

4th of July Gets Off and Running Early, Ends With A Bang

More Than Three Hundred Runners, Walkers Honor Memory of J.P. Blecksmith at Tribune's Annual 5K.

By Mitch Lehman

EDITOR OF THE TRIBUNE

IN THE RICH history of the City of San Marino, there may have never been a more festive, more appropriate celebration of Independence Day. It all started when a huge throng of supporters – more than four hundred in all – showed up in honor of an American hero, San Marino's J.P. Blecksmith, who was killed last November during Operation Iraqi Freedom, by running or walking a race in his memory. And it all came to a close some thirteen hours later, when the final firework exploded over Lacy Park, providing an exclamation point to the celebration of our nation's 229th birthday.

In between, there was a spectacular clock dedication by the Rotary Club of San Marino, another particularly homespun parade, smiling politicians (not to mention hula-hooping and paddle-balling politicians), outstanding musical performances on the Lacy stage, family fun and a steady stream of Little Leaguers, water balloons and makeshift cherry pickers.

First, the Tribune's J.P. Blecksmith Memorial 5K Run, which attracted friends, family members, teammates, classmates and fellow soldiers who single-mindedly traversed the course. The exceptional participation and sponsor involvement will result in a donation of more than \$10,000 to the J.P. Blecksmith Leadership Foundation, which will fund a scholarship at Flintridge Prep, J.P.'s alma mater.

"We were very very pleased with the turnout from the San Marino community and the other people who came to pay tribute to J.P.," said Ed Blecksmith, J.P.'s father, on behalf of the family. "All the volunteers and all the sponsors, that stepped up to help made it very special for us all. Mary Gilbaugh, our son Alex, J.P.'s girlfriend Emily and The Tribune. They all put so much into this and we are very pleased."

More than \$1,400 in sales of Foundation t-shirt sales Monday morning will help add to the coffers.

"We kicked off a nice tradition here and it was a tremendous event," Blecksmith continued. "We will be able to make a nice donation to the Foundation. The one thing that J.P. loved was his friends. Even in death, he continues to bring us all together. He is still doing his magic."

Among the many participants was one of J.P.'s military instructors, who came from Tennessee with his daughter to run, several Marine Corpsman and football teammates of J.P. from the Navy Midshipmen.

Then, it was on to the dedication ceremony for the Rotary Club of San Marino's Centennial Clock, erected at the corner of San Marino Ave. & Huntington Drive. The much-anticipated unveiling got temporarily hung up – literally – when the black plastic shroud became entangled in the clock's five spires. A little adaptability, a cherry picker and a deep breath later, Rotary President Len Therrien and Past President Jack Hamilton were basking in the shadow of the city's newest structure – replete with chimes that fellow Rotarian Greg Thompson claims can easily be adapted to play the USC fight song.

The tune of 'I Love A Parade' soon was on the lips of thousands, as the annual trek down Monterey Road featured Congressman David Dreier, L.A County Supervisor Mike Antonovich, youngsters on decorated bikes and the annual water war between the Little League baseball and softball all-star teams (film of that event is currently under scrutiny to determine a winner).

San Marino High School garage bands Vindicity and Shock Treatment entertained their respective fan clubs before Christian Simmons and Broken Arrow, the San Marino Community Band and Tom Sullivan's Dixieland Band took their traditional turns on stage.

New features to the program included a hula hoop contest amongst the members of the San Marino School Board (won by Joseph Chang) and a paddle-ball competition for members of the San Marino City Council. Mayor Bob Twist was able to put three or four consecutive contacts together to eke out a win there.

Before the fireworks, the more than 14,000 park-goers were treated to tremendous vocal performances by Katarina Mayers, Robert Lin and Yu-Pang Chen who belted out the Star-Spangled Banner and America the Beautiful, followed by fellow San Marino High School students Lindsay Jenkins and Jen Kellogg, who hit all the right notes on God Bless America.

Fireworks followed, and the 4th of July staff then departed for their annual 364-day break.

Full marks to Recreation Director Cindy Collins, citizen volunteer Jeff Groseth, sound man Milan Ubovich, and the San Marino Police and Fire Departments, who employed their entire staffs to insure the safety and comfort of all in attendance.