

Photo provided by Bob Ocken, Ocken Photography

Walking on Water

by Pat Riley, Jr.

The South is not typically known for the fitness level of its population or for having facilities that encourage people to exercise. In fact, Arkansas, lying in the heart of the frying pan belt is one of only twelve states (all but one in the South) with obesity rates above 30%. But thanks to some visionary leaders and their admirable persistence, the reputation of central Arkansas as a unique fitness destination may be changing.

I'm talking about our bounty of pedestrian/bike bridges that stretch majestically across the Arkansas River on the east and west side of town. We've got four of them now, more than any other city in the country. These bridges link up with an impressive and growing system of biking/walking trails that connect parklands up and down the river. These paths beckon the old and young, fit and unfit to get out and use them. On a typical Saturday more than 1600 people cross the Big Dam Bridge. If you build it, they will come.

But how did they get built you might ask? That's what I wondered so I decided to call the man widely credited as the driving force behind these bridges, Pulaski County Judge Buddy Villines.

It all started, Judge Villines explained, in the mid '90's as part of the River Project, an effort by local leaders to revitalize the Little Rock/North Little Rock downtown areas along the riverfront. The anchor developments under discussion in those days were Alltel Arena (now Verizon) on the North Little Rock side and the River Market on the Little Rock side. Lying directly between these two projects is the Junction Bridge so the idea arose to convert this abandoned railroad bridge into a pedestrian walkway. It would take well over a decade to pull off, but that goal finally became a reality on May 17, 2008.

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE	LENGTH (FEET)	WIDTH (FEET)	HEIGHT ABOVE WATER (FEET)	GRAND OPENING DATE	COST (MILLIONS)
Big Dam Bridge	4226	14	65	9/30/06	\$12.8
Junction Bridge	1800	17	N/A	5/17/08	\$5.8
Two Rivers Park Bridge	1162	14	45	7/8/11	\$5.3
Clinton Presidential Park Bridge	2653	13	46	9/30/11	\$10.5

Interestingly, the idea for the Big Dam Bridge (BDB) occurred well after planning began for the Junction Bridge but for a variety of reasons, the BDB was completed first (its opening ceremony was on September 30, 2006). I asked Judge Villines to tell me about the inspiration for the BDB.

He explained that one idea from the River Project talks was to develop paths along the riverfront where people could stroll along while admiring the view. This goal led to the development of the Arkansas River Trail, also known as the Millennium Trail.

The initial focus was on the downtown area but it wasn't long before attention shifted upstream (i.e. west). As Judge Villines recalled, the BDB grew out of a discussion that he and North Little Rock Mayor Pat Hays had one day in '96 or '97. They wanted to find a way to connect Burns Park on the northern bank with Murray Park on the south. Zeroing in on the Murray Lock and Dam, it's easy to imagine the two leaders asking each other "how hard could it be to put a bridge over that?"

Once the idea to build a pedestrian bridge across Murray Dam took shape, it was only logical to conceive of extending existing pathways along

both riverfronts, eventually to make a continuous loop. Furthermore, why not connect the western edge of Little Rock's trail to Two Rivers Park across the narrow Little Maumelle River thereby linking up to many more miles of trails? Of course, the story of going from concept to reality was filled with drama and uncertainty but the good Judge prevailed and the western bridges are a testament to his perseverance.

The Two Rivers Pedestrian Bridge opened to the public in July 2011. Two Rivers is a natural complement to the BDB and opens up access to three miles of existing paved pathways. A project now under construction will connect Two Rivers Park by paved trails all the way to Pinnacle Mountain State Park. Also under construction is a second ramp on the west side of the BDB to better connect that bridge with Two Rivers.

The fourth and final piece of the Little Rock/North Little Rock Pedestrian Bridge system lies eight miles east of the Two Rivers Bridge at the site of the Clinton Presidential Library. Here the old Rock Island Railroad Bridge (built in 1899) has been transformed by a thirteen foot wide ramp that gracefully arcs above the lift span to accommodate walkers and cyclists. This majestic

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pedestrian bridge is scheduled to have its opening ceremony on September 30, 2011 – five years to the day after the Big Dam Bridge opened.

The first time I ever saw a pedestrian bridge was in Chattanooga, TN. It was 2002 and I was there for a regional team tennis competition. A friend and I walked across their bridge, high above the Tennessee River and we talked about how wonderful it was and how cool it would if Little Rock had something similar. Little did we know that less than ten years later there would be four such bridges in our hometown.

