

Terwilliger Parkway and the Shamrock Run

April 2015

In this conversation with our long-time board member and runner, Robin Vesey, Steve Hamilton, the organizer of the annual Shamrock Run, discusses the background of this event and what draws them to Terwilliger Parkway.

1. Tell us about your personal running history.....

Not much of a running history for me, I'm afraid. I'm a former WSU running back with a bad knee that has kept me off the roads for the last 20 years.

2. When did you start Hamilton Events and why?

We started the Shamrock and Starlight Runs in 1979 -- 37 years ago -- as an incentive to get customers of my parent's retail athletic store to come in and shop. The running boom was just getting started. But, no one knew anything about organizing a running event, so we learned on the fly.

3. How did Terwilliger Parkway become part of the Shamrock Run?

When the Cascade Runoff discontinued its operations in 1993 after 16 very innovative and successful years, we started the River City Distance Classic in 1994 and used essentially the same 15k course as the Runoff. That course had used Terwilliger as a key component. We wanted to keep that course alive.

Adidas was the title sponsor of River City. In 2000, we asked adidas to become the title sponsor of the Shamrock Run, which we also produced. Adidas agreed, provided the 15k could be a part of Shamrock. That's what happened. River City went away, and the adidas Shamrock 15k Challenge was born.

4. What memories do you have of organizing your first few Shamrocks?

We began in 1979 in the Progress area near Highway 217 at an Irish Pub called O'Callahans, and finished in a nearby Beaverton park. Nearly 1000 runners showed up for the inaugural Shamrock 10k Run. Three years later, we moved to downtown Portland and Jake's was our primary sponsor. KINK joined the next year, along with McCormick & Schmick's.

But, it wasn't until 1999, that we finally reached 10,000 participants. Not coincidentally, we added the Widmer Brothers beer garden to the experience that year.

5. Why and how has the Shamrock Run become so successful?

Shamrock is literally "Opening Day of running season in Portland." It 2007, attendance jumped to 16,000 from just 11,000 the year before. Social media was evolving and Shamrock was catching on as a fun way to enjoy St. Patrick's Day weekend. When we added the team component the next year, the event went to 18,000. In 2010, we introduced a field limit to enhance demand and create a sense of urgency and began the first of 6 consecutive sellouts. We reached 35,500 on Shamrock's 35th anniversary in 2013!

Shamrock has become a major part of the cultural fabric of the City. Not only does Shamrock Sunday draw 35,500 participants and thousands more spectators to Waterfront Park, but coffee shops, restaurants and pubs throughout downtown Portland are a sea of green all afternoon.

In conjunction with adidas, Shamrock has made a "Commitment to Community" through its charitable giving programs, highlighted by a 20-year history of donating more than \$600,000 to a major Terwilliger neighbor, Doernbecher Children's Hospital Foundation. Counting our annual contributions to our high school worker groups and to our Shamrock Super Team beneficiaries, Shamrock has donated more than \$1 million to the community since 1996.

6. What, if any, difficulties do you encounter when staging a race on Terwilliger?

The biggest challenge has been to make sure we find a way for patients and families to get off the Hill during the race. Thanks to the continued cooperation of OHSU and Veterans Hospital, and Portland Police, we have been able to maintain an exit lane for a brief distance on Terwilliger during the event. Doernbecher also pays for the OHSU Tram to operate on Shamrock Sunday. The tram normally does not run on Sunday.

We also take measures to notify the neighborhood in advance of the event so that residents are aware of the closure period and can take steps to reduce the inconvenience. We are very grateful for the patience and understanding of the entire Terwilliger community during Shamrock Sunday.

7. What is the best part of staging a race in Terwilliger Parkway?

What else? The view!!! Assuming it's sunny, of course. But, Terwilliger is a beloved part of the running experience in Portland. Many visitors who are runners enjoy finding their way to Terwilliger to run or walk and enjoy the vibrant beauty of the hills and the pathway.

8. What suggestion do you have to make Terwilliger Parkway even better?

Don't change anything, unless it is to find a way to create even more views without compromising the natural beauty of the neighborhood. Remind new residents of the history of the area as an integral part of the running community. The inaugural Shamrock Half followed the 15k route on Terwilliger this year and more Shamrock participants than ever before were able to experience the challenge and joy of running through this scenic area.