

Great River Road Race is special family tradition for directors Russ and Kathy Colona

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - For **Russ and Kathy Colona**, the annual **Great River Road Run** is almost a rite of passage, now just another yearly part of their lives.

Russ and Kathy coordinated the large race for the 11th time together this year with the rest of the **Alton Road Runners Club**. The race was initially started by former Alton High School track and cross country coach **Jim Wigger** and the Road Runners Club has always been a part of it. This year is the **56th year** for the race, which has developed a reputation throughout the Midwest.

The race is one where many originally from the Alton area come back to run the 10-mile race.

The Alton Road Runners Club and the volunteers make the race, occupying probably 15 different types of jobs, Russ Colona said.

“Every year, we expect between 1,000 and 1,200 runners, Colona said.

The race started at 10 a.m. Saturday in Downtown Alton.

Mike Brasier, a runner from the Chicago area, has run all 56 River Road races. He now starts early and walks part of it, but he always finishes, even in his 70s. Coach Wigger also usually makes an appearance at the race he started.

Russ and Kathy work together on everything they do and are best of friends. They keep score and clock together at the East Alton-Wood River High School girls and boys basketball games. Russ coaches cross country and track and Kathy is always by his side helping. The two have a special relationship that all married couples should strive to have and set perfect examples for the East Alton-Wood River High School students. The two are approaching their 40th wedding anniversary and Russ and Kathy both said they couldn't be happier.

Runners can always enter all the way up to race day and now that is done at Mac's Time Out Lounge.

It is just a community gathering," Russ Colona said of the annual race. "It is a huge event for the City of Alton. We have seen people from 27 or 28 states come back. We see them year after year. The friends, the people and the little things people do from making outfits that match make it a race to celebrate. People wait in mass at the finish line for their family members to cheer and finish. It is quite an Alton tradition."

Russ Colona said he and his wife are definitely "partners in crime."

"Kathy handles all of the registration and details and I get to announce the kick off of the race," Russ said.

Kathy Colona said she loves seeing everyone who returns to the Great River Road Race each year.

"It becomes a sort of family tradition and everyone loves seeing each other year after year," she said.