

All in stride: New All Saints parishioner was one of world's top marathoners

By Elizabeth Lowe

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Marilyn Bevens began running for fun as a tween, but didn't develop her love for road racing until she observed the Boston Marathon as a spectator.

"That's when I started running regularly," said Bevens, who watched the world's most famous 26.2-mile race while a graduate student at Springfield College in Springfield, Mass. "I always enjoyed running. I developed it from the men in my family."

In very little time, Bevens went from being a graduate of Baltimore's Eastern High School, which had no track, let alone a track team, to being one of the 10 best female marathoners on the planet.

Black History Month carries a special meaning this time around for the 64-year-old parishioner of New All Saints in Liberty Heights, who was inducted into the National Black Marathoners Association's Hall of Fame last November and was recently featured in the January issue of *Runners World*.

After earning a master's degree in curriculum development from Springfield, Bevens returned to Baltimore, became a physical education teacher and joined the Baltimore Road Runners Club, which she represented with élan.

She made her debut at the classic distance in the 1973 Maryland Marathon, taking second in 3 hours, 31 minutes, 45 seconds. In 1977, she won that race and finished second in the Boston Marathon, which earned her the 10th spot in the annual world rankings by *Track and Field News*.

Bevens posted her personal best, 2:49:56, at Boston in 1979, and was a bit past her prime when the women's marathon was finally added to the Olympic program, in 1984.

From marathon success in New York and Chicago to representing the U.S. in West Germany and Japan, Bevens never lost sight of what's most important.

"Keep the Lord first," said Bevens, who cited running as an opportune time to pray the rosary. "You've got to put it (running) in your life but it shouldn't be your whole life. A lot of times I would leave a race and go to Mass. You have to keep things in perspective."

At New All Saints, Bevans is a lector and extraordinary minister of holy Communion. She has been visiting the sick and bringing them the Eucharist for three decades. Michael Bruce, who has run and coached with Bevans over the years, credits her with strengthening his faith.

"She emphasizes everything we're doing is for God," said Bruce, 54, who worships at St. Ambrose in Park Heights. "Once I started running with her, she started encouraging me to go back to church and start participating in activities the church sponsored."

Catherine M. Deford, a New All Saints parishioner who also visits the sick, called Bevans an unsung hero at church.

"She is a devoted person and one who wants to instill the best in the students she works with," Deford said.

Bevans taught for 31 years in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, and still coaches cross country at Perry Hall High School.

While she no longer runs marathons, Bevans competes in half-marathons (13.1 miles). Today her training regimen includes strength training and running three miles four times a week.

"I feel fantastic," Bevans said. "I'm still able to get out there."

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