

## RUNNING

# Runner of the year completed 25 marathons in 2009

## Keith Parks ran in 50 before his 50th birthday

By **LORNE WHITE**  
The Daily Courier

Less than a year after the challenge was set before him, Keith Parks achieved his goal to run 50 marathons before he turned 50.

The career accomplishment earned him the Kelowna Running Club's 2009 male runner of the year award — based largely on the 49-year-old surpassing his target by completing 25 of those marathons in the past year.

At the KRC's 2008 Christmas party, fellow member Pat Gable asked him — partly in jest

— after it was announced that Parks had run seven marathons that year: "What are you trying to do, complete 50 marathons by the time you're 50?"

Said Parks on Thursday while "resting his bones" in the hot tub, "I thought about that and figured it would mean running 'only' 11 a year in the next two years. It was certainly doable."

So, even as he began the quest with his first marathon on Jan. 25 in Miami, Parks' aim was still to do at least 11 marathons in 2009. But after reaching his immediate goal by June 27 and recently having joined a group called the Marathon Maniacs, he admits he got carried away.

"The Maniacs have a star system and I guess I was one of those who loved getting stars as a

kid in elementary school and never lost the bug," joked Parks. "I still had half a year to go; I felt good and loved what I was doing."

Even though he didn't run a marathon in July and didn't complete his 12th of the year until Aug. 16 in Edmonton, the flight paramedic ran his 49th marathon less than two months after he turned 49 (Aug. 22) and reached his goal of 50 on Oct. 25 in Tri Cities, Wash. — while wearing the bib he had requested, No. 50.

He went on to run three more marathons before the end of the year, two of them on back-to-back days — the third time in 2009 that he accomplished the feat. On eight occasions during the year he completed marathons on consecutive weekends.

In the ramped-up process, he also ran three

marathons on three straight days at the Lake Tahoe Triple (Sept. 25-27). His combined time was ninth best overall and he was the oldest runner in the top 10.

"It was one of the most spectacular things I've been involved with," said Parks, who still lists his first and only Ironman Canada in 2006 as his best day in sport.

"It taught me that patience can make you endure."

On most occasions, Parks' primary goal is to run a Boston Marathon qualifying time (3:30:59) in every event he enters. He achieved that goal seven times during the past year, including at the actual marathon mecca on April 20.

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# Marathon

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"It's one thing to run a Boston qualifier, but it's another to do it with 25,000 runners in Boston," said Parks, who completed his fifth Boston Marathon in 3:25:59 and plans to keep running in them "until he dies."

"It was quite a thrill."

While he'll cut back on his marathon running dramatically in 2010, he's already signed up for four and is still planning to do about 10, with a couple of half Ironmans for good measure.

After running a personal-best 3:13:09 and finishing first overall at the Easter Marathon in Elma, Wash., in April, Parks has a sub 3:10 in his sights for 2010.

But for him, just competing in the marathon is the draw.

"I hate training for a distance — ramping up and then tapering down. By running so many marathons, I figure I'm just on a constant taper and the marathons are my training. And it's a lot more fun travelling to all the events and taking part in them.

"As in my wrestling and soccer days, I'm still competitive and running helps me satisfy the need — whether it's against myself or others."

Joining him on nearly all of the trips are his wife, Debra, and three-year-old daughter, Victoria, named after his first marathon in 1998 (Royal Victoria Marathon).

"I always run better when Debra is there," said Parks. "She's not only a great supporter on race day, but she also manages the travel and accommodations."

A wrestler at high school in Port Moody and Simon Fraser University, Parks began running to stay fit while playing over-30 soccer in Coquitlam.

While working as a paramedic at the finish line

of the Vancouver Marathon in the spring of 1998, he decided to run in Victoria later that year.

Although he continued to train with the intention of running in a marathon each year thereafter, circumstances prevented him from doing so until he moved to Kelowna in 2003. He ran four more a year later and by the time of the running club Christmas party last year he was up to 28.

A self-confessed marathon addict ("there are worse addictions," he says), Parks also admits he's passionate about setting goals and making them bigger and tougher as the days and years go by.

He's looking ahead to the day when he'll do his 100th marathon — in Victoria where it all began — and making it to the world Ironman championships in Hawaii.

"I'm not saying when those things will happen — likely after I retire at 55 — but they will happen."

Looking at his accomplishments of the past year, who would doubt?

## Welder top female

Laurelee Welder, who broke a second age-group course record at Ironman Canada in 2009, was selected as the Kelowna Running Club's female runner of the year.

The 55-year-old also finished second to her sister, Cindy Rhodes, in the overall 2009 Canadian Tire Interior Road Race Series age-graded standings.

The female trail runner-of-the-year title went to Mel Bos, who completed the Haney to Harrison 100 kilometre relay as a solo and finished third among the women.

Pat and Corrine Gable were presented with the most improved runners award at the KRC's annual Christmas party on Saturday.

Randy Werger was named member of the year, while Karen Maguire was the volunteer of the year and Brian Rourke the rookie of the year.

For more information on the club go to [www.kelownarunningclub.ca](http://www.kelownarunningclub.ca).



Special to The Daily Courier

After completing 25 marathons in 2009, Keith Parks is cutting back this year and plans to run in only about 10 — along with two half Ironmans.