



NORTH FLORIDA NEWS

(Some Headlines From The Road)

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MICHAEL'S MANIC MOMENT FOR THE MONTH: MORE BLAH, BLAH...FROM THE WINDY CITY –

Greetings from Chicago! Normally, I would tell you 'greetings from North Florida,' but I'm tightening up my notes while the experience of the convention is still very fresh in my mind. While it was (nearly) mandatory for me, as state rep, to attend the 2007 National Convention, I had a strong idea the experience was going to be great this year. I lived just north of Chicago for three months five years ago and spent several weekends traveling on trains down to Chicago to see things and have fun. Outside of the (obvious) educational experience, this trip was no exception...however, I didn't know just how much fun I would have this time.

I, like many of the state reps and convention attendees, had a difficult time getting into Chicago on account of the weather. Some of the reps who were scheduled to arrive on Wednesday evening didn't make it until Thursday. That might be the theme of the entire convention: 'Plan B.' I was scheduled to arrive on Wednesday evening, but didn't get into the hotel until midnight. Of course, all I wanted after sitting on planes or in airports for about seven hours longer than initially intended was a bite and a brew...then, and only then, could I even think of bed.

I got some semblance of a workout that morning, hit breakfast and ran into Ken Bendy. After a brief chat, I took a walk out on Michigan Avenue, otherwise known as the "Magnificent Mile," visiting Niketown and the Apple Store. good fun. The four-hour state representative training seminar was something I probably could have used last year, but since hindsight is not only perfect but magnified I picked up some good tips and clarified some things that I wasn't quite too certain. For those of you who are club presidents and feel uncertain about the guidance you're supposed to have...my concerns are greater, as Albert Einstein would have said. But now, I know all the things I need to...and if you believe that I have a bridge I want to sell you.

The Embassy Suites nightly Manager's Reception was filled...lively...and where most of the real business of the organization had to be done. Great time to place names to faces, such as Norm Haines from California, John TenBroeck and Dave Boukros from Jacksonville. Since there's nothing like having pizza with beer, Dave and I went for a six block walk to Giordano's Pizza to have a Chicago-style pie and a pitcher of Goose Island Honkers' Ale. Brought back old memories of when I was younger than forty.

Why is my phone ringing? Why is there no answer? Why did I sleep until 6:15 when the Gatorade-sponsored morning group run is at 6:30? I had a series of senior moments as

I was getting my stuff together and stumbling down to the lobby...not realizing just how chilly Chicago in March can be. Dave's wearing a long-sleeved top, tights, an ear warmer; I'm in a short-sleeved top, short running shorts. No problem; we're going out for 45 minutes one way. By the last mile of the run, I was not able to talk normally; my jaw from the cheekbones down were frozen cold. Why yes, I am from Florida. Why do you ask?

During the convention, the Southern Region made themselves known, whether it was through the excellent work of their State Representatives, the performances on the road of their male open and masters runners. All right, some of the accents gave us away...and in my case, the serious permanent Florida tan. Not long after the first day of the convention, attendees could be wearing and carrying much of the swag provided by Puma, Save Our Soles, and USATF. The technical shirt from Puma was especially sweet; very understated convention logo on the sleeve, and highly comfortable on the mid-afternoon history run sponsored by Fleet Feet Sports. Chuck and Dave from Fleet Feet took a group late Friday afternoon down to Grant Park, Millennium Park, a little piece of Michigan Avenue, also. I learned a great object lesson from Chuck's discussion of the Chicago fire, which killed only 300 people, and the Peshtago fire, which killed at least a thousand. It's all in the marketing.

This year's seminar on marketing and the media with HerSports and Fitness Magazine reinforced the race marketing seminar I sat on in New Orleans two years ago. Was there anything new? Yes. Did I need to hear it? Over and over again.

The convention luncheon speakers; John Bingham on Friday, and Rich Benyo on Saturday, spoke on running and races from two different perspectives. Bingham, naturally, was looking from the back of the pack, but provided insights and wisdom that translate well even to someone in the "Pretty Fast Runner" category he spoke of. I almost thought I would be bored to tears by "Fifty Ways To Love Your Penguin." I guess that means you should go into any of the seminars or luncheons with an open mind...and an open stomach, in the event of the luncheons. Rich Benyo did provide a half-century's retrospective on all things running, from clothing, to timing, measurement, magazines, shoes and so on. Makes you continue to have an appreciation for technical fabrics and motion control shoes.

