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Now he's running

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Race director Jones runs in first Ringing in Spring

VALPARAISO -- Veteran runner Mike Jones has been so busy running the Ringing in Spring 5K that he hasn't had time to run in the race -- until Saturday.

He's always been a proud papa, but this time he got to actually hold his "baby" so to speak.

Jones created the race 15 years ago as a fundraiser for the city YMCA downtown. "Dawn Collins, then fitness director at the 'Y,' asked me to put on a 5K," he said. Collins is now a well-known Realtor.

"I said OK. I didn't know much about it so I got some friends with a little experience and formed a committee. We had a couple hundred runners that first year."

Saturday, on a "great day for runners" and for Jones the event broke the century mark for the first time with 1,067 runners plus 63 walkers. His baby has grown into the area's largest and most popular 5K. It had 874 finishers a year ago.

Jones, 60, climbed a stepladder to ring a bell and begin the race on a new course at the new YMCA on the city's far north side. Like most expectant dads he didn't get much sleep the two previous days.

Unlike the first 14 races Jones did more than just start the race, he ran it.

"After ringing the bell I jumped in and ran. It's the first time I've felt comfortable running with things under control," he said.

"I wanted to check out the new course first-hand. And I got to talk with other runners; that was kind of neat. Lots of folks told me how much they enjoyed the race. We had a beautiful day (40 degrees, sunny) which made it special and just over 200 walkups."

Jones retired a few months ago after 37 years as a principal engineer with NIPSCO. He works out daily and runs with friends.

"If I wasn't retired I wouldn't be able to do it (organize and run the race). It's a ton of work. But it feels good to see all those people out running. I think of them all as friends."

The big smile on his face afterward told how much fun he had. "I ran a 10-minute (per mile) pace," he grinned, finishing the 3.1 miles in a "pretty slow 33 minutes."

That's not good for most runners, especially one who's run 53 grueling marathons, 26.2 miles at a clip. But it was OK with Jones whose left knee suffered major damage in a water skiing accident in September 2005.

Cadaver parts replaced his wrecked knee's top tibial plateau and MCL. He limped for years after and still has constant pain. But he recently was told he's getting his old running gate back. He began running in 1990 and won his age group in the 2004 South Bend Sunburst marathon.

He knows what it means to put on a good race. He appreciated the help of Bill Baker of Urschel Development,

volunteer coordinator Ruth Cavanaugh and city and county police for traffic control.

"We had no problems and no cars on the course," he said.

How tough is the Ringing in Spring? Rich Gutierrez took second in 16:43 in his first time here; he and Piaskowy were the only ones to break 17 minutes. He won his first two races this spring, a 5K and 10K for 30 road race titles.

Valpo High distance ace Megan Ranegar also was second in her first "Spring" race and second ever 5K. A University of Iowa recruit, she was state cross country runner-up in 2007.

Find expanded age group results in the local recreation standings link at www.post-trib.com/sports.

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