

## Local Running Group Beats the Heat

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It must be something in the water—or maybe in the air. For whatever reason, at almost any hour of the day or evening, you can find dozens of runners pounding the pavement throughout the streets of Mt. Lookout and Hyde Park. Even during the dog days of summer, the peaceful, tree-lined community is a haven for local jogging enthusiasts.

It's not a bad habit to have. Running is a great way to obtain overall cardiovascular fitness, build muscle strength, and burn hundreds of calories. It's a convenient, inexpensive sport that offers the option of training alone or with others. Those seeking motivation can join one of the running circuits in the area, such as the Saturday Morning Running Group (SMRG).

Founded 15 years ago, the SMRG meets at the corner of Delta and Observatory at 7 a.m. each Saturday morning. Ken Knight, director of the group, has been a member for 10 years. After training alone all through college, he joined while preparing for a marathon and is now an avid group runner.

Why run with a group? For Ken, the chief benefit is the company. "There's a real sense of camaraderie," he says. "You're talking and joking, and before you know it, an hour's gone by. Suddenly, those 18-mile runs don't seem so horrible."

The number of runners in the group varies each week. "On a really nice day, we'll have as many as 20. If it's nasty out, three people might show up." The group has four regular routes ranging in length from 10-15 miles, but they put can tackle 22-mile routes when training for a marathon.

The SMRG consists of both men and women with an average age of 40. Most of the group is married with families. Many of the runners reside in the Hyde Park and Mt. Lookout areas, although some drive in from neighboring communities. "The group consists mostly of professionals, so many have

relocated for their jobs,” notes Ken. “It’s a great way to meet people and make new friends.”

Many runners join the group to train for a specific event. The SMRG has participated in a long list of races together, including the local Flying Pig Marathon, the Boston Marathon, and the Minneapolis Twin Cities Marathon. Those who don’t race often come along to show their support. “During the Pig, it was a great feeling to look over and see them cheering me on,” says Ken.

On SMRG’s website ([www.expage.com/smrg](http://www.expage.com/smrg)), their motto is proclaimed: “*We aren’t the fastest, but we are the most social!*” The group often meets outside of their weekly runs. The first Saturday of each month, they go out to breakfast together. Each Christmas, they gather at Ken’s house for a holiday celebration. The group also has a “pre-Pig” gathering before each marathon.

Ken believes any level of runner can benefit from the companionship and support of group training. “When running with a group, you can tolerate things you never thought you could on your own.” However, Ken does note that runners are often very individualistic. For those with families and busy lives, it may seem inconvenient to meet with a group instead of hitting the sidewalk right outside the front door. Ken acknowledges that group runs are more advantageous for long routes than shorter ones. “With longer runs, you’re going at a slower, more conversational pace, and that’s when it really benefits you to run with others.”

### **Beating the Heat**

In August’s sweltering heat and humidity, a usually easy three-mile jog can be grueling. But no matter how high the temperature, the SMRG devotedly churns out its scheduled weekly mileage.

Ken has had plenty of experience training in the heat. He once ran a 106-degree training run in Phoenix. Each year, he runs in the Newtown “Meltdown” 5K, which is held in mid-August in notoriously hot conditions.

Below, Ken offers some tips for maintaining your workout regime when outdoor exercise seems unbearable.

***Dress accordingly:*** It may seem obvious, but you should dress lightly for summer runs. “Sometimes if you’re starting out in the morning, it will feel cool, but your body warms up pretty quickly,” Ken points out. Avoid cotton in hot temperatures, as it absorbs sweat and can irritate and chafe the skin. Ken recommends fiber blends, such as Coolmax. “Synthetic fibers are better at wicking moisture away from the body and bringing it to the surface of the fabric, where it evaporates.”

***Stay hydrated:*** Hydration is more important than ever when temperatures soar. Ken recommends drinking fluids continuously. “Once you’re thirsty, it’s too late—you’re already dehydrated,” he warns. Make sure to drink plenty of water before, during, and after a run.

***Modify your running schedule:*** Ken recommends planning runs for early morning or evening if possible, to avoid running in strong direct sunlight.

***Slow down:*** “When it’s hot, the body is serving two functions: to propel you forward and to dissipate heat,” explains Ken. “Less blood is pumped to the legs and heart, so you can’t go as fast.” Be sure to pace yourself to avoid overheating.

***Take rests or walking breaks:*** During hot runs, the SMRG takes a break every 15-20 minutes. Get some water, walk for two minutes or so, and you’ll perform better during the rest of your run.

***Don’t forget the sunscreen:*** During long summer runs, the risk of sunburn is always imminent, and often not considered until it’s too late. Be sure to slather on high-SPF sunscreen as part of your pre-run ritual.

***Stay off the asphalt:*** When running on surfaces such as asphalt (or blacktop), you can actually feel the heat emanating up through the ground. Ken recommends sticking to grass, dirt surfaces, and other cooler terrain.

***Stick with it:*** The body becomes acclimated to the heat after 1-2 weeks, so hang in there.

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