

RUNNER'S PROFILE

By Joe Howell

Last month our profile featured Gordon and Gae McClenathen, outstanding father/daughter Grand Prix winners. This month, we feature two more Grand Prix champions in their age group: Mike Saunders (men's 55-59) and Shirley Saunders (women's 55-59). The competition for running stardom does not end in the Saunders family with Mike and Shirley, as both their son, Dave Saunders and their son-in-law, Robert Hollister, are also extremely gifted local runners.

Mike and Shirley started running in 1975, began their racing careers with the Semana Nautica 15K in 1978 and when their lives were just too busy with other activities, they temporarily "retired" from high mileage and frequent racing. (When you read Shirley's profile, you will note that she was the first-place woman in the Carpinteria Marathon in 1980 and 1981; she earned the right to retire early!) While they maintained their running on a low-key level, Mike and Shirley returned to a more active running schedule and the local race scene in 1995. Not only were Mike and Shirley Grand Prix champions this year, but Mike, his son Dave and son-in-law Robert Hollister, turned in an impressive 57:23 time for their 3 X 5K effort in winning the family/men's division of one of Santa Barbara's most prestigious running events--the Law Day 15K Race/Relay.

Good luck to Mike and Shirley on continued success in their running careers.

Basic Information

Name: Shirley Saunders

Age: 56

Employment/Family: Housewife; we have four married children (three daughters and a son) and eight grandchildren. Mike and I were both born in Santa Barbara. We met and started dating at Santa Barbara High School. We were married four years later.

Other Sports/Interests: I love hiking, but never have enough energy to both run and hike. At the age of 50, I decided I wanted to learn to draw, so I took an Adult Education sketching class. That led to the discovery of a hither to unknown interest in art. Now I am enthusiastically learning how to draw and paint.

Running Highlights

Favorite Distance: Right now I like 5K's because they are short enough for me to go out fast, and if I'm dead at the turn around there is only 1 1/2 miles back to the finish.

Best Race and Why: My best races are defined as ones that were the most fun and memorable. The most memorable and fun race ever was the first Chuck's Beach Run. Chuck's misjudged the tides and consequently there was little dry sand to run on. Most of the race was in ankle deep water. The water level at the last point was waist high. Our shoes weighed 3 lbs. when we weighed them at home. I still smile when I remember what a crazy experience that was.

I ran both of the Carpinteria Marathons in 1980 and 1981. I'd be lying if I called them FUN, but they were personally satisfying. I was the first woman in both. My times were 3:18:20 and 3:17:55. The accomplishment of running such a mind-boggling distance had a profound influence on my confidence level. And it is FUN to win a race!

Average Weekly Mileage (last 12 months): Same as Mike's - 25.4. We run together and he keeps track of our miles and race results.

Favorite Local Races: Resolution Day, Big Avocado, Chuck's, and the Nite Moves.

Goals (Realistic) for 1997: Keep improving our training. Be able to run a weekly 10-12 miler without being wiped out afterward. Incorporate more "senior citizen" speed work in our schedule. Get our mileage up to a steady 30 miles per week.

Goals (Wildly Optimistic) before Year 2000: Actually I have an aversion to performance goals. They don't work for me. What works is to plan our training as best we can and then see what happens in races. I know I'd love to keep improving for the next 10 years. I guess you could call that wildly optimistic.

Additional Information

Why I Run: I love running because it is so childish, unsophisticated, playful, demanding, undignified, heroic, honest, individual and communal. It hurts so much when I am out of shape, but it is so powerfully joyful when I am well trained. I have a theory that we, as humans, need to push ourselves against our limits in order to feel good about ourselves. Running, and especially racing, lets me push against my limits.

My Runner Hero & Why: Mike. He kept the "running faith" for about 10 years when I wasn't much interested in running. I'm glad that running and racing are back in our lives and that I have such a great, supportive running partner.

Personal Training Tips: Be sure to give your body a rest after it has worked hard.

Suggestions for local races: Don't schedule races too close together.

My views on ...: My thanks to Paul Gilbert for marking the Goleta Bike Path so legibly and accurately in 1/4 mile segments. It's a fantastic place to do pace running. Thanks also to all race directors and volunteers who very unselfishly work so that we racers may "push against our limits."

Quote: "Bloom where you are planted."

Basic Information

Name: Mike Saunders

Age: 56

Employment/Family: Retired school counselor. Married to Shirley.

Other Sports/Interests: I enjoy fishing from the kayak and try to get out a couple of times a week as weather allows. Gardening, bicycling and hiking are other regular activities.



Running Highlights

Favorite Distance & PR at same: Half Marathon (1:28 at Santa Barbara in 1981). Now it is an accomplishment just to finish.

Best Race and Why: Law Day Relay 1996. I started as the slow runner of our "family" team. Our son-in-law, Robert Hollister, was second and our son, Dave, was the anchor. When I finished my portion, we were in the middle of the pack. By the time Robert finished we were about a minute and half behind and in fifth place. What a surprise it was when we saw Dave move into first place with a couple of hundred yards to go. It is the only race where I have been able to say "we won!" Thanks guys.

Average Weekly Mileage (last 12 months): 25.4

Favorite Local Race: Big Avocado. This is a small community 4 mile race with a pleasant rolling course. The atmosphere is usually casual. Our family has done very well here over the years. Shirley was the first woman in one of the first years; son-in-law, Robert, has been first overall, and our son, Dave, won the race last year.

Goals (Realistic) for 1997: I would like to continue the improvement of the last year, hopefully increasing training to 30 miles a week.

Goals (Wildly Optimistic) before year 2000: I'll be 60 that year. I'd like to see improved times in the 5K to half marathon each year to 2000.

Addition Information

Why I Run: My physical and emotional motivations are probably shared by a lot of runners. However, I especially enjoy training with Shirley. We do all our running together and the daily sharing is something beyond description.

My Runner Hero & Why: My #1 hero is easy - Shirley! What can I say? She has some excellent accomplishments, but more importantly, she is my "coach" and partner. #2 hero is Dave, our son. He balances excellent running, a stressful occupation and family life. #3 hero is our son-in-law, Robert. He has been and will continue to be one of Santa Barbara's fastest.

Personal Training Tips: STRETCH As a recently converted skeptic, I can vouch for what it can do.

I love runners who...: As a group runners seem to be positive and happy folks and that makes for nice company.

Suggestions for local races: It would be nice to see if reduced entry fees for young runners (17 & under) might stimulate/facilitate participation and help develop a life-long interest in running. I would limit the benefit to 5K races.