

Manatee County's Oldest Running Tradition

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The Labor Day Canes Cross Country Classic 5K began in 1993 as a fundraiser for the Manatee High School cross country team. According to longtime coach and race director Tom Orehowsky, "the first race director was Ed Lopacki who convinced me to do it with help from our team parents, some of whom were members of the Bradenton Runners Club, in order to raise money for team equipment and travel." The idea was to invite the general public to race on the high school cross country course at G.T. Bray Park and allow them the opportunity to compete against local high school runners to see how they measured up. This was something that had never been

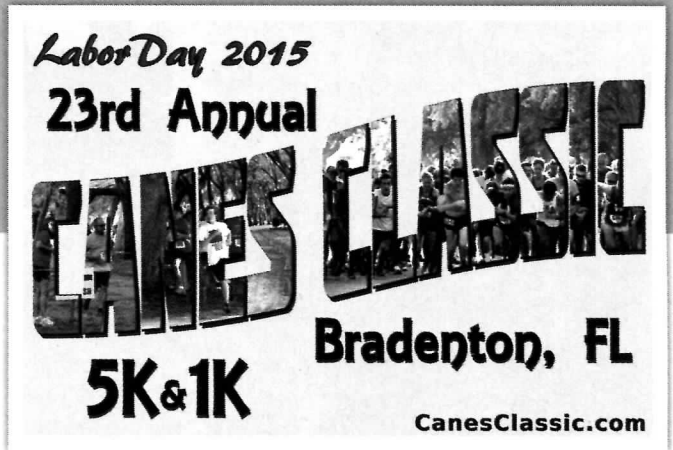
done before. With the support of the cross country team parents, local businesses, and the BRC, Tom Orehowsky began his reign as race director of what has become a Labor Day tradition

Over the years, the 5K course changed just slightly to accommodate changes in the terrain at G.T. Bray Park with only one major change in 2009, which simply reversed a loop but made the course a lot less confusing and congested. The 1 mile fun run/walk became a 1K a few years ago in hopes of attracting younger participants. The new 1K course is all on trails within

the park, so it is safe for all ages. In 2012, the youngest finisher of the 1K was just three years old. The goal is to get more of the youth in the community interested in running and walking as a way to fight childhood obesity. "The Canes Classic is unique in that it is a multi-surface, flat and fast course, with excellent spectator viewing under our abundant oak tree shade," emphasizes Orehowsky. "Few courses have that."

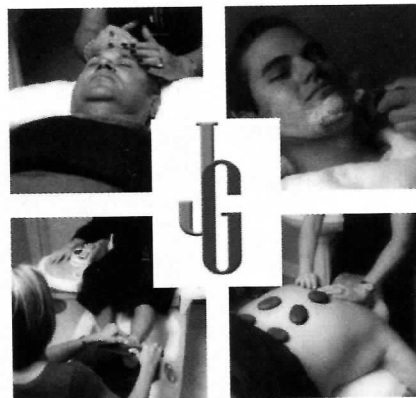
Coach Rae Ann Darling Reed joined the coaching staff in 2003, eventually taking over as race director when Orehowsky retired and also contributing to the formation of the race website CanesClassic.com. Race results dating back to 2002 are accessible online in addition to the course records and free race photos.

Over the years there have been many generous sponsors of the Canes Classic, as it is a fundraiser event not just for the Manatee High School cross country team, but also a charity that the team chooses. The two most recent charities that benefitted from the team's generosity are Save the Manatee Club and Monson Tornado Relief. Of special note on the sponsor side is Shepherd's Tire Pros who has sponsored the Canes Classic every single year. They are a locally owned business dedicated to supporting this hometown tradition for the past 22 years.



Coach and race director Tom Orehowsky retired from teaching and coaching about a decade ago, yet he is still heavily involved in all things running in Manatee County. He volunteers so much of his time, especially with the Canes Classic. You will see him every Labor Day helping set up the course, singing the national anthem, starting the race, and so much more. Orehowsky is passionate about the tradition he started, noting that "We have entire families running together, as well as parent-child or husband-wife duos. Some of those who ran our first Canes Classic in 1993 are still in it in 2015. It has become a tradition for many area runners."

This year marks the 23rd Annual Canes Cross Country Classic 5K & 1K on Monday, September 7, 2015. It has grown into so much more than the team fundraiser it began as way back in 1993. No longer is it just a race, but also a milestone in the running history of Bradenton and Manatee County. Several running clubs include the Canes Classic in their annual racing series. It is known as the official kick-off event for the fall racing season in southwest Florida since there aren't very many races during the hot and humid summer months. The Canes Cross Country Classic is the oldest, continuously running race in Manatee County. Now that's a tradition you don't want to miss!



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