

At 86, New Orleans runner Albert Briede will participate in his 50th N.O.A.C. Turkey Day Race



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Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, gasoline was 25 cents a gallon, Mattel's Barbie was born, and Alaska became the 49th state in 1958, the year Albert E. Briede ran his first Turkey Day Race. At 86, Briede will participate in his 50th race next week.

He was a runner long before running was cool.

One of the founding members of the New Orleans Road Runners (now the New Orleans Track Club), Briede ran before there were, well, running shoes. He began racking up his miles in white canvas high-top sneakers.

The first Turkey Day Race he ran, he finished dead last.

"My time was 44 minutes," he said. The next year he ran eight minutes faster in the race that was established by Bostonian Tad Gormley when he came to the New Orleans Athletic Club in 1907. Later in the 1950s and '60s, Briede was the first NOAC member across the finish line on more than one occasion.

Last year, he walked the race due to a broken bone in his leg. And this year, he plans to participate by walking a mile with his four daughters.

Briede's running days might be over, but the retired funeral director believes that "when a runner becomes a walker, he should enjoy every step."

When Briede started his running habit, he was 36 years old -- which at that time was considered almost middle-aged. "People thought my husband was a kook," said Irene Briede, the woman he married in 1949 and with whom he had eight children. The family's Thanksgiving tradition was as much about going to watch Dad in the annual five-mile race as it was about sharing the holiday dinner.

"The turkey would go in (the oven), and we would go off," Irene Briede said.

"I remember being bundled up and going downtown to Canal Street, standing there with my mother and grandparents to watch for my father," says Irene Lutkewitte, one of the



Kathy Anderson / The Times-Picayune
Albert E. Briede ran his first Turkey Day Race. At 86, Briede will participate in his 50th race next week.

Briedes' four daughters. "There were just these few men running, no police escort, no streets blocked off, and the men had to dodge cars because running wasn't fashionable then."

Years went by. Tradition continued. Man walked on the moon; women walked out of the kitchen and into the boardroom. Running became cool.

"My mother called one day and said, 'Your Dad is running with women.' And I'm thinking my Dad, who doesn't smoke, drink or curse, is running with women?" Lutkewitte said.

But the foot races once restricted to men only had given way to include both sexes. In 1969, Barbara Gorrondona became the first woman to run the Turkey Day Race. (Two years earlier, Kathrine Switzer challenged the men-only Boston Marathon rule by being the first woman to complete that 26.2 mile race.) Yes, Briede was running with women.

In the '70s, running was so cool that jogging suits were hip for non-runners, too. In 1981, the British film "Chariots of Fire" fired up anyone with a pair of Nikes and a Sony Walkman.

And Briede was still running the Turkey Day Race, as well as other local races and half-marathons.

Earlier, he even had a race named after him.



Al. Briede in 1974 on St. Charles Street

"Only because they ran it on my birthday," Briede said.

But the Al Briede Gold Cup three-mile race is now a Brother Martin High School fundraiser and has been in existence for 41 years.

In addition to opening up to women, there were other changes in the Turkey Day Race over the years.

"Until the 1980s, the runners were 'handicapped' based on their time," said Ron Schulingkamp, Turkey Day Race historian. Race categories soon gave way to age groups.

The legendary local race, Schulingkamp said, "was suspended in 1918 because of World War I and was revived by athletic director Irwin Poche in 1928. With the exception of the World War II period of 1943-45, the race has been held every Thanksgiving morning."

In 1967, the Turkey Day Race was held in City Park for the first time. It moved there permanently in the '80s.

Through the changes, Briede kept running, even when tragedy struck his family.

On Sept. 27, 2002, the Briedes' youngest son, Christopher, was murdered at the age of 32 in a home invasion. His wife, Amy, survived only because the killer's gun jammed.

On Thanksgiving Day that year, the family once again joined together to uphold a tradition: They went to the Turkey Day Race and came home to share a meal.

"It pulled everyone close together," Irene Briede said.

"And whenever there was a group photo taken after that, one of our daughters would hold a photo of Christopher so that he would be part of the family picture."

Next Thursday will be like the past 49 Thanksgiving Thursdays for the Briedes. Time has passed. There are now 20 grandchildren in the Briede family. Things have changed. Runners are plugged into iPods and accessorized with aerodynamic water bottles. Briede is a walker and no longer a runner. But some things remain the same.

"I'm doing the best I can with what I have left," he said.

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Courtesy of Al Briede

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TURKEY DAY RACE

What: The New Orleans Track Club presents the 101st annual race; established in 1907 by the New Orleans Athletic Club, it is one of the oldest non-marathon races in the United States.

When: Thursday; registration at 7:30 a.m., race at 8:30 a.m.

Where: Tad Gormley Stadium, New Orleans City Park.

Fee: \$25.

Benefits: Spina Bifida of Greater New Orleans. www.SBAGNO.org

Call: 504.467.8626 or visit www.runNOTC.org or www.TurkeyDayRace.com