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NEIGHBOURS

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An exclusive magazine serving the communities of Mississauga Road, Sherwood Forrest, Erindale At UTM, Sawmill Valley and Indian Road

*Robert
Winckler*

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Running into the Record Books



Robert's 2018 Guinness World Record certificate.

Photo courtesy of Robert Winckler



Robert's impressive running career has spanned over 36 years; he ran his 60th marathon this past April.

Photo by Ivy Cahigas, Fable Studios

Meet Robert Winckler

By Annette Torchia

When he's not enjoying time with his family, volunteering, swimming, attending church, or cheering on the Maple Leafs or Argonauts, you'll likely find Robert Winckler doing what he loves – running. In fact, Robert has some pretty impressive accolades under his belt, including breaking three Guinness World Records as a marathon runner. Talk about impressive!

But running wasn't always Robert's passion. Now 54, Robert recalls growing up in Toronto and bike riding with his father when he was young, sometimes along the Martin Goodman Trail and for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. It wasn't until he was 18 that he stopped biking. Around that time, Robert was working at Crown Life Insurance in Toronto. There was a gym in the receiving area that staff were able to use after work, and a room where the Crown Life Running Club met. They invited Robert to join, and for several days Robert couldn't stop thinking about the club, having been

interested in pursuing another hobby. So, on April 4, 1983, he finally decided to give it a shot. He told the woman who ran the club, "I won't be very fast because I never ran before." "It's ok," she replied, "we never leave a runner behind."

Over time, Robert's involvement in the club grew. Eventually, he became interested in races and set a goal of completing a full marathon and a half marathon. He began running 5km, then progressed to 10km. His hard work and persistence paid off, and in October 1984 he entered the Shoppers Drug Mart Marathon (now known as the Toronto Marathon). It took him over five hours to finish his first full marathon. His fellow club members waited for him at the finish line, just as they had promised. The following October Robert ran his first half marathon. But even though he had achieved his goals, he wasn't sure if he was satisfied.

Robert worked at Crown Life for a few more years and left grateful to the running club for introducing him to his new passion. "If not

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for me working at Crown Life Insurance and those young ladies asking me to join the Crown Life Running Club, I wouldn't have become involved in running." Now, Robert runs an average of 25 to 30km five days a week to train for upcoming races.

Robert currently still holds two of his three Guinness World Records, set in Toronto at the Scotiabank Waterfront Marathon. He set the first record on October 16, 2016, as the fastest person to complete a half marathon dressed as a swimmer. The following year he set the record for running the fastest half marathon dressed as a cowboy. And just last year he set yet another record for running the fastest half marathon while carrying a full set of golf clubs in a standard golf bag. This year, Robert plans to head back to the Scotiabank Waterfront Marathon and take back his world record for fastest half marathon dressed as a swimmer, which was broken last year. He recalls how hard his records were to accomplish and is very proud of them, even though he admits it's still surreal. In 2019, Robert came across a Facebook post of two men asking for witnesses for their attempt

at setting a world record. Robert agreed to be their witness, and on May 5 he ran his 40th half marathon alongside Greg Reed and Robert Laurin at the Mississauga Marathon and watched as they set a new Guinness World Record in their hand-made canoe for the fastest half marathon in a two-person costume. It's one of his favourite memories.



Robert running in the Nutrience Oakville Half Marathon in 2018, his final training before he broke the record at the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon a few weeks later.

Photo courtesy of Charles Zhang

Robert's running career has spanned over 36 years and has included many first-place awards and over 160 medals. He's ran many 5km and 10km races, a 50km ultra marathon in 2017, a Canada Army run in 2017 and 2018, and the Cambridge Mile four years in a row. And he's not finished yet. "I'm hoping to run many more races as long as I possibly can," he tells us, and also hopes to be a pacer (someone who runs at a pre-determined speed in a race, typically a long-distance event, helping other runners maintain their desired speed).

This past April, Robert completed his 60th marathon in Waterloo. He also counts himself fortunate to be a member of his running club, the Guelph Victors, and to live in a community that hosts many running events. He participates in the Ragnar relay race – a 300km

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run from Cobourg to Niagara Falls, made up of approximately 200 teams from the United States and Ontario, and his club has won the master title for runners 40 and over in 2017 and 2018. But he tells us his favourite marathon will always be the first one he ran in Toronto in 1984, which will always hold a special place in his heart.

So why does he do it? "Because I enjoy it, and to stay healthy and encourage others to choose a healthy lifestyle." Because every marathon is different. And of course, there's always the challenge of pushing onward to see if he has anything left at the end. His advice for anyone considering running is to visit a running store in their community and sign up with a marathon clinic, where they can receive coaching from experienced marathon runners in preparation for a race, 5km or 10km run, or half marathon.

A large part of Robert's gratitude is directed to his wife, Jackie, and his mother Bernice for always supporting him in his running and encouraging him to reach new limits. And it's no surprise that he considers Terry Fox an inspiration, "for what that man did running across Canada on a prosthetic leg for cancer research...he's a hero to me, because of his determination to finish what he started and the legacy he left behind." He also admires Ed Whitlock for all the records he holds and his kindness. "Ed was a role model for many runners. Age has no boundaries to what you can do." Clearly, Robert's accomplishments and determination are proof that there's still more to come from him, and we wish him luck on that journey. 🏃



Robert runs an average of 25 to 30km five days a week to train for upcoming races.

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