

Press Times CITY pages™

June 9-16, 2023

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ARTS • CULTURE • ENTERTAINMENT • IN PRINT EVERY FRIDAY

SUMMER
IN THE **Downtown District**

— THIS WEEK'S EVENT LINEUP —

FRIDAYS
ON THE
FOX

FRIDAY, JUNE 9TH
6 P.M. - 9 P.M. • CITYDECK

SATURDAY
FARMERS
MARKET

SATURDAY, JUNE 10TH
7 A.M. - NOON • WASHINGTON & DOTY ST.

CityBees
FAMILY SHOWS

MONDAY, JUNE 12TH
6 P.M. • CITYDECK

Downtown
District

EVENT DETAILS AT: DOWNTOWNGREENBAY.COM

PUTTING FEET ON THE STREET SINCE 1977

How the Bellin Run transformed from a one-time race into an annual community event



▲ The first Bellin Run event, called the Bellin Heartwarming Run, was put on in 1977 in conjunction with the opening of Bellin Hospital's cardiology wing. It was meant to be a one-time event, but the community wanted it to return annually. Submitted photos

By Janelle Fisher
City Pages Editor

This Saturday, thousands of participants from near and far will gather in front of Bellin Hospital to embark on the Bellin Run — an event which started more than four decades ago in conjunction with the opening of the hospital's new cardiology wing.

"The race was started in 1977 by George Kerwin, the former CEO of Bellin," Bellin Run Executive Director Randy Van Straten said. "It was 1977, they had just opened up a new hospital wing where they were doing heart surgeries at Bellin, and they needed an event. They considered other things, they considered maybe bowling, they considered numerous other events, and they decided on the run. It was called the Bellin Heartwarming Run and in 1977 it had 881 participants lined up."

One of those participants, Van Straten said, was none other than Frank Shorter, a two-time Olympic medalist in the marathon event.

"George, being a runner himself, had been to many races and was a very good runner," he said. "He put the troops together at Bellin and organized this race, and he thought, 'let's have a feature runner' and invited Frank Shorter to run the race. Frank Shorter, at the time, was the ultimate runner. He was a runner for Team USA and everybody knew him when he came into town. He ran the race and won the race with some good, local competition here. And that was it. That was the race. It was planned to be a one-time event."

That one-time event, Van Straten said, soon became an annual occurrence, thanks to an outpouring of support from the community.

"The community, when spring started rolling in, asked 'well, can you

have the Bellin Run again?" he said. "And Bellin considered it. I truly think, based on its roots, that the Bellin Run is a true, grassroots, community run. The community asked for it and Bellin helped make it happen."

Ten years after that first race, Van Straten became involved with the Bellin Run.

"The first time I ran the race was in 1987," he said. "I ran it with my little sister. We ran together and I did not do well. I didn't train well. I was just out of college, and I thought maybe mind over matter at the time. It was a very miserable run and I got sick afterwards. 6.2 miles is a long way without training properly, and I didn't feel well all day after the race — and my little sister beat me. So I made a commitment to myself that I was going to train for the race next year. So in 1988, I trained and I trained and I was all ready for the race — and in the best shape I'd ever been in — and about a week before the race, my leader at Bellin came up to me and said 'I need you to work my corner, I can't make it.' At the time, everybody had their corners as team members of the Bellin Run. So she asked me and I thought to myself, 'I've been training for this race, and now she's asked me to volunteer on the corner.' And I thought, 'Well, okay, what corner do you need me on? I'll volunteer on your corner and I'll be the traffic control at that corner.' So I went there for the race and I had a ball volunteering and giving high fives at the race. Three days later, after the race, I got called to the president of Bellin's office, and someone had written a letter about some crazy guy on the corner that was having a lot of fun with the race, and that's how I got invited to be on the race committee. My role just evolved throughout those years with the Bellin Run about different strategies of

MURAL & BUSKER FESTIVAL



Street Performers, Muralists, Musicians,
Food and Beer
Saturday, June 17 & Sunday, June 18
12:00 pm-4:00 pm

Muralists Painting Live:
Thursday, June 15-
Sunday, June 18

Mural & Busker Festival

BROADWAY DISTRICT



Showcasing incredible muralists & street performers throughout The Broadway District



putting the feet on the street and creating a healthy community event.”