Beth Onines from the Alpine Runners and her staff were instrumental in making certain each of the 126 member clubs, 12 event clubs, 30-plus state representatives, regional directors, board members, various and sundry other hangers-on were comfortable and able to link, learn and experience as much as Chicagoland had to offer. The Friday evening dinner and Puma/Fleet Feet fashion show at the Goose Island Brewery bar in Wrigleyville was a study in "on-your-feet" adjusting to the situation. The original plan was to have two buses traveling from the convention hotel to Goose Island. However, only bus was on duty to take the attendees. "No problem," said Beth. There are plenty of taxis at the hotel. I jumped in with a couple of Southern Region reps, Ron Macksoud and David Williams. Talk about a fish out of water. They began to talk about SEC football, a topic on which I'm absolutely clueless. However, it's always fun to listen to ol' boys talk about football...especially when Ron mentioned about Mike Price...ah, but that's another story.

Prior to the convention a number of issues had been disseminated by e-mail and phone conversations. An open forum for many of these issues was held prior to the business meeting, during which some members expressed the desire for more open and transparent communications between the national office and the member clubs. A discussion followed about the financial wisdom of bringing the national magazine *Footnotes* back in print form rather than on-line; according to the national organization analysis, the expense of producing *Footnotes* has consistently exceeded the advertising and subscription revenues since 1981. A rebuttal statement claimed the cost to produce was less than the average cost per member.

A major highlight of the business meeting was the election of the Southern Regional Director, Western Regional Director, and two At-Large Directors. Following nominations from the floor, Ken Bendy was unopposed and subsequently elected by acclamation. The "*Footnotes*" issue apparently was a root issue behind the nomination of at least two of the three candidates opposing the nominating committee selections, however, the floor-nominated candidates were defeated when the votes were finally tallied.

Some of the other highlights from the business meeting that were mentioned during the president's and executive directors reports included the fact that we now have 774 member clubs, the highest number of membership in history, including new clubs as of Jan 1. Individual, corporate and sponsor membership has grown, as well. The national organization is working with other national organizations, including USATF, in order to achieve their goal to add maximum value to members.

One of the biggest programs that will be initiated this next year includes a focus on youth running, called "Kids Run The Nation." This program will include grants to develop and grow recreational running programs for elementary school youth, in much the same manner as the post-collegiate Roads Scholar program.

One of the Roads Scholar recipients, Nephi Tyler, was in attendance at the Saturday evening awards banquet. He had his brief moment, but I think the show was stolen by a little old lady. A little old lady who's done adventure races, ultramarathons, triathlons. Watching the footage of the EcoChallenge adventure race on the big screen, then hearing her talk in such a matter-of-fact way about her accomplishments, I could not help but think "she did an Ironman, why the heck can't I?" If nothing else, Helen reminds me to "keep moving." The individual and club awards closed out the banquet, with Ron Macksoud's acceptance speech the absolute hit of the banquet. I'm certain there are loads of hard-working volunteers around the organization who are also busy writing their acceptance speeches for next year in order to try and outdo Ron. Forget it. It looked like the paparazzi in front of some movie star.

At the close of the convention the next years' venue was announced. RRCA will meet on May 1-4 in Cincinnati, OH, with the Flying Pig Marathon organization as our hosts. "The Pig," quite frankly, are going to have a tough act to follow. I don't see Skyline Chili quite standing up to Chicago style pizza, but I'm looking forward to giving it a go. I hope

I will see more of you there; I had a great time linking up with Lynn Gray from Tampa, John TenBroeck and Dave Boukros from Jacksonville, especially.

Extra appreciation to - Alpine Runners and Beth Onines – (Saint?) Al Becken for his donations, to cover the cost of hotel and meals for state reps - Jessica Sleight for her endless patience with the paperwork (I told my wife Jessica looks just like her!) - Don and Maryann Nelson from S. FL (The Conch Republic) for their experience and insights - Ken and Marie Bendy for their patience this last year - Joan, the HI state rep for great t-shirts in the auction - Rob Holmes from “the ATL” for insight - Ron Macksoud from AL and Dave Williams from AR for the enjoyable taxi ride to Goose Island. There's a bunch more, but I'm going to stop there.

Have a safe-mileage-filled day!