

Running Blind 2014 Annual Report

1-10-15

A Message from Running Blind Founder Hal Wolfe

For starters, I want to say thank you very much to all of the people that supported Running Blind – my board members (Tom Gardner, Amy Shepherd, and Katy Kerch), our guides and other volunteers, our donors, the Ann Arbor Track Club, and our visually impaired runners. Special thanks to Tom Gardner who also serves as our volunteer webmaster. (*Thanks Tom!*) Without substantial support my efforts wouldn't amount to much, so gathering all of this support is fantastic. This was a very busy year for me, and a very good one for Running Blind. Fundraising was difficult but productive, with the Gallup Gallop being the largest fundraiser for 2014. As the pinnacle for the year, the Adventure Camp was a rousing success. Personally hosting five days of that event at our family property on Lake Charlevoix was very gratifying. Special thanks to the Eccleston's (Glenn & Liz – our Charlevoix neighbors) who allowed us to use the beach front area on their property which worked out great and was instrumental for the camp. (The much higher Great Lake levels in 2014 that swamped most of the beach we previously had on our own property, so without access to their property, the camp would have suffered.) A special note – it was a highlight of the camp experience to have Ozzie attend (I had dedicated it to him) after he largely recovered from his injuries from a near fatal car accident. (He was a pedestrian and was hit by a passing car. His guide dog Gala was also hit and very sadly was killed.)

2014 was a great year for Running Blind and I'm not sure I can duplicate the outcome in 2015 as I know that my own time will be more limited. I definitely don't plan to undergo a large effort for a similar adventure camp in 2015. Possibly something like that will return in 2016, but for 2015 our efforts will focus on how to manage the more basic efforts of Running Blind with guide runner pairing, and in a manner such that it isn't 100% Hal, which isn't an overly healthy mix (for me or for the organization!) With the support of our first two part-time Running Blind employees, I am hopeful this will work out. I have already introduced Ozzie and **I am now announcing Hope Springstead of Wyandotte** who will also be coming on board as our 2nd part time employee. She has been running with us for most of the last year and she will be helping with communications. Ozzie will shift to head up our fund-raising efforts. Both of these roles appear to suit the two of them so this arrangement should work out well.

I am hopeful that with the support of our guides, donors and other volunteers, and with the added efforts of Ozzie & Hope that 2015 will indeed be every bit as successful a year as 2014 was for Running Blind. Thanks again to all of you who made the success of 2014 possible – it was challenging but memorable!

Blind runners that Running Blind is currently supporting

Running Blind's primary mission is to help people with visual impairments live a more active and healthy life. This year we have been supporting 7 people in that regard. New to our list this year are Hope and Geri. Hope lives in the downriver area and is a friend of Tonya. Geri is a more of a walker than a runner. I met her at the Ski For Light activity which Geri is a board member.

Hope (B1) - lives in Wyandotte and is currently running with Sara Gdowski of Trenton who started working with her this summer. They both participated in the Gallup Gallop 5K this July. Hope is very enthusiastic and (in my opinion!) has a lot potential as a runner.

Geri (B3) - lives in Farmington Hills. Since she is in the B3 category (*see table at the end of the report for the 4 different vision categories*) she would not qualify for the support of a guide by international

standards for track and field competition, but she likes the support of a guide to help with traffic and directions and for general support. She is currently walking with Shelly Soble of West Bloomfield, and the pair completed a 10K walk this fall.

Sile (B1) - lives in Ann Arbor and works for U of M – she is a professor in the Music Department. She is on her 3rd guide and is currently running with Kelly Hogan of Ann Arbor. They ran the 2014 Big House 5K together and plan to run the 2015 Dexter Ann Arbor Run.

Tonya (B1) - lives in Linclon Park and until recently was working with Marie Lamb of Wyandotte. They ran together for about a year and they ran the 2014 Gallup Gallop 5K together. Marie has young children and needed more time with her family so she requested some time off from guide running, so we are currently looking for someone to step in and support Tonya.

