



Runners wind down Spring Garden Rd. last March in the Around the Bay Road Race that has taken place annually since 1894. Training for this race begins in the fall.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

that race director Mike Zajcenko wants everyone to know. Passionate about the history, Mike's a gifted organizer with a vision. In 1996 a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation allowed the team to bring Mike on full time and the race as we know it today began to take shape. As Mike says, "The

Bay is a premier running event in Canada and it is part of our history." He wants to promote both, sees the value in both. Associate race director Graydon Stephens makes the fair observation that, "You can't get on the ice with a NHL player but you can run The Bay with some of the best in the

world." Mike also acknowledges the interest and flavour the elite runners bring, but maintains that the race is geared for everyone to enjoy. He also recognizes the boost to the community. He's especially proud of the partnership established with St. Joseph's Healthcare Foundation. "The partnership gives the hospital a fundraising venue. Local celebrities are involved and that creates general interest."

and this past March I laced up my shoes and raced with some of the world's best. The horn goes and my running partner John and I file onto the road. We jog east past Hamilton's Copps Coliseum along Wilson Street. Those faster weave and dodge to run ahead. The road gradually dips, offering a slightly elevated view of the crowd. It's spectacular, a sea of bobbing heads.

To turn dreams into reality, I began training in September 2007

Then we're into the heart of Hamilton, along Cannon Street



Running south on Valley Inn Rd., racers follow the curve around the west end of Hamilton Harbour.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS



At the halfway point with the Skyway Bridge in the background, Deborah Serravalle and running partner John enjoy the non-competitive side of the race.

PHOTO BY CAROL ROSS

Hamilton's "Around the Bay:" A Road Race That Rocks!

By Deborah Serravalle

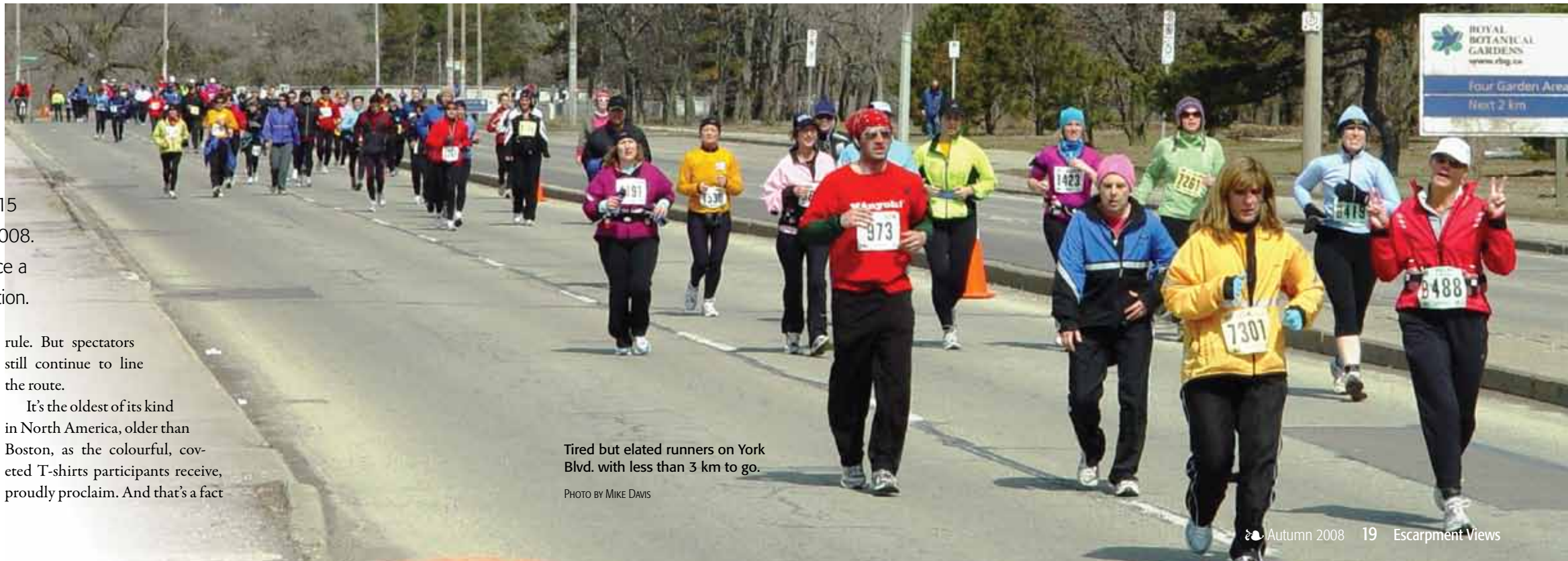
They come from Hamilton and surrounding cities, towns and hamlets. Others from farther afield, the States, Kenya and Ethiopia. They're bio-physics engineers and truck drivers, homemakers and office workers. Running is a great equalizer. But races pull communities together. And none does it better than Hamilton's Around the Bay 30k Road Race held annually in March. A five-km run/walk and 10 and 15 km relays are also offered. Participants numbered 8,600 in 2008. Organizers expect 9,300 for 2009 and 10,000 for 2010. Once a half-day event, "The Bay" has turned into a three-day celebration.