These days when I have an out of town guest visiting, the pedestrian bridges are at the top of my list of attractions to show off. These bridges are terrific communal gathering spots. On weekends these “promenades in the sky,” as Judge Villines called them are filled with a vast cross-section of people, including Club members of course and, I’ve noticed, almost everyone is smiling. It makes me smile too. It also makes me proud to live in a city that recognizes the value of fitness and makes it a priority for its citizens.

Arkansas River Trail News

The loop from the BDB to the Clinton Bridge is approximately fourteen miles long. Almost the entire North Little Rock side lies on dedicated pathways where cyclists can ride without concern about automobile traffic. In Little Rock, however, there are three to four miles between the Junior Deputy baseball fields and the Medical Mile downtown where cyclists must detour off the path and wind through a maze of city streets and sidewalks. In the cycling community this stretch of road is known as “the gap.”

City officials and the Little Rock Parks and Recreation Commission are working feverishly to eliminate the gap by building a dedicated path through this area along the riverfront. Because of the terrain and various manmade obstacles, completion of this section will take engineering genius and money. To accomplish the goal, the City has applied for a multi-million dollar Tiger Grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Should we be awarded this grant and the “gap” becomes history, Little Rock will truly have a world-class walking/running/cycling venue that is second to none. Having miraculously built four pedestrian bridges over the past five years, this final piece of the river loop trail seems imminently achievable.

Competitor's Corner



Michele Lucas & Shadra Baker



Julian Owen



Kelly Thompson, Michele Adams and Taylor Adams



Noah Findlay



Krissa Thoreson

ITU SPRINT TRIATHLON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP (BEIJING, CHINA)
Don Fletcher (8th in age group)

LOUISVILLE KENTUCKY IRONMAN
Gary Taylor

TUPELO MARATHON (MISSISSIPPI)
Scott Sander

HOTTER'N HELL BIKE RIDE (WICHITA FALLS, TX)
Belva Cook
Cindy and David Lynch

TRI ARKANSAS INTERNATIONAL DISTANCE TRIATHLON (DEGRAY LAKE)
Susan Blair (1st in age group)
Michael Johnson

RIVERCITIES TRIATHLON (SHREVEPORT)
Susan Blair (2nd in age group)

MIGHTY MITE TRI (FOREST CITY)
Susan Blair (1st in age group)

SHARKFEST SPRING TRIATHLON (BENTONVILLE)
Kelli and Bill Criswell

DEGRAY LAKE SPRINT TRIATHLON
Michele Adams (first tri/1st in age group)
Taylor Adams (first tri/1st in age group)
Elizabeth Freeman (2nd in age group)
Caylie Gillum (3rd in age group)
Chris Henry
Julian Owen (first tri)
Kelly Thompson (first tri/2nd in age group)
Krissa Thoreson (2nd overall)
Chris White (1st in age group)
Angie Stafford and Kenny Bell (3rd in mixed relay)

ARKANSAS 5K CLASSIC (NLR)
Carl Carter

EUREKAN TRI (EUREKA SPRINGS)
Kelli and Bill Criswell

CATS SPRINT TRIATHLON
Michele Adams
Lee Burrell (first tri)
Nick Curton (1st in age group)
Lindsay Herron (1st in age group)
Julian Owen
Gary Taylor (3rd overall)
Jimmy Thompson (1st in age group)
Kelly Thompson
Krissa Thoreson (2nd overall)

ROLLING ON THE RIVER 5K
Shadra Baker
Michele Lucas

BRYANT INVITATIONAL CROSS COUNTRY MEET
Noah Findlay (1st overall)

CONWAY KIDS TRI JUNIORS 6 - 10
Andrew Haughaboo (1st in age group)
Finishers: Zoe Adebayo, Jonathan Borne, Sydney Borne, Mary Kate Crone, Carson English, Emily McMennamy, Nathan Tonti