Naza (B1) and Austin (B3) – they are both in school in Ann Arbor. Austin can run track on his own but likes the support of a guide for Cross Country. He has worked with Matt West of Ann Arbor for a number of years. Austin chose to focus on music in 2014 and didn't run much. Naza has run both track and cross country in the past in Junior High with many different guides. She has been struggling with academics and other teenager issues and is currently not actively running but hopefully will again soon.

Cheryl (B1) - lives in East Lansing. She has hoped to find support for walking / hiking partners. I have tried a number of times through various means to find her support, but to date have been only moderately successful. I did find her support from some students at MSU who are in a sorority and they helped Cheryl with things related to her ongoing job search, but for various reasons they never did much walking together. Hopefully we can get more support for her in that capacity in the near future.

Thanks to Our guides!

We owe a debt of gratitude to our guides – they are the eyes and backbone of our organization. Without their support, Running Blind would not be possible. Whether you have helped for years, or filled in as a sub, having your collective support is important. To all of you – I sincerely thank you for your support!

Supporting More Visually Impaired People

Finding a way to support more visually impaired people is a key challenge for Running Blind. So far we have been operating largely in SE Michigan, but have been supporting or at least trying to support a few people in other areas including Bob who lives near Columbus Ohio and Heather who lives in Florida. As I have learned the hard way with cases like Cheryl's, it can be a challenge to find appropriate guide support in areas that my own personal contacts are not as strong. How to attack that problem is a key to the future success of Running Blind. Obviously networking is the key, but what avenues to pursue and finding the recourses to pursue the various avenues is a challenge. My own time is limited, and so far the pairings that have been made have been entirely based on my own efforts. Realistically I understand that such a model is not sustainable moving forward, so finding ways to gather appropriate support is a key issue that I am grappling with. To date, I have leveraged a large e-mail database that I developed in my days as the race director. I have also tried to get support from various clubs and running stores, and have had some limited success with that, but that has proved to be more difficult. One sad development was the recent experience I had with a running club in the Kalamazoo area. They contacted me and indicated that they would like to support my efforts, but then they provided me a list of requirements that I needed to fulfill before they would collaborate which included needing to have a general liability

insurance policy in force that would list them as a “2nd party insured”. Unfortunately this requirement has effectively stifled any cooperation with them, as that outcome is not one I have been able to accomplish so far, nor would I be inclined to spend a lot of money to do so. Over-coming this type of guarded support may become a growing challenge, but thankfully a new volunteer in the Kalamazoo area has stepped up that will effectively allow us to operate in that area with his support to help work around the situation with the reluctant running club. Use of Facebook will likely be a resource we will tap more in the future. (We do have a Running Blind Facebook page named “Running-Blind”.)

Ozzie’s Running Blind Adventure Camp

For those that haven’t already heard, this event was a huge effort and a great success. We partnered with Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind (OUB) on this and it was the capstone of Running Blind’s 2014 activities. OUB has been in operation for many years and hosting camps is what they do, but the adventure camp theme was right up my alley, so I agreed to organize it and to fund it – both of which became big challenges but both worked out. There is a detailed trip report that I wrote that is posted on-line at the Running Blind website (www.runningblind.org) under “About Us”. (Please take a few minutes to look at that if you haven’t already – it has lots of great pictures of the group having fun.)

2014 Gallop Gallup and Run Like Hal’s Jingle Bell Fun Run

Gallup Gallop - I took over the 2014 Gallup Gallop 5K as the Race Director for the Ann Arbor Track Club (AATC). I have worked with the AATC for many years in various roles, so when they offered to allow this race to be a fundraiser for Running Blind, I felt it would be a good fit. It is a small 5K but for my first year as director, there still was a good deal of effort involved. The result of the event was that it was very successful. Despite of a bad weather forecast we drew over 300 runners (2nd largest ever for this event) and raised just over \$6000. I will be doing it again in 2015 and I’m hoping for more like 400 runners and to raise more money. The event will be held on Saturday July 11th in 2015 – please mark your race calendar and plan on joining us in Gallup Park for a fun and family friendly event!

