



# RACE CENTER

October/November/December 2011

Northwest

## HOP ON THE CROSS TRAIN

Run, bike, ski to your  
best off-season ever

### THE DIRT

Cross train on the trails

### HEAVY MEDAL

The rich tradition of the  
Portland Marathon and the  
medals that tell the story

### CYCLOCROSS

Tailgate party on wheels  
+ Northwest race preview



ABOVE: Max King's training column debuts  
in this issue, just in time for 'cross' season

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**ON THE COVER:** Oregon's Max King is one of the most accomplished and versatile runners in the country with numerous road and trail victories under his belt. King makes his debut as RaceCenter's training column author in this issue — page 22. PHOTO: JIRO MOCHIZUKI / PHOTORUN.NET

**TOP:** The Pacific Northwest provides some great cross country skiing opportunities in the off-season. Check out J.D. Downing's easy-to-follow guide to this exciting winter activity in this edition — page 52. PHOTO: TYLER ROEMER

**LOWER LEFT:** The Endurance Sports Media Group Fall Shoe Guide showcases the latest in running footwear, including a number of minimalist shoes hitting stores now — page 45. PHOTO: COURTESY KARHU



The 1983 medal and its 1982 predecessor were known as "clunker" medals since they were extremely heavy and coated in chrome.



History has played a large role in the medal design over the years, including the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail shown on the 1993 medal.



The 40th anniversary medal that will be awarded to this year's finishers features Portlandia, a symbol in the Seal of the City and the title of a whimsical television series about Portland.

# Heavy Medal in the Rose City

Cara Esau



Numerous Portland landmarks visible from the race course are present on the medals.

They say a picture paints a thousand words. Likewise, the artistry of the Portland Marathon finisher's medals tells a different story each year. With extensive reflection and research, Event Director Les Smith designs the medallions himself. Each one portrays Portland's robust history of growth, beauty and success. The medals either depict a Portland landmark that runners may see on the course, or they commemorate a historical Oregon event. Unique and full of detail, both sides are worthy of attention.

When we finally cross the finish line and grasp our well-earned medals, few runners pause to study the detail of what we hold in our hands. We happily put it around our necks and head straight for the food and massage. If you have run Portland in the past, retrieve your medal now. You will likely find fascinating details you never before noticed. For example, on the 1995 medal, you will observe the depiction of the original City Hall. This particular building is on the medallion because 1995 was the year City Hall was renovated. If you look more carefully, you will notice runners passing by, behind the wagon and horses.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY PORTLAND MARATHON

The year was 1972 — Portland's first marathon. A whopping 173 runners participated. The course was on Sauvie Island: flat, expansive and rural. Year after year, as the race continued to grow, a handful of Sauvie Island residents complained about the influx of runners each race day. One local even tried to force runners off the road with his pickup truck! Finally, in 1977, the marathon moved to the city.

By the time Smith became the president of Oregon Road Runners Club in 1981, only four events in Portland included even a shirt. Then a 10-year-old marathon, the Portland Marathon was an ORRC event. An avid runner, Smith was planning to race. At the outset of the event, he noted some serious problems: "It started 25 minutes late, the aid stations were not ready, there was a lack of volunteers out on the course, and there were no mile markers." When he arrived at the halfway point, he dropped out of the race in order to help with the finish and other administrative details.

As he poured water and cheered on fellow runners, Smith began to envision the Portland Marathon as one that could outshine other renowned races. One that would be known for treating all runners as VIPs: "My vision was to administer the event like the New York City Marathon, with a committee dedicated to the many elements that make for a great marathon — an event in which everyone who finished would be treated as a winner. For us, it was not how fast you ran it, but that you finished."

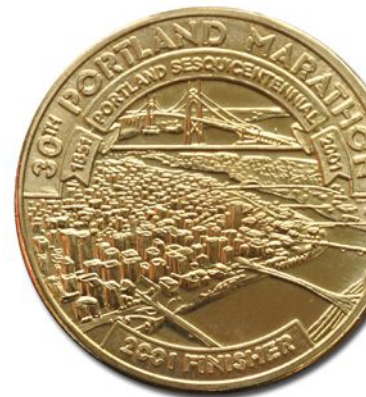
Smith took over as race director in 1982. Within one year, the race grew from 471 runners to 1,200, and to 1,700 the next year. At that time, only New York and Boston presented finishers with medals. Portland joined the ranks of the greats in 1982 by awarding finishers with a medal Smith describes as a "clunker." It was heavy and coated in chrome; this was also true of the 1983 medal (pictured). From 1984 until 1999, the medals were crafted by London's Birmingham Mint and shipped to Portland. But in 1984, as a result of political uprisings overseas, the medals never arrived. Nevertheless, Smith eventually obtained medals for every single finisher and mailed them in March of the following year.