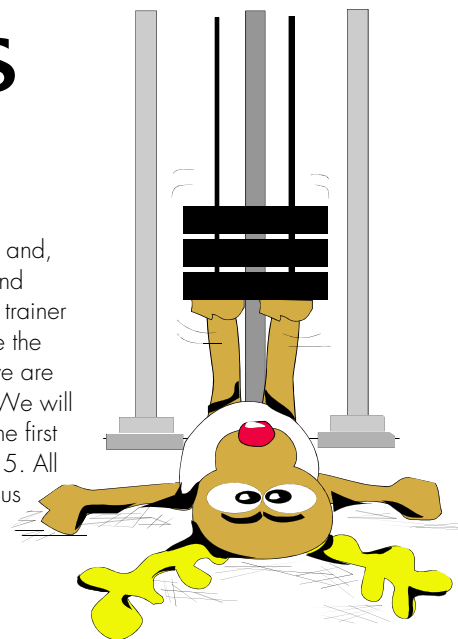
CONWAY KIDS TRI SENIORS 11 - 15
Eve Larkin (2nd in age group)
Emily Leding (1st in age group)
Caleb Rodgers (3rd in age group)
Finishers: Trevor Borne, Alex Brown, Harrison Brown, Molly English, Natalie Tonti

MIRACLE CHASER KIDS TRI
Josh Farrell (2nd in age group)
Andrew Haughaboo (1st in age group)
Alexa Tolbert (1st in age group)
Finishers: Zoe Adebayo, Kathryn Begnoche, Mirielle Begnoche, Jonathan Borne, Sydney Borne, Trevor Borne, Andrew Davis, Audrey Davis, Madison Davis, Ella Tolbert

Holiday Happenings

Check the List Challenge

We've decided to overhaul our annual holiday fitness challenge in order to add some excitement, anticipation and, quite frankly, challenge. Six of our trainers (Pam Boerner, Carla Branch, Nancy DeBin, Paul Fajer, Lee Gunn and Aimee Larkin) have graciously agreed to help. We are currently fleshing out the details but the plan is for each trainer to create a surprise list of challenge activities for completion over the course of a week. Participants will receive the lists via e-mail - one per week for five weeks. (You're right, there are six trainers - more on that later.) Again, we are still sorting it out but anticipate award of partial points and inclusion of non-traditional fitness/health activities. We will bring back some favorites from the old challenge (like "Club check in") but overall it will be entirely different. The first challenge week starts Monday, November 28, so be on the lookout for registration details. The entry fee is \$15. All entrants will receive an LRAC logo shirt and prizes will be awarded. In the meantime, you can give some serious thought to whether you are up to it. Go ahead, say "yes," we challenge you.



Taking Orders for Pasture Raised Turkeys

Sam Hedges, our Cool Down Café manager, is taking orders for Thanksgiving turkeys from Falling Sky Farms in Northwest Arkansas. These pasture-raised birds spend their days picking and scratching and are fed a GMO (genetically modified organism) FREE grain in addition to their normal grass/bug diet. According to Sam, "Thanksgiving is about expressing thanks and these turkeys were raised with gratitude for the sustenance they provide. You can feel good about this turkey being on your table."

The turkeys cost \$3.75 per pound and they range in size from 12 to 18 pounds. To order your turkey, contact Sam (225-3601, ext. 340 or samhedges@lrac.com) and let him know the approximate size you would like. (The sooner you order the better your chance of getting one of the larger birds.) To hold your turkey, Falling Sky requires that we collect a \$20 non-refundable deposit which may be charged to your LRAC account. The turkeys will be delivered to the Club the week before Thanksgiving at which time the balance will be due. Sam will contact you with delivery specifics.

Rice Depot Brown Bag Event

We're teaming up with the Arkansas Rice Depot again this year and hope you'll come through in an even bigger way. Last year, the Club was the Depot's largest holiday donor, graciously giving 223 sacks of much needed groceries to help feed hungry Arkansans. Sadly, the number of families that need assistance is growing. If you would like to participate, please bring non-perishable food items to the Club between the dates of October 24 and November 17. (Wish lists will be located at the desks.) If you forget your groceries but want to contribute, we will be happy to charge your Club account for whatever amount you tell us and we'll send your donation as part of a lump sum. (Please note, we will send instructions to use monetary donations where the need is greatest.) Contact Kelly, 225-3601, ext. 331, if you have questions.

Get Patio Phit

It's not quite Venice, CA, (home of "Muscle Beach") 'cause there's no sand or ocean but our newest exercise area *will* be alfresco and *is* near the water and there will be plenty of opportunities to flex one's muscles. What's up, you ask? Well, in mid-October when the pool bubble goes up, we plan to convert the outdoor sun deck on the north side of the pool into a makeshift functional training area. There will be Olympic bars, Bosu balls, kettlebells, pull up bars, plyo boxes, a 50 foot conditioning rope and other "toys" available for a thorough functional workout. We are always looking for space(s) to expand our exercise offerings and this area has some interesting potential when the weather isn't too wet or cold. Of course, come springtime, the space will revert to its original purpose as a sunning deck. Till then, come work out on the "Phitness Patio."