Since Van Straten joined the Bellin Run team, and eventually rose to the role of executive director, the Bellin Run has grown significantly.

“When I started, we had 2,500 participants, and we grew that in 2013 up to 20,000 participants,” he said. “And we did that through community engagement and the help of the community.”

Accounting for some of that growth, Van Straten said, has been efforts to get younger participants involved in the event.

“I noticed that at local races there weren’t younger folks filling the awards categories, and there were gaps,” he said. “There weren’t that many younger runners out there, so we started the after school program — the Kids for Running program — and that started because a teacher, Myrna Dickinson, asked me to come talk to her class. She was training third- through sixth-graders... and she had like 20 kids that she was training and I thought that was a great idea.”

The addition of the Kids for Running program, Van Straten said, has also been the catalyst for several other changes to the Bellin Run, including this year’s new 5K distance option and the creation of the corporate challenge.

“To do a 10K run, even a 10K walk, it does require some training and some practice and getting out... As I learned that first year,” he said. “We wanted to add the 5K... I train kids after school and it’s hard to keep track of 40-50 kids in a training program for a 6.2-mile training course. So we thought about it and we listened to what



our kids and our running coaches were telling us, and we decided to create a 5K. And we’ve been getting many compliments about that and people coming out to do the 5K... It was the engagement of others that helped bring runners in. It was running coaches that recruited kids, and parents

▲ The Bellin Run grew from 881 participants in the first run to 20,000 in 2013. Although the recent pandemic brought participation down some, Van Straten said the event is showing growth again.



▲ Frank Shorter, a two-time Olympic medalist in the marathon event, was brought in as a feature runner for the first-ever Bellin Run.

getting involved with their race. What we found is that when the kids were involved, the parents came out and did the race, and the family came out. Then we took that concept and said ‘can we do this with a corporate challenge division?’ So now we have the corporate challenge captains that go out and it’s a wellness activity for companies and we have a friendly company competition.”

Although the recent pandemic and other factors mean the Bellin Run isn’t quite as

big as it was 10 years ago, Van Straten said the mission of the Bellin Run to provide a healthy community event and put feet on the street remains unchanged.

“That’s the whole point, right? It’s about getting people out there and running,” he said. “That’s the key. The lack of physical activity is our biggest health risk in our region. So this is one of our strategies to help get more people physically involved in a fun activity.” **CP**



▲ Although the Bellin Run has grown and changed since it started in 1977, Van Straten said the goal remains the same — to provide a healthy community event and get feet on the street.

38th Annual

ALLOUEZFEST

Community Picnic & Classic Car Show

Sunday, June 11th, 2023 • 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM • 900 Greene Ave • Green Isle Park • Green Bay, WI

Car Show Info

allouezoptimistclub@gmail.com

- Registration Fee - Show Cars \$8.00 using Advanced Registration or \$10.00 day of show 7am 'til Noon Sunday. For Advanced Registration please send email request.
- Dash plaques for all pre-registered attendees
- All Voting Participant Choice, Open to all Vehicles 1900 to present
- Trophies presented at 3pm - Voting ends at 1pm

Presented By The

*Allouez Optimist Club
In Partnership With Our
Title Sponsor Associated Bank*

- Food and refreshments (no carry-in's allowed)
- FREE admission for spectators (\$5.00 donation suggested)
- Kids' games, picnic area & playground
- Live DJ all day long
- Face painting by State Champion Notre Dame girls basketball team
- Huge bounce houses for the kids
- HobbyTown RC car demonstration
- 2023 Allouez Optimist Raffle winners will be posted including Grand Prize Winner of \$10,000!!!
- Einstein Project's Mobile Makerspace in attendance all day
- Large Vendor Fair

All Proceeds Go To Local Youth Organizations