I have memories of the race as a child. The Bay is an anticipated Hamilton affair, like the Labour Day weekend Ticat-Argos match or the Christmas Parade. Certainly when it came round I'd entertain fantasies of running but never dreamed I'd ever participate.

Older Than Boston
The *Hamilton Herald* newspaper and cigar-store owner Billy Carroll created and sponsored the first Around the Bay Road Race Christmas Day 1894. Times have changed. The course is altered; women compete and the Kenyans

rule. But spectators still continue to line the route.

It's the oldest of its kind in North America, older than Boston, as the colourful, coveted T-shirts participants receive, proudly proclaim. And that's a fact



Tired but elated runners on York Blvd. with less than 3 km to go.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

Hamilton's "Around the Bay:" A Road Race That Rocks!



At the 26-km mark, running up Heartbreak Hill requires strength of mind and will.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

East and Britannia Avenue. Residents are clapping and cheering. A short jaunt down Parkdale brings us to Melvin Avenue and then Woodward where there's a steep ramp that crosses the QEW. Ahead there's a white-haired, wiry little man going a good clip. We pick up the pace. "Is this your first Bay Race?" I ask. Dave informs us it's his fifth. Out of shape, he decided to spend his retirement time training. Now 68 years old, he has also participated in a number of marathons.

Tin Pan Alley

Beach Boulevard stretches before us. This strip got the nickname "Tin Pan Alley" from the residents who line the street clanging pots and pans. One group has created an entire booth. Supportive enthusiasm is invigorating and we continue on rejuvenated!

The old Dynes Tavern was demolished this past year, making way for lakefront condos. For years, the



The Grim Reaper has a hug for Deborah and Helene.

PHOTO BY JOHN JOHNSON

front boulevard was home to the *Herald's* five-mile marker. We scan the area but the sign's gone. Later, office manager Gary Pickett tells me it disappeared during the demolition. Organizers did attempt to remove it but were thwarted by its underground concrete base. When they returned with appropriate tools, the marker was gone without a trace. Mike suspects the City of

Hamilton is responsible, but hasn't followed up yet. He's unconcerned, claiming, "Someone has it!" The Skyway Bridge soars above and the Burlington Lift Bridge is just past the halfway point. The Bay office sends out notices to the mariners and coast guard informing them of the race, requesting their cooperation in keeping the bridge down during the race. Most

years it works out well, but not all. The bridge went up during the race in '61 and then again in '96 when a number of runners decided to turn around and re-trace their steps. They were disqualified. "What can you do?" Graydon says. "They left the course." Although some of the slowest runners and walkers were trapped on the Hamilton side this year, Mike is confident the problem is solved, claiming normal opera-

tions must resume after the agreed-upon three-hour hiatus.

Revellers line Northshore Boulevard. A series of hills now lies ahead and whether you're running to win or simply finish, it's here the race truly begins. Our friend Helene has agreed to offer moral support by running alongside. Waiting at LaSalle Park, she's chilled and bounces onto the course grateful for the opportunity to defrost. If

it's dry, late March is great running weather and today is no exception. Warm from exertion, I'm down to my long-sleeved shirt. But for those staffing the water stations and lining the route it's chilly.

We take on the hills and then turn onto Spring Garden Road. Within minutes we're passing Eastbrook's Hot Dog Stand, trailed by the smell of French fries. My mouth is still watering as we approach the

25 km marker. Fans line both sides of the street.

Heartbreak Hill

Helene starts singing Queen's "We Will Rock You" even before we get to Valley Inn Road. Helene knows that Stan Wakeman will be there, a little person with a big boom box blasting the famous tune. Faithfully, each year Stan encourages participants before they climb Heartbreak Hill.

It's painful but we're up and out onto York Boulevard. From the High Level Bridge, we enjoy the distant view of the Skyway Bridge, amazed we've run so far!

The signs announce him and soon the black, flowing robes of the Grim Reaper appear. Standing in front of the Hamilton Cemetery, he's become a race tradition. It's a bit of fun that lifts tired runners' spirits. Helene scurries into his embrace and I follow. John snaps a photo and it's on to the home stretch!

We've come full circle. It's down the ramp and into Copps Coliseum to cross the finish line. Our names are announced and family, friends, those we know a little and many we don't know at all, together emit a cheer of congratulations. It pays to dream a little. ■

Deborah Serravalle is a freelance writer, aspiring novelist and runner living in Burlington.



Runners in the home stretch return to Hamilton's Copps Coliseum.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS



PHOTO BY JOHN JOHNSON