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## Outdoors

### Teams set for Hood to Coast

From the serious to the zany to the competitive, this race covers it all

August 19, 2009

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By Henry Miller

Statesman Journal

Hard-core to happy-go-lucky, there's one Salem-area team that stands out for this year's Hood to Coast Relay.

For a while, the dozen members of the Stumbo's Prayer Warriors thought their efforts might turn out to be a memorial tribute to John Stumbo, their pastor who stepped down after being stricken with dermatomyositis, a rare, wasting, connective-tissue disease.

"He was originally on the team; he's quite a runner," said team captain Annie Dudley, who works at Salem Alliance Church. The Warriors are all members and employees of the church.

The week in October when the team submitted its application for one of the 1,000 slots in the Hood to Coast, "we found out that Sunday that he was at death's door," she said.

"And the day that we found out that he had turned the corner and was not dying was the day that we found out that the team had made it, which is ironic," Dudley added.

Stumbo is a former ultramarathoner who had clocked qualifying times for the Boston Marathon.

As he battles back from the brink, the Warriors are dedicating their run to him.

"He's walking with a cane right now, whereas he was walking with a walker before," Dudley said. "And he's regaining some of his voice ability. It's still really weak, but he's getting better with that.

"There's been some gains, but he still can't swallow. So there's still a feeding tube. And he's still really weak."

Dudley said that Stumbo's biggest regret is that he can't be with the team, its members decked out in their matching Stumbo's Prayer Warriors T-shirts.

But they're taking video cameras and plan to splice together a montage for him when they return.

"We're praying for full recovery. That's our goal," Dudley said. "But at this point, it's just really nice to have him around.

"He's quite a beloved guy."

Here's a look at some of the other 12-member teams with Salem participants in the Aug. 28 and 29 Hood to Coast Relay, a 197-mile, 36-leg run from Timberline Lodge to Seaside.

Elvis Has Left the Van

"We do have a cancer survivor among our runners, and then one of our drivers is also a cancer survivor,"

Sally Daly, the team captain, said about her team's fundraising efforts for the American Cancer Society. "So we're kind of doing it for them, but really just to donate to the cancer society."

The ACS is this year's selected Hood to Coast charity.

As of Monday, team Elvis had raised between \$1,100 and \$1,200, which put it in the Top 15 with about two weeks to go until the event, she said.

Fundraising for a worthy cause is about as serious as this group gets, though.

"We're not at all competitive," Daly said. "We just like to have fun with it.

"If we get there (to an exchange point), and the runner that we're meeting is in the porta potty, oh well, we'll wait," she said about the no-hurry, no-worry attitude.

And everyone piles out of the vehicles at all of the stops to bring a touch of Vegas to the rolling and running road show.

"We always get out of our vans," she said. "We have our Elvis cutouts. We have our boom boxes that play Elvis music.

"And we're usually out there dancing or doing something that probably would be embarrassing, if it wasn't the Hood to Coast."

And lest you worry about the mental health of team Elvis ...



SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Rebecca Preston (left) and Alicia Triplett run together as part of the Elvis Has Left the Van team during the 2008 Hood to Coast relay race.

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"I call Van 1 the social workers van, the mental health van, because we have a driver and four runners who are all social workers," Daly said. "And I do the billing for our mental health clinic.

"And then we have a primary care physician."

Slug Hunters

Kevin Hutchins joined the Florida-based team in 2006 after he did an online post about his desire to join in serious competition.

"So I ran with that team for a couple of years, and we won our division, and I had a great time," he said.

The 10 Florida team members dropped out, but the team continued, made up mostly of serious runners from the Pacific Northwest.

And this year, Hutchins moved up to captain's slot.

"I've been on both casual teams and competitive all-men's teams and mixed, and it's always a good time no matter what," he said. "But I've always had the most fun running with a group that's trying to win a place in the division.

"And I talked with some of the other members, and this year we decided we were going to try and get something of a little bit faster team together."

Starting with the core of five members of the 2008 Slugs and filling slots through online solicitations, he put together this year's mixed submasters team with runners from as far away as Boise, Idaho; Carlsbad, Calif.; and Seattle.

Some, such as a runner from West Virginia and another from Arizona, pulled out.

"I had a full team in February, and then I lost six," So I had to replace the whole team throughout the summer as I had people drop out," Hutchins said.

