

# Perennials take on original course before 40th Bloomsday

By Scott Maben/SR [scottm@spokesman.com](mailto:scottm@spokesman.com) (208) 758-0260

They've covered enough ground over the past four decades to reach Seattle.

Martin Kittredge, of Spokane Valley, brought that calculation to Sunday's reunion of Bloomsday Perennials – those men and women who have finished every race since it began in 1977, and who plan to be there May 1 for No. 40.

“I never thought it would get this big,” said Kittredge, 65. “I wasn't sure it would even last.”

In the late 1970s, he was running 2 miles three times a week when he heard about the inaugural run.

“I had to work my way up to 8 miles for the first Bloomsday,” he said with a laugh. “I got up to it just two weeks before.”

On Sunday morning, about 30 of the 92 Perennials marked the occasion by running or walking – mostly walking – the original race course. They crossed the Maple Street Bridge, looped around the West Central neighborhood and returned via Broadway Avenue to the finish in Riverfront Park.

Most sported shirts declaring “I've run 'em all!”

“Sunshine” Shelly Monahan saw them off in the lead car, just as she did 40 years ago as an 18-year-old disc jockey for KJRB.

The 92 Perennials represent 7.7 percent of the 1,198 people who finished the first Bloomsday. The youngest is 51 and the oldest three are in their 90s.

“I think it's an amazing number,” said Don Kardong, 67, Bloomsday's founder and a Perennial himself. “You think of going for 40 years without missing. I think it's a tremendous number who have kept at it all these years.”

They gather every five years for a luncheon, and they also tackled the original course 10 years ago.

“For a lot of them, the only time they see each other is when they go to the starting line,” Kardong said. “I don't know how accurate their stories are, but they've got a lot of stories.”

Kittredge, a retired accountant, nearly skipped Bloomsday one year in the late 1990s because of a minor knee operation three weeks before race day.

“That was the closest I came to missing it,” he said. “But once you get hooked on it, you keep going.”

Kittredge walks the course these days. “I’m on spare parts now,” he said. “The warranty was up on my knee.”

Perennial Chris Boucher, of Spokane, was 14 when he ran the first Bloomsday. Kardong had been his teacher at Loma Vista Elementary School.

“I just said I want to be there every year,” Boucher said, and he has, even during a three-year period when he lived in Minnesota.

Race organizers changed the course after the first three years because the on-ramp to the Maple Street Bridge, near the beginning, was a bottleneck for the growing number of runners. And because the throng was causing the bridge to bounce and rattle the lamp posts.

“We didn’t think the bridge would fall, but we thought it might be possible the glass would shatter,” Kardong said.

The Perennials who met up Sunday gathered outside the INB Performing Arts Center and spent time reminiscing about past Bloomsdays.

The first year, the race began at 1:30 p.m., leaving many to suffer through the hottest part of a day that reached 81 degrees.

“It was like a battle zone,” said Glen MacPhee, who lives near Rathdrum. “In sight of the finish line they were passing out.”

Several also recalled the 1 to 2 inches of new snow on the ground the morning of the run in 1984, and when a helicopter crash the following year killed the pilot and a KREM-TV photojournalist preparing to cover the race.

Sunday also was the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure in downtown Spokane – an event that brings out thousands in support of research for breast cancer. The Perennials shared a starting line with the Komen participants, joining in at the end of the large crowd in front of City Hall, before they peeled away to cross the Maple Street Bridge.

Kris Olson-Wood, 64, of Coeur d’Alene, said she still runs Bloomsday, “slowly.”

“This is what got me running,” leading to a lifetime of fitness, Olson-Wood said.

“It kept me motivated to keep running,” she added. “I just didn’t realize it would grow to be what it is.”