



Race's Success Continues After 25 Years  
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Twenty four years ago, on a strikingly similar day, Litchfield Hills Road Race co-founders Joe Concannon and Bill Neller met up at the beginning of Meadow Street just after the start of the inaugural race.

Under a bright, sunny sky, the co-founders expressed amazement at what they had started. Concannon and Neller had no idea the race would evolve into the international event it has become, but they realized they had created something special.

On Sunday, shortly after the last runners had crossed the finish line of the 25th LHRR and with the sky as bright and blue as it was in 1977, Neller again could be found at the start of Meadow Street.

He was there to celebrate the 25th running of the race with friends like Tommy Leonard, Bill Sivhra, Rick O'Dell, Steve Eisenhaure and Dennis Meltzer, leading them in a toast that featured 25-year-old Port wine.

The group of two dozen toasted Concannon, who died last year, the silver anniversary of the race, each other, and just about anyone else they could think of who has helped make the race one of the crown jewels of the New England road racing circuit.

“This is about the friendships we've made through the road race,” said Eisenhaure, a former Litchfield resident and an organizer of the race in its early years.

Friendship, indeed, is what brings Eisenhaure to the race from his home in Florida, Meltzer from Grand Rapids, Mich., Sivhra from California, and Leonard from Falmouth, Mass., via Boston, where he was a famed bartender at the Eliot Lounge.

Together, they mingle with the likes of Neller and O'Dell, who have run all 25 LHRRs, former road race director Rick Evangelisti, and many of the others behind the success of the race.

Meltzer, who uses road race weekend as a reunion with college friends from Northeastern University, has become a true symbol of the race. He's demonstrated that he wouldn't miss it for anything, once having skipped his sister's wedding to come to Litchfield.

“People come back year after year because of the friendships they've made here,” Neller

said in explaining the lure the out-of-staters feel. ``They're definitely not here to race. Joe (Concannon) set the tone for the race 24 years ago when he said he wanted his Litchfield friends to meet his Boston friends.

``That's exactly what happened. So many of my good friendships have come about because of the race. For that, I'll always be thankful to Joe."

Neller and most of those gathered around him at the toast did run in the race, although very slowly. For them, the race is a time to mingle with spectators and enjoy the ambiance of the course. Racing is about the last thing they're going to do.

After 25 years, the race, as Sunday proved, is as strong as ever. The leadership of race director John Clock and the dozens of volunteers assisting him before the race and on race day continue to do the work necessary to maintain the integrity.

As long as people like Neller, who handles several organizational tasks before the race and keeps up its historical significance, and Clock are involved the race will hold onto its revered status.

Twenty-five years old and as successful as ever. May the race live on for another 25 years, leaving Neller the job of finding a few bottles of 50-year old Port for another toast on Meadow Street.