners Club of America (RRCA) is a national organization of running clubs, running events, and individual members dedicated to promoting the development and growth of running, events, and the interests of recreational runners throughout the country. The RRCA provides programming member clubs can use to promote and support running, runners, and supporters of the sport; and provides educational information and programs to keep them safe, healthy, and informed. If you walk because you *can't* run, no problem. RRCA also values the active participation of walkers. (USA Track and Field governs race walking, that's why you see their judges at some events.)

Ask most clubs the two biggest benefits of RRCA membership, and you most likely hear about IRS non-profit group status and event insurance. Those benefits are something the individual runner may never need to know, and in the case of the latter I hope they never need to use. Not long after the National Convention in April, I ticked off (one of those "off the top of my head" things...) a list of 11 programs and services provided by RRCA which, if a member club chooses to implement them, can keep individual club members informed, grow and sustain their membership, and develop leaders within the running community. There are more than 11 programs; though. Information on most of them can be found on the RRCA's web site, <http://www.rrca.org>.

So, without further delay, here are the most notable programs and services RRCA has to offer to the individual runner and the individual club:

1. Coaching – If you are a runner looking for a RRCA-certified coach, there is a searchable listing available by state. If you have a passion for running and want to help individuals achieve personal fitness and athletic goals, two-day certification seminars are also scheduled throughout the country. Continuing coaching education courses are provided each year at the National Convention.
2. Conventions – Each year, RRCA takes care of business with its member clubs, state representatives and board of directors in a different city (this year was Cincinnati, OH; next year is San Francisco, CA). These meetings include educational seminars to help grow and strengthen individual club operations, improve the quality of events and can jump start the motivation of even the most ambivalent club worker. Guest speakers include greats and notables of running from the past and present.
3. Education/Advocacy – RRCA has developed safety training programs, materials, and tip sheets on general running safety, running during hot and cold weather, empowering runners, rules of the road, trail or track, and race-day etiquette.

4. Kids Run The Nation – RRCA developed the Kids Run the Nation Fund in 2007 to assist running clubs, events, and schools in implementing or supporting a current youth running program. This program is funded by restricted contributions from RRCA members, individuals, foundations, and corporations. Six grants were awarded through an application and selection process overseen by a volunteer selection committee. Just like the Roads Scholar program, Kids Run The Nation can be supported by your tax-deductible donations through Active.com.

5. Recognition Awards – As part of the national convention, regional and national-level service, journalistic and athletic awards are given, including State Representative of the Year, Club President of the Year, Road Race of the Year, Journalism Excellence Awards for Club Writer, Large Club Newsletter, Small Club Newsletter, e-Newsletter and Web Site. Also, RRCA provides a National Volunteer Service Award for those individuals who serve their clubs behind the scenes of running for extended periods of time.

6. Personal Fitness – All runners need a little motivation now and then. To reward individuals for their dedication to living a healthy life and incorporating running as their regular exercise, RRCA has developed a Personal Fitness incentive program, which includes the use of an on-line mileage log and rewards you can purchase to celebrate achieving your six-month mileage goal. RRCA has also embarked on a long-term investment in promoting running as a significant opportunity to address the growing youth obesity epidemic. RRCA is revising the current Teacher's and Coaches Curriculum Guide as part of Kids Run the Nation to ensure the most up-to-date information is available. However, copies of the current RRCA Teacher's and Coaches Curriculum Guide and kids running booklets are still available in limited quantities; they can be obtained for the cost of shipping.

7. Roads Scholar – This program provides stipends to support promising national-class road runners after their college career has ended. The Roads Scholar program has supported one Olympic distance running medalist and several Olympic Trials qualifiers since its inception in 1999. Individuals and clubs can make a tax-deductible donation to the Road Scholar program through Active.com.

8. Run@Work Day – How do you get runners to leave their cars at home and run to and from work? If you live in a city with a well-developed pedestrian network or mass transit, it is not difficult. However, for most of the working population the idea is probably not feasible. On September 19, 2008, RRCA will promote the 3rd Annual National Run@Work Day, with the hope that clubs and individuals will host community-based events to encourage people to get at least thirty-five minutes of exercise into their day, before work, during lunch, or immediately after work, which can markedly improve a person's overall physical health. A free on-line pledge is available through Active.com.

While these next programs are focused more toward club board of directors, officers, and race directors, they should not be overlooked as a good thing for the individual runner:

9. Championships - RRCA awards National, Regional, and State championship events through a competitive bidding process. The goal is to help recruit top-performing runners, attract sponsors, and improve civic and media support. Championship events can qualify for support from *Gatorade*, discounts from Active.com, discounted participant shirts, items from *FuelBelt*, and (for regional and national championships) awards for open, master and grandmaster winners.

10. *Footnotes/Inside Track* – RRCA has two print magazines to communicate and promote grassroots running to membership and clubs. RRCA's quarterly membership magazine, *Footnotes*, is now on-line; a hard-copy can be purchased through the RRCA shop at CafePress.com for a nominal fee. *Inside Track*, while more closely focused on club leadership, provides great insight into what RRCA and the sport of road running is all about. Both publications can be found on-line on the RRCA web site if your club doesn't have a link to them.

11. News Syndication – Individual club websites can have newsfeeds from RRCA on a free RSS link. These RRCA newsfeeds can keep individual members and website visitors up-to-date on what is happening in the running community.

12. Online Services – RRCA clubs can use the online event registration functions of Active.com for event registration, charity fundraising and membership renewal purposes. Individual members can be kept up to date on RRCA programs and communication through the Constant Contact e-mail list; this list is kept strictly for the use of RRCA and is not given out to any marketers...so you won't get any offers for coffee when all you want to know is when the next issue of *Footnotes* will come out. Individual clubs can use Constant Contact for their own e-mail event marketing and survey purposes, too.

13. Women's Distance Festival – Before 1984, the longest distance event in the Olympics was 3,000 meters; the 10,000 meters did not enter the Olympic program until 1988. The RRCA developed the Women's Distance Festival in response to the lack of distance running events in the Olympic Games for women. Today, WDF celebrates the history of women's rights to participate in running events at any distance and at any age. Clubs and events can designate a WDF event if the event is a women's race or has a special women's only start time or wave.

One last thing...

14. State Representative program – These 45 *volunteers* serve as the link between the individual RRCA club and the national office, and are the eyes, ears, nose, throat (and sometimes spleen!) of the organization. They work to pass along the news from the national office and individual clubs to each other, trade notes on occasion outside of convention, and work to drum up interest in the RRCA programs listed above. They receive a small reimbursement for business expenses, and hold a silent auction each year at the National Convention to defray the cost of travel and lodging (however, tax-

deductible donations to the State Rep fund, through the national office, are graciously welcomed).

I hope this mini-lecture has sparked your interest in serving the local running community. Something Bart Yasso wrote in my copy of his book comes to mind, 'never limit where running can take you.' So far, it's taken me on a pretty cool ride. If you have any questions, or need more information, all of this information is located on the RRCA web site, <http://www.rrca.org>. Or, contact me through the state representative link on the RRCA site, <http://www.rrca.org/rrca/reps>.