

The Rush of Volunteering

BY LAURA NEWSOME

On race day, they arrive earlier than anyone else—setting up snow fencing and finish chutes, filling water cups and making sure course communication is crystal clear at every turn.



Photo by Bill Nemeth

As the finish area Fluids Coordinator, Barbara Carroll is responsible for coordinating crew chiefs and nearly 150 volunteers to dole out approximately 70,000 bottles of water and 40,000 cans of Coke and bottles of PowerAde come race day.

When the race is over, and 55,000 runners are on their way home to celebrate personal victories, there is another dedicated group still walking the course, picking up the remains of their earlier labors—recycling water bottles, collecting traffic cones and returning rented race supplies.

These hardworking race fans are the 3,500-plus volunteers who make Peachtree possible. And because these unsung heroes dedicate the early hours of their holiday weekend just so others can enjoy the glory of crossing the fin-

ish line, we acknowledge their efforts by honoring two of their most loyal comrades—one a seasoned pro and the other a relative rookie.

The Seasoned Vet

By all accounts, Barbara Carroll is short; but what she lacks in stature, she makes up in her feisty dedication to the Peachtree. At 4 a.m. on every July 4, Carroll can be found making rounds in her rented pickup truck, hand delivering bags of ice to medical tents and water stations throughout Piedmont Park.

“She’s a really sweet lady but she has an aggressive side that helps her make sure every-



Photo courtesy of the Atlanta Track Club



Photo by Scott Medway

thing's perfect," says Brantley Sherrer, materials coordinator for the Peachtree. When asked about her best traits, Carroll is quick to recognize the dangers of self-flattery, but she does describe herself as a "short person with an up personality," someone whose enthusiasm gives her the strength to get out of bed at 3:30 a.m. on race day, only leaving the house after a warm shower and a cup of coffee.

Carroll got involved with Peachtree and the Atlanta Track Club because her son and her husband, an avid ultra-distance runner, used to run the race. After a couple years of watching the two men in her life fly by from her lookout on 14th street, Carroll decided it was time to step in and volunteer. "I figured I was already there so I might as well help out," she recalls. The memories have melded together, but by her estimations, Carroll believes she has been volunteering for Peachtree for more than 18 years, starting out as a water volunteer, becoming crew chief of the water line and eventually taking on her current position as Fluids Coordinator.

As the finish area Fluids Coordinator, Carroll is responsible for coordinating crew chiefs and nearly 150 volunteers to dole out approximately 70,000 bottles of water and 40,000 cans of Coke and bottles of PowerAde come race day. For Carroll, Peachtree has become more like a family reunion than a job. Her daughter has served as the Coke crew chief, and her three sisters fly in from Florida and New York because they love volunteering for the grand fete just as much as Carroll.

As a mother, volunteer and owner of her own business, Carroll wears many hats, but her favorite Peachtree duty suits her enthusiastic personality. At the end of the race, Carroll stands on a tall scaffold, bullhorn in hand, triumphantly welcoming runners to the finish

area. "It's the culmination of all the work that's constantly been on your mind finally coming to fruition," she says. "It's so exciting to see the looks on [the runners] faces when they cross the finish line—it makes it all worthwhile."

The Rookie

David Ziskind has always had a knack for communication. Tech savvy since grade school, Ziskind earned his amateur radio license when he was just 12 years old. Now an electrical engineering major at Georgia Tech, 23-year-old Ziskind splits his time between school and his volunteer gig as coordinator of communications for Peachtree, and the Atlanta Marathon and Half Marathon. One of the youngest guys on Peachtree's executive committee, Ziskind has "never missed a beat," says Sherrer. "He's really easy going, clean cut. When he's presented with a problem, he always seems to think about it for a minute and come up with the right answer." Ziskind may be quiet by some people's standards, but his dependable expertise speaks loudly over the two-way radios that line the race course, ensuring a smooth, safe running of the Peachtree.

Ziskind was first introduced to the Atlanta Track Club when he ran the Peachtree Junior as a child. Since then, his passions have certainly made a turn for the technical. His self-described, cool, levelheaded and organized personality comes in handy as communications coordinator—providing Peachtree officials and the medical staff with ham and amateur radio capabilities. What began as a hobby in the late '90s, lending his services to the Atlanta Marathon and the Peachtree, grew into a leadership position in 2002.

With an army of 20 like-minded amateur radio enthusiasts, Ziskind and his friends create a net-



Photo by Scott Medway

In the months preceding the race, Ziskind organizes his volunteers and researches new technology, adding anywhere from 5-15 hours to his week.

work of communication devices ranging from cell phones to two-way radios, and a variety of other communication devices. All the devices are rented and the communications team must ensure that more than 200 devices are operational and in the hands of trained users. In the months preceding the race, Ziskind organizes his volunteers and researches new technology, adding anywhere from 5-15 hours to his week.

Communication devices are set up at the start, the finish, water stops and many other places along the way. "In this kind of race you've got to know where everybody is," Sherrer says. "It's vital to every single runner, and there are always a fair amount of people getting attention from the medical staff."

> > > > Peachtree Volunteers

When running or watching the Peachtree, the work done by both Carroll and Ziskind can easily go unnoticed. But their behind the scenes contributions will never be taken for granted by the people they protect.

“Dehydration from the heat is a big issue we have to deal with,” says Dr. Perry Julian, a podiatrist and co-medical coordinator for the Peachtree. “The water helps cool the body, even if half of it ends up on their heads.” Although Julian says it’s hard for runners to get dehydrated in a 10K race, thanks to the help from fluids, incidents of dehydration and being overheated are very low, despite the muggy July heat.

Course communication allows the medical team to locate and treat people suffering from water deficit and other major and minor medical emergencies.

“We have two-way radios along the entire course, so if a runner isn’t looking well, we are able to keep an eye on them,” Julian says. Through radio technology, the medical team is able to reach any injured runner within a matter of seconds,

providing care that may be lifesaving for some.

The common perception is that it’s the racers who are putting in all the hard work, but the runners themselves know who to thank when they cross the finish line. “It’s so inspiring for someone to do on their day off, what they do for a living every day,” Julian says. Despite being hot, beleaguered and exhausted, many runners take the time between catching their breaths to say thank you to every volunteer they pass by. “The runners are so gracious,” Carroll says. “You have no idea how gratifying it is to see their warm generosity.”

It may seem masochistic to wake up before the sun, only to stand on your feet on a hot holiday morning, but Carroll and Ziskind are so enamored with the event, they cannot see a time when they won’t be Peachtree volunteers.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Carroll says. “You would never believe what it looks like when the mass of humanity comes into the park and it’s just wall-to-wall people.” For Ziskind, the best explanation for his dedication

is the inspiration he gets when the runners pass through the finish line. “I’m just amazed to see some of these people finish—the wheelchair racers are pretty amazing.”

Dedicated volunteers like Carroll and Ziskind are of utmost importance to the running of the Peachtree. “It’s vital that we have volunteers because we couldn’t pay them enough to do what they do,” Julian says.

From medical professionals to logistical coordinators to just plain helping hands, Peachtree’s volunteers are the race’s unsung heroes—the only reason why one of the best-loved races in the world goes off every year without a hitch.

And if Carroll and Ziskind are any example, volunteering is contagious. Even if you’re not a runner, and you happen to be downtown to watch the Peachtree this July, you just might find yourself standing there next year too, with a cup of water in hand, ready to greet the runners when they pass by.

To join the volunteer team, go to atlantatrackclub.org.

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