Part of the problem is that Salem-area established elite teams have a lock on a lot of the local talent.

"And you know, when you're competitive, there's a lot more chance for an injury because you're training hard," he said. "And then there's also the fact that a lot of these people are doing a lot more events. So people aren't going to put this one high up on their list of priorities."

The Slug Hunters isn't your draw straws to see who gets the uphill leg on the gravel road kind of team.

Hutchins uses a software program to help put together the team strategy.

"... it's basically a spreadsheet where you put in everybody's predicted 10 (kilometer) times, which is Hood to Coast's estimator. And it gives you what it thinks is your team's fastest lineup," he said.

In a nutshell: The fastest runner does the longest mileage; the slowest the shortest, Hutchins said.

Oh, and then add the "not me" factor for runners who don't like to do uphill legs.

The Slugs have set their sights on a Red Lizard team from Portland and a team from Arizona known as the Banditos, Hutchins said.

"The story's getting kind of interesting now," he said. "I'm hoping that we'll have some close races with other teams in our division.

"It's always fun when you have a close race."

Femme Fatale

This all-women, over-50 team is like the old punchline about two people running from a grizzly.

"You can't outrun the bear," one says.

"I don't have to outrun the bear. I only have to outrun you," is the reply.

"There were only two teams in our division last year, and we ended up being the winners instead of the losers," said captain Becky Heintz, who despite being in her "16th or 17th" Hood to Coast can't hold a candle to teammate Chane Griggs, who has been in more than 20 of the 28 that have been run.

Through the years, a lot of the Femme members have come from the marathon training program at Gallagher's Fitness Resources in Salem.

"We're still the same team; we just don't know how to quit," Heintz said, then chuckled. "We get slower every year but not enough to get us kicked out, yet."

And she said she's got a shadowy secret about her favorite leg of the race.

"I love running in the dark," she said. "Nobody else would probably say this, but I love running along Highway 30 out there where it's fast and you're in some jeopardy.

"That's where that girl got hit last year, and I ran right past that accident. But I just really like it in the middle of the night. The van gets confusing, and the best way to get away from that is to just get out and run."

That said, Heintz also echoed the sentiments of several other runners.

"And then there's nothing like hitting the beach," she said about the cheering throngs at the finish. "You know, once you get to the beach, that's pretty awesome, too."

Everyone that she's talked to pretty much agrees on the toughest part, she added.

"The hardest leg is always the last one, because regardless of what you've run it's hard to get out again," she said. "You've had no sleep (for more than 24 hours). Your muscles are sore.

"So everyone tries to get the least amount of mileage on their last time out of the van, because it's hard to get out. So it's always the last leg for most people that is their least favorite."

Leg Irons

If there's a Hood to Coast stealth team, this is it.

Because all of the members work for the Department of Corrections, member Joe Harding was loathe to send the team roster or photos without getting clearance from each of the other team members.

"I'm not sure how comfortable a lot of people are with that," he said.

But Harding, a seven-time Hood to Coast participant — two with the Leg Irons — said the corrections crew is long on camaraderie and short on formality.

"We're not a competitive team; we're just there to finish," he said. "There's been times that I've just been thrown into a van with complete strangers, and by the time the race is over, you're best friends."

The Leg Irons also participate in the Rainier to the Pacific relay in Washington and the Cascade Lakes Relay in Central Oregon.

"We talked about carbon-offsetting, and I said 'I'll let you guys handle that,' " joked captain April Graybill

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about the team that, with one exception is made up entirely of employees of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

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Graybill said she did the dreaded start in 2008, her first Hood to Coast.

"I heard a lot of horror stories about the first leg, because it's so steep, and 'sometimes your toenails turn black and fall off,' she said, then laughed. "I didn't have any problems."

It was love at first stride, Graybill added about her inaugural Hood to Coast.

"Once you try it, you're hooked," she said.

There were a few minor disasters, Graybill said.

Such as the support strut that held the hatch open on the team sag wagon, a Ford Explorer, eventually broke and took out the back window.

"It was crazy," she said. "Somehow, that loosened and kind of ricocheted back and hit it."

The problem was compounded at the finish, when someone reached through the hole in the window and stole a pair of running shoes while the team was away celebrating.

"Hopefully, that won't happen again this year," Graybill said.

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