

# Ron Chopek

When one thinks of the charter founders of the MRA, Ron Chopek is definitely in that group. Before 1974, no one, including Ron, could have imagined that.

At age 33, Ron was in poor physical shape. His doctor told him that a lifestyle change was required. He asked the doctor what sort of activity he should take up. The doctor was a runner. The rest is history. Ron started running then and has never stopped, into his 80's.

In 1974, the MRA was Ron and Marilyn Fraser and Charlie Paille and Steve Gajerski and Jim Nadler and a few others. They organized all the races because there were no other race directors.

Ron became president of MRA in 1977 and served until 1981 when he resigned to start the Phidippides running store with Doug Sammons and the late John Menlove. They also decided to start a running club and called it Phidippides as well, and then felt that a potential conflict made changing the name appropriate. They changed the name to Prairie Sky.

Ron could often be seen running on the streets of Winnipeg's south end. He says he didn't run fast, at least not for the pace of that time, but his achievements are considerable. He completed 23 full marathons, ran Boston 3 times as well as Minneapolis and Victoria, and ran twice in under 3 hours.

Ron's proudest achievement in road running was reviving the MRA when it was on life support in 1974. His favourite race was the Freeze Yer Gizzard Blizzard Run in Minnesota, which he ran for 29 straight years, including a year when the 10 km course was shortened to 3 km because it was so cold. One day in 1984, Ron was on a run on a day when it was -32 and a Free Press photographer took his picture and put it on the front page of the next day's paper.

Ron's favourite road running memory is running many times with his daughter, Jennifer. One that was very memorable and emotional was the Victoria Marathon, Jennifer's first marathon. Ron also fondly remembers running the Banff-Jasper relay with 16 terrific guys on his team. The event builds great camaraderie and was a lot of fun. Their team placed 10<sup>th</sup> the first year they went, and 9<sup>th</sup> the next, both times out of 100 teams.

Ron's worst running experience was a hot and humid Grand Forks Marathon one June. Ron had to stop at 24 miles and had to hitchhike to the finish. He was picked up by a farmer in his pickup, one that had a dog with a major flatulence issue. Upon delivery, Ron had to lie down sick for 2 hours with heat exhaustion. Some days it is just better to change your plans.

Ron's best time for 5 km was 19 minutes, for 10 km it was 36 minutes, 10 miles in 67 minutes and marathon in 2:52:07. At age 80, in 2020, he gave up running in favour of walking and cycling. However, the MRA should be forever grateful for Ron's efforts to get the MRA back on its feet, in perpetuity.