

# Steve Gajerski

Steve Gajerski could easily be named Stevey Wonder so unparalleled is his contribution to the sport of running in Manitoba. An accomplished runner as well he was inducted into the Manitoba Runners' Association Hall of Fame in 2011 as a "Builder" after previously been awarded an MRA "Life Membership", to acknowledge his many years of selfless volunteer service to our running community. He boldly took on many jobs new to him in the 1970's to help the fledgling MRRA (later renamed MRA) get on its feet and grow, as a small group of dedicated members tirelessly worked to lay the foundation for road running in Manitoba and Canada that it rests on today. Now five decades later, retired as a competitive runner, he is still involved in his beloved sport as a recreational runner and event volunteer. A legacy few can match and greatly appreciated. (see [Steve's Hall of Fame plaque](#)).

Steve's running career begun unexpectedly in 1971 while living in Thunder Bay. One school day as a 15 year old grade 10 student, he was required to run a 2 mile fitness test for his Phys Ed class. To his amazement he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> with no prior running and then got selected by his school to represent it at the annual city high school track and field championships. With limited preparation he competed in the 1600m and 3000m races, got the running bug and started on his life journey as a runner.

Moving to Winnipeg in the fall for grade 11 he continued his progression as a competitive runner through cross country races and indoor and outdoor track meets before discovering the nascent road running scene in Winnipeg. Without an indoor track facility in Winnipeg at the time, winter training for track clubs took place in the Winnipeg Arena, running around its concourse. Indoor track meets were held in the Minto Armoury with running lanes painted on the drill floor, with an occasional big meet held on a board track at the Arena. Outdoor track meets by now were held at the new Pan Am Stadium synthetic track, built in 1967 for Winnipeg's hosting of the Pan American Games, instead of the decades old crushed gravel track at Sargent Park.

After high school Steve went on to the University of Manitoba and ran cross country and indoor track for the Bisons, where he trained with many of Winnipeg's finest runners of the time. After graduation in 1980 with a Bachelor of Commerce degree he shifted his running focus more to road racing as the continent-wide running boom was just exploding.

Steve's first MRRA road race, at 16, was the January 1972 Coureur du Bois 5 mile run in St. Boniface, put on by another of our early running pioneers Alphonse Bernard, followed up that summer with the Gimli Icelandic Festival 10 mile road race from Winnipeg Beach to Gimli. In 1971 the MRRA hosted it's first marathon in September in Bird's Hill Park and a young, foolhardy Steve decided to enter the 1972 edition as his first 26 mile test of willpower and stamina. On a hot May day about 20 brave souls started the race and only 4 to 5 finished. Steve was one of those hardy survivors completing the distance in a blistering 4 hours 36 minutes. A baptism of fire, but not one to give up easily he would come to master the marathon distance

with proper training. In 1977, after accurately measuring the Kildonan Park to St. John's Park Scotia Street 5 loop course for the race, on a whim Steve decided to enter the Labour Day Harvest Marathon himself and finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in a field of about 30 runners, in a noteworthy time of 2:50:02. A month later he would run in his first New York City Marathon, which had an unheard of field size of 5000 runners from all over the world.

In 1979 Winnipeg officially joined the North American running boom with its inaugural Manitoba Marathon for the Mentally Retarded and Steve was one of the 4000 starters and 1600 finishers. In total Steve completed 13 marathons and ran his best time of 2:29:14 in the 1981 New York City Marathon. Steve doesn't have a favourite race but says the half marathon is his favourite distance where his best time of 1:12:20 also came in 1981, in Winnipeg. Steve's times over other distances are equally impressive with a 5K track time of 14:46, and 10K at 31:50. Steve was an accomplished and complete runner having raced over all surfaces - road, cross country, indoor and outdoor track, and over all distances up to the marathon. Unfortunately, torn ligaments in 1984 brought a temporary halt to his training and competing in road races.

While rehabbing his injury he took up cross training with swimming and cycling and serendipitously discovered a new passion, the triathlon. He did his first triathlon in 1986 at Minaki and went on to complete over 30 races at varying distances including 2 ironman triathlons. The ironman triathlon event consists of a 2.4 mile open water swim, a 112 mile bicycle ride and a 26 mile marathon run, done one after the other.

Now, what is left for Steve to do in running? Not much. To recap his extraordinary history, at various times he has been a track runner, road runner, triathlete, race director, newsletter editor, course measurer, race timer, results compiler, webmaster, MRA board member and committee chair, Athletics Manitoba track and field official, Manitoba Marathon race day volunteer and MRA Hall of Fame inductee, which Steve considers his most satisfying achievement. At 66 he shows no signs of slowing down so who knows where Stevey Wonder's story will end.