

Fiona in Focus

Memories of a remarkable man - Jeph Abara

by Fiona Green



I was greatly saddened to hear of the passing of Jeph Abara on December 27th. I still can't believe I won't see his radiant smile again or hear his signature, dramatic "on your maaaaaarks, get set, goooooo" that started off his races.



I last saw Jeph on Christmas Eve at the Christmas Spirit Classic 5K in Grand Prairie. Despite being confined to a wheelchair, he was determined to take care of every element of the race, from setting up the cones at the turnaround point, to starting the race, to announcing the names of every age group and door prize winner. It was evident to all who knew him that his health was declining but canceling the event was definitely not an option for him. The weather was ideal for running, the atmosphere was festive, and many participants had brought gifts to be donated to children in need. It was a perfect morning.

Jeph's passing marks the end of an era. For years he organized charity events, usually one a month, at various locations throughout the Metroplex. Being a runner, he knew what mattered in a race and he cut out the frills and extras to keep costs low and make his events affordable to all. His races attracted a large group of regulars who appreciated his philosophy and philanthropic efforts and the fact that participating in one of his races felt like attending a family reunion. Jeph knew his regulars by name and showed a genuine interest in their achievements and race times, celebrating and commiserating with them as appropriate. Aware that not all runners were fast enough for an age group award, he mixed things up a little, introducing the random 'souls and soles' awards and distributing door prizes.

Many of Jeph's e-mails and Facebook posts began with the phrase "Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud." Jeph was a rainbow in many people's clouds. Three years ago, when I mentioned to him that the son of a local runner had lost his leg in a lawn mower accident, he immediately made plans for an event to raise funds for the family. This event took place on a very hot July morning. Halfway through the awards ceremony Jeph passed out due to the heat. He was quickly revived and as he was being taken to the ambulance he made sure volunteers remembered to present special awards to members of the boy's family. This was typical of Jeph. He always placed others ahead of himself and was determined to keep giving to others for as long as he could.

In losing Jeph we are saying goodbye to a fellow runner, a friend and a remarkable human being. He will be greatly missed by his friends in the running community and the many people whose lives were enriched thanks to his generosity. While Jeph's shoes are impossible to fill, perhaps the best way to honor him is by embracing his philosophy of "being a rainbow in someone's cloud." Knowing Jeph, nothing would make him happier.

(Jeph is pictured with Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price and Opal Lee, Juneteenth organizer, June 2015.)