

President Carol Zuegel-Longman with Treasurer and Newsletter Editor R.T. Thomas



MORE THAN MILES

As the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Running Club celebrates its 45th anniversary, members say the group's greatest strength isn't speed—it's connection.

words by **Bill McLean** / portrait photography by **Katrina Wittkamp**/
sports photography courtesy of the **Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Running Club**

AT 8 A.M. ON SATURDAY MORNINGS, the East Lake Forest train station becomes less of a commuter stop and more of a gathering place.

Runners and walkers of varying ages and ambitions arrive in layers, stretch a little, swap a few words, and head off together on a familiar route—down toward the beach, back up through town, past stately homes and Lake Forest College.

Some cover the full six miles. Others peel off earlier.

All start in the same place. And, just as importantly, many end in the same one, too: over coffee.

That rhythm has helped sustain the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Running Club for 45 years. Founded in 1981, the club—now nearing 200 members—has become a fixture in the two communities, offering far more than exercise. It is a place to train, certainly, but also to socialize, volunteer, support neighbors and strengthen ties in town.

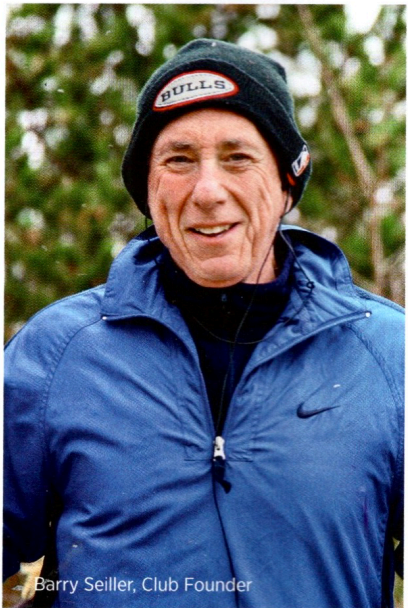
“It’s not cliquy,” says club president Carol Zuegel-Longman, who joined shortly after moving to Lake Forest in 2020. “It’s enduring.”



Zuegel-Longman, a former high school and collegiate cross country and track athlete, said the club's appeal is its openness. Members range in age from their early 30s to 90, and they include everyone from marathoners, Ironman competitors and triathletes to people who simply enjoy walking 2 or 3 miles with company.

"Runners in general are nice people," she says. "Being a member of a club like this is a good way to meet members of the community."

That welcoming spirit traces back to founder and first president Barry Seiller, who died in 2022. Seiller



Barry Seiller, Club Founder

once said he was proud that the club had become "a shining example of people bonding together by a common goal of keeping fit through running or walking."

Zuegel-Longman said Seiller intentionally wanted the club to feel inviting and accessible.

"He appreciated how running brings people together and allows them to make connections," she says.

The club's reach extends beyond Saturday mornings. Members gather for four weekly meetups, summer track workouts led by Jenny

Spangler—the 1996 U.S. Olympic marathoner—and social events throughout the year, including a holiday "Jingle Run" and an annual chili cookoff. There are also partnerships with local organizations and businesses, including Kiddles Sports in Lake Forest.

The club's sense of purpose also shows up in service.



During its Thanksgiving Day 5K and 10K in 2025, it raised more than \$21,000 for the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Over the years, it also has supported projects such as the restoration of Walden Bridge, the East Lake Forest train station and the Lake Forest Beach pedestrian ramp.

Ron "R.T." Thomas, the club's treasurer and newsletter editor, has been a member for 30 years. He now walks with the club after what he calls "40 years of competitive running," and he said the group's loyalty is what stands out most.

Years ago, after a bike accident put him in the hospital, he missed the club's Tuesday track workout.

"Half the running club visited me in the hospital on that day," Thomas says. "I received a basket of oranges from them."

That, in a few pieces of fruit, may explain the club better than any race result.

Yes, the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Running Club keeps people moving. It helps them train, stay healthy and get out the door on cold mornings. But its real strength may lie in what happens during and after the miles—in the conversations about travel, work, family and life, in the laughter over coffee, and in the easy, steady companionship that has carried this club for 45 years.

And counting.

Visit lflb.org for more information.