From the NTRP

Held August 12—14
at LRAC/LRRC



Martha James, Maggie and Chris Minshall and Caroline Fox



Kim Gaiher, Keina Jennings and Derek Jennings



Bob Harrison, Tennis Director Phil Mehlin, and Betty Harrison



Glen Jones, Stuart Jones, Guy Gilliland and Bill Russell



Dale Aldridge, Lori Uekman, Lynette Bowersock and Chadley Uekman



Pepper, Lola, May and Mark Bridges



Jonie Burks, Jordan Burks and Bailey White

Member Winners

DOUBLES: 4.0 Melissa Overton/Karrie Wroten;
3.5 Allison Baker/Anna O'Donnell;
2.5 Rhonda Eichler/Theresa Huber
SINGLES: 4.5 Wyatt Miller; 3.5 Alexander Varela;
3.0 Josh Daniel; 2.5 Jessica Rogers
SENIORS: 4.0 Pat Johnson/JoAnn McCoy
COMBO MIXED: 8.0 Martha James/Wyatt Miller;
6.0 Maggie and Chris Minshall

P Program Notes

PARENT'S NIGHT OUT: Oct. 7 and 28 (Halloween Carnival). Ages 3 - 12. 6:00 to 10:30 pm. Call the DUC, 225-3601, ext. 335. **MUST PRE-REGISTER!**

BUBBLE RAISING: Oct. 6 (rain date Oct. 7). Swim lessons are cancelled. AquaFit will be held at the LRRC.

PILATES BEGINNER SERIES: TuTh, Oct. 11 - 27; 11:00 am - 12:00 pm or 6:30 - 7:30 pm. \$25. E-mail Lisa to register, lcooper@lrac.com

LITTLE ROCKERS MARATHON: Training starts Oct. 11. TuTh 3:45 - 4:30 pm. Ages - 7 to 12. \$20. Race date: Mar. 3. Call the DUC, 225-3601, ext. 335 or go to www.lrac.com, for all the details.

LRAC RACE FOR THE CURE TEAM: Deadline, midnight, Oct. 19. Register at www.komenarkansas.org. Team name - "Little Rock Athletic Club". Password - "LRAC". \$26

DUC OUT OF SCHOOL FUN DAYS: Oct. 13, 14, 20 and 21; Nov. 21, 22, 23, 28, 29 and 30. 7:30 am - 6:00 pm. Members - \$35 per day. Call the DUC, 225-3601, ext. 335. **MUST PRE-REGISTER!**

TRICK, TREAT & SPLASH: Lap pool turns into a "foggy bog" on Friday, Oct. 28. 4:30 - 6:00 pm. Event is complimentary. Wear costumes/swimsuits. RSVP to Eimear, 225-3601, ext. 310.

BOOT CAMP: MWF; 5:45 - 6:45 am. Oct. 17 - Nov. 18. \$225. Call Carla at 225-3601, ext. 236, to enlist.

THANKSGIVING: The Club is closed Thanksgiving. Join us for Go! Running's Golbber Turkey Trot at 8:00 am on Thursday, Nov. 24. The entry fee is a can of food and there will be a race tshirt swap, The course will cover road, track, trails and other unusual things. (3—4 mile and 6—8 mile loops). Refreshments will be served.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS DAYS: Guests are welcome at the Club free of charge, November 25 - 27. Guests must be accompanied by members.

Tennis League Winners

MONDAY: Margo Wynne, Marci Hall, Benjia Hollinger, Becky Arthur, Kitty Smith, Stacy Harter, Aimee Berry

TUESDAY: Lisa Nutt, Sheffield Duke, Lindy Spaulding, Susie Haynes, Lynda Allen, Susan Olmsted, Judy Rauton

WEDNESDAY: Lindy Spaulding, Mindy Morrell, Debbie Cooper, Landon Luzader, Angela Hutsell, Wendy Phelan

THURSDAY: Becky Howeth, Shannon Greer, Amy Palmer, Stephanie Jacuzzi, Karen Toland, Tarrie Boggs, Schelle Fike, Jessica Rogers, Kathy McConnell, Becky Arthur, Michael Osborn, John Magee, Libby Thalheimer

FRIDAY: Shara Turk, Missy Wortman, Teresa Murphy, Caroline Fox