Jingle Bell Fun Run - my annual Jingle Bell event was not quite as successful. This was my 5th year hosting this small non-competitive fun run / walk staged from the Michigan Theater. It drew close to 100 people one year, but drew only 30 this year. I did manage to cover my expenses (I have to rent the theater and buy refreshments) so that was helpful. We also got 3 of our visually impaired runners to participate (Sile, Tonya and Hope) which was great as they had a good time and got a chance to be recognized for their participation with Running Blind. This is designed to be a small event but I am hoping that I can find a way to draw more people next year. I will likely move the event back to Sunday (I tried a Saturday this year) and hopefully that will help.

Financial Status

Through the generous support of many people and from the hard work in managing the Gallup Gallop, Running Blind raised just over \$11 thousand dollars, with close to half of that coming from donors and rest from the Gallup Gallop run. The support was fantastic. The hard part was that the Adventure Camp required that much (and more actually) so I was not able to fully fund the camp as I had initially hoped to do, and my funds are largely drained at the moment. (OUB had to cover the staff salary expenses – I covered the rest.) At present I have just over two grand left in my coffers, which was largely due to savings based on high winds the day we were to stage parasailing on the adventure camp, which scuttled that event but did save us most of a grand. That was very disappointing to the kids, so I hate to point to

that as a success, but that and some late donations did allow Running Blind to retain a little money which I will use to start paying Hope and Ozzie and to start providing some additional benefits to our blind runners. (Safety vests, running shoes, race entry fees, and help with guide expenses are all things I plan to support as we move forward.) So, while I do have a bit of money in the can, it's not clear to me how I will manage to pay for any staff support in 2015. But without the expense of a camp in the plans this year, the bulk of the money that is raised for the Gallup Gallop and through donations will help to support staffing costs, and runner expenses. The future of any fledgling non-profit is never certain, and while I believe that Running Blind will carry forward, the future financial status and how we will create a sustainable operational model is still somewhat murky. Applying for grants will most likely need to be a part of the picture. Hopefully in 2015 things will get sorted out and become more stable.

Future activities

The primary emphasis of 2015 will be to find a sustainable means to find and support more blind runners, and to establish a means to provide additional support for them. While there are no plans for hosting a camp again in 2015, I do hope to start a smaller, more focused fitness type camp in the future, possibly inviting a mix of sighted and visually impaired youth to exercise together. I have also long wanted to stage a regional sports camp for aspiring, blind, teenaged athletes, similar to the one that the US Association of Blind Athletes used to stage, back when I was taking Michigan kids out there every summer as I did for many years. How and when that may materialize is not certain as things like facilities, funding and staffing are major obstacles to grapple with for an event like that, so for now that will wait. My hope is that by the end of 2015 we will have at least a dozen pairs of people out regularly exercising together, with 2-3 staff members working part time on salary to support our efforts.

With that I sign-off for 2014. I hope 2015 treats Running Blind and all of its participants, volunteers and supporters well, and I hope it's another great year for Running Blind!

Hal Wolfe

Running Blind President and Founder

e-mail: runlikehal@yahoo.org

website: www.runningblind.org

Vision Problems – don't take your sight for granted!

Refractive Error: more than half of the U.S. population (over 150 million) wear corrective lenses.

Visually Impaired: uncorrectable 20/60 vision. More than 3.4 million Americans (2.85% of the population) over the age of 40 are visually impaired or worse. (20/40 or better is required to drive)

Legal Blindness: uncorrected vision of 20/200 or worse or a field of vision of 20 degrees or less.

Track & Field visual impairment categories:

B1: total blindness – guide runner required

B2: 20/600 or worse – guide runner optional

B3: 20/200 – 20/600 – guide runner not allowed at Paralympic competitions

B4: 20/70 – 20/200 – not recognized by the Paralympics – must compete with fully sighted