The Portland medals emphasize monuments that runners can actually see from the course. The Pittock Mansion (on the 1994 medal) is the only one far away from the course, though still visible to runners. Among the notable landmarks featured on some of the medals are Portlandia (1987), the St. Johns Bridge (1992), The Portland Building (1997), and Mill Ends Park (1999) — which is the smallest park in the United States.

There are exceptions to the monument rule. When the year is a historical anniversary, the medal then focuses on the theme for that anniversary. Historic events that have been commemorated include the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail (1993), the Lewis and Clark Expedition (2004), the 1905 Exposition (2005), the end of Lewis and Clark's winter stay at Fort Clatsop (2006), the 150th anniversary of Oregon's statehood (2009), the Louisiana Purchase (2003), and the incorporation of the City of Portland (2001).

In honor of the Portland Marathon's 25th year in 1996, the medal was an intricate potpourri of the 10 previous years. It was cast in silver, representing the marathon's silver anniversary. Again, the Portland Marathon medal boasted several landmarks in 2002. Carrying on the Lewis and Clark theme, this coin featured the statue of Sacajawea as it stands in Washington Park. Since 2002 was the year Portland renovated her streetcar, the medal also depicted the streetcar; additionally, a familiar landmark — the Benson fountain — is on the medal.

Tight-knit, detail-oriented, and passionate about the race, Portland Marathon's 60-plus committee members have served for an average of 18 years. After the death of several long-term committee members, it was apparent that service together on the committee had a bonding effect, making them all feel much like a family. In 2007, after the passing of yet another committee member, Smith determined it was appropriate to honor those who had served for so many years. The 2008 and 2009 marathon medals honored 13 committee members, each with over 25 years of service. Smith notes: "I... think it significant to show we honor committee members with their portraits on the back of medals....I do not think any event has ever done that or done a 'bust' head of a person as we did."



# HEAVY MEDAL IN THE ROSE CITY



As any Northwest runner knows, this is a particularly special year for the Portland Marathon. In October 2011, Portland celebrates her 40th marathon. Naturally, the medal must be exceptional in recognition of such a significant milestone. After much thought, Smith produced a stunner for the finishers of the 2011 Portland Marathon. Every year, the design is based on something that Smith finds inspirational. And this year is no exception. The famous 1911 St. Gaudens \$20 gold piece provides the artistic inspiration. One of these original \$20 pieces was sold at auction for an incredible \$7.5 million. In addition to its rarity, the high detail and definition on the coin has made it one of the most sought-after items for numismatists.

The 2011 finisher's medal imitates the St. Gaudens design. The latter features Lady Liberty with a flowing gown, holding a torch in her right hand and a laurel in her left. The former cleverly depicts Portlandia. She is still in windswept gown, but instead brandishes the Portlandia trident in her right hand and a fir tree in her left.

Furthermore, the St. Gaudens coin depicts the U.S. Capitol Building. Portland's coin shows Mount Hood and the outline of the City of Portland. In painstaking detail, the medallion represents the city even by its use of roses and rose leaves rather than the acorns and oak leaves of the U.S. coin. Additionally, the 40 stars around the edge represent each year of the marathon. The St. Gaudens coin features 48 stars to represent the states that then comprised the Union.

On the reverse side of the St. Gaudens coin, the majestic wings of the American eagle send a powerful message of freedom and victory. The marathon's medal is the same, changed only in terms of the wording: 40th Portland Marathon, 1972-2011.

The Portland Marathon finisher's medals are unlike any other. Indeed, the race itself is entirely unique — characteristic of a vibrant and creative city. Some of the medals' reliefs reflect our colorful past, and others, our hopeful future.

The 2011 Portland Marathon is expected to sell out with 12,000 marathoners and 3,500 half marathoners. If you are going to be one of them, you look forward to the indescribable moment when you cross the finish line. With that incredible mixture of exhaustion and victory, you happily receive the rose, the tree seedling, and of course, your finisher's medal. Before heading for the food and drink, take the time to smell your rose and study your well-earned medal: Portlandia, Mount Hood, the roses, the fir tree — pictures that paint the story of your 26.2-mile journey.

## About the Author

Cara Esau is a certified personal trainer and running coach, registered nurse, and a mom of four. A self-described "late bloomer," she became an athlete in her thirties. Cara has run and won numerous races, eight marathons, and was the female winner of the Death Valley Marathon. With a desire to make health and fitness instruction accessible to all, Cara offers online personal training in addition to traditional training in a home or gym setting. As a running coach, she loves to help individuals find their "inner athlete," whether the goal is to begin running, establish a new PR, or qualify for Boston. Residing in the Portland, OR area, Cara also presents seminars on fitness topics. When not running, lifting, or working with clients, Cara is likely exploring farmer's markets or hiking with her four children. Cara can be reached at 503-662-2722 or [caraesau@gmail.com](mailto:caraesau@gmail.com)