

## Best of the Northwest — Medals!

A veteran runner and avid medal collector selects his favorites

By Paul Gentry

Driving up the California coast en route to a move to Washington, I wondered why I was leaving a running wonderland for the raindrops ahead on my windshield. Surely there would be fewer dry early morning runs, let alone marathon runs, in a state with only a 38 percent chance of sunshine each day. But where there is a will, there is a way, so before I knew it I was lining up for my first Northwest event: the Capital City Marathon. I quickly found out I had tons of marathons to choose from and that the moderate weather in Washington generally favors the marathon runner. After I received that first northwest marathon finishers' medal, I thought: "I just ran 26.2 miles with no clue what memento was going to mark this achievement." That day the idea for the website, [www.262medals.com](http://www.262medals.com) was conceived.

Many runners will not publicly admit the importance they hold for their finishers' medal and yet few will simply throw it into a drawer or box in their garage. Many are proudly displayed on custom-made hangers or on a corner of a prized photo. It's not at all vain to be proud of your hard-earned medal and display it for others to see. It can be inspiring for those who view that final prize. But what if that first effort was marked by a cheap-o medal that was purchased at a trophy shop? I received a medal like this once; my children remarked that their chess medals were better crafted than the one representing those seemingly endless miles I had run. I learned to check event websites to see if a custom finisher's medal was awarded. At the end of the journey most runners would prefer a head's up on what type of medal will mark that special moment in time.

Every marathon has its own personality, a sense of community and a proud history of footsteps that are never forgotten. When you witness a first-time marathon finisher cross the line, you see unmistakable tears of joy in their eyes and a huge ear-to-ear smile as the finisher medal is placed around their neck. Every finisher, regardless of time, scores a victory that day. Receiving the medal fulfills the dream, akin to the vision of the Olympic marathon medal being awarded for this life-changing achievement. That medal lives on in many marathoners' lives, often to be passed down to their children and cherished like a military shadowbox or Eagle Scout Certificate hand-signed by the President.

Bob Cannon, the race director for this year's inaugural Windermere marathon took a proactive approach to medals for his new event. He actively solicited ideas from experienced marathoners, listening to their likes and dislikes and refined those ideas to design a well-crafted gem that nearly 300 finishers now hold dear. He took to heart the positive comments that many gave regarding spinner medals, yet ensured that the Windermere medal would keep its local distinction, with a classy engraving of the Spokane River to represent the beauty of Eastern Washington. His approach was innovative as many race directors learn about medal design in the school of hard knocks: from comments from runners after the event.

Medals don't come free

The race directors who truly do understand the importance of the finishers' medals often are the ones who are marathoners themselves. Tony Philippi, a Marathon Maniac and co-director of the Tacoma City Marathon, estimates that medal costs represent about seven percent of their total budget, but city-run marathons require police hours and a myriad of extra costs. Skagit Flats race director, Terry Sentinella, comments that his medals are closer to ten percent of total costs for his mostly rural marathon. Sentinella purposely overestimates the number of medals needed due to late registrations. The cost of some extra medals is worth it to him as he strongly feels anyone

running five or six hours deserves a finisher's medal. All race directors have a need to balance their medal numbers and intricacies with the affordability of the marathon. The medal needs to attract runners, assuring that they return year after year, yet still fit within the event's budget. A "keeper" medal, like those pictured in this article, can cost as much as \$6.00. Multiply that by 1300 finishers and little differences in design can have huge financial consequences.

Sponsors sometimes extend their support to the medal. For the past two years, Tacoma City has rewarded them with very clever finishers' medals: a paint can medal representing sponsor Parker Paint, while Michelob Ultra's sponsorship yielded a bottle cap motif. Philippi's creativity, incidentally, extended to half medals: half of the whole that combines with the following year's award to make a whole medal.

A race director can over think this, though. For example, one recent marathon opted to award very nice event jackets instead of the finishers' medals that they had always given out in the past. Even though they had honorable intentions, the cost of the jackets was more than medals, and many finishers were unhappy. Eighty-year-old Bob Dolphin, finisher of 450 marathons, holder of many finisher's medals, and RD of the Yakima River Canyon marathon, was one of those who commented that he would have preferred a medal after that event. His words seem to echo the running community's sentiments that suddenly changing tradition is probably not a good approach.

So, which marathons have created a medal that best represents the many facets of community, history and that clever design everyone looks for? Like a fine work of art, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Yet true beauty is also universally recognized. After a recent poll of Northwest running directors, the following list includes their ten favorite medals, in alphabetical order. The one constant among custom finishers' medals is they are the final keepsake for all those exhausted runners who realized their dream of crossing a marathon finish line, joining the select few who are from that point on worthy of being called a marathon finisher!

1 — Amica Insurance Seattle Marathon—Seattle dramatically changes their medal design each year.

2 — Eugene Marathon—This relatively new event is very popular and spinner medals are always popular.

3 — Michelob Ultra Tacoma City Marathon (TCM)—TCM takes great pride in completely changing their top-notch medals each year.

4 — North Olympic Discovery Marathon—Everyone loves this gorgeous design, so they cleverly change the colors each year.

5 — Pacific Crest Marathon—A beautiful design that covers all the running events during their weekend sports festival in June.

6 — Portland Marathon—These golden medals change design each year and are minted like a fine rare coin.

7 — Rock 'n' Roll Seattle Marathon—Any medal from Elite Racing will be magnificent, you can count on that.

8 — Royal Victoria Marathon—A first class medal offering the essence of British Columbia.

9 — Skagit Flats Marathon—Time and expense is put into this heavy medal which is popular with Northwest runners.

10 — Windermere Marathon (Spokane)—This medal has it all: it spins; features a river design representing the area and an engraving section for name, time and place.

[www.262medals.com](http://www.262medals.com) continually updates new medal pictures weekly from all 50 states and many countries around the world. Paul Gentry is a member of the Marathon Maniacs and Half Fanatics and is known by all as the “medal guy.”