



Leslie Hanna, right, checks her time as she finishes leg nine of the Hood to Coast Relay in Gresham. Soul Train teammate Carmen Foster takes off leg 10 after Leslie passed on the “baton” bracelet seen on Carmen’s left wrist.

# Mountain to the Sea

*Runner who loves to compete finds perfect venue in the Hood to Coast Relay*

**By Lori Russell**

Driving to Mount Hood in the wee hours of the morning, Leslie Hanna noted flashes of light in the otherwise black sky.

“I thought it was a strobe light up at Timberline marking the beginning of the race,” she says.

As her team’s Soul Train II van neared the starting point of the Hood to Coast Relay, it became obvious that their first runner would be heading out in a different type of light show: a thunderstorm.

“We had a 4:30 a.m. start on Friday morning,” Leslie says. “By the time we had sent off our first runner and started down the mountain, it was pouring.”

Leslie is a customer service representative for Northern Wasco PUD. She often is the first person customers speak with when they call or stop by the utility’s office.

Whether at work or running a relay, Leslie approaches challenges with a cheerful demeanor and can-do attitude. Neither rain nor fatigue nor lack of

sleep would deter Leslie and the rest of Sole Train team in their 200-mile trek from Timberline Lodge to the ocean at Seaside.

Now in its 30th year, the Hood to Coast Relay is the largest event of its kind in the country. On the last weekend in August, more than 20,000 people—including Leslie and her 11 teammates—competed in the 36-hour event, which raised more than \$500,000 for the American Cancer Society.

With the decorated vans and team costumes, the Hood to Coast has been dubbed by one participant as a “traveling Woodstock for runners.”

Each team is made up of 12 runners divided into two vans. As the runners in the first van cue up for their relay legs, those in the second van drive to the prescribed exchange point where they eventually will relieve their teammates. A wrist band—instead of a baton—is passed from runner to runner during the race.

The weather cleared before Leslie ran her first of three legs of the relay. Each segment of the course is rated for difficulty and distance. Leslie ran the greatest distance for Soul Train II in her three legs, a total of 19.68 miles.

“There were times I was running alone in the dark,” she says. “I could hear things moving in the bushes. Every so often a runner would come up fast behind me, pass and disappear in front of me.”

Participants must wear an LED headlight and reflector vest when running at night for safety. Headphones or ear buds are not allowed.

In the Coast Range near the town of Mist, the line of vans shuttling runners slowed to a halt.

“Cars lined up bumper to bumper,” Leslie says. “Runners had to get out of their vans and run a mile or so to get to the exchange spot to meet their teammate.”

Lack of cellphone service in some rural stretches of the route made communication between the two team vans a challenge. So did the lack of sleep. While one teammate drove the van, the others attempted to catch a few winks with varying results. Leslie estimates she nodded off for about an hour during the 36-hour event.

Leslie began racing five years ago, not long after taking up running.

“It is one thing to be a recreational jogger and another to enter races,” she says. “It’s an addiction. It brings a whole new dimension to my running. Midweek runs become a goal because I need to train.”

For her “short” mid-week runs, Leslie often heads



out on the Riverfront Trail in The Dalles, covering the eight-mile round trek from the PUD offices to the Discovery Center and back. On Sundays, it’s a half-day run, usually with Hood to Coast teammate and running partner, Sydney Olson.

Last year, the pair ran outdoors throughout the winter. On a snowy day, Sydney drove the 14-mile route before the pair ran so they could follow the tire tracks.

In April, Leslie completed the Yakima River Run—her first marathon and professed “best run of all time.”

She continued to race through the summer, completing several half-marathons and 10k races too numerous to remember.

At 36 years-old, Leslie says she is in the best shape of her life. She is on track to compete in her second marathon in Arizona in February.

When the Sole Train runner completed the last leg of the relay and crossed the finish line, the team reunited to celebrate the achievement.

“We all did well,” Leslie says. “People surprised themselves. All of our first-timers want to do it again.”

As for someone who is considering participating in the largest relay in the country, Leslie has this advice: “Anyone who loves to run should do it at least once.” ■

**Hood to Coast Relay teams of 12 are divided into two groups. Soul Train II is made up of, front row from left, Leslie Hanna, Katie Layton and Carmen Foster; back row from left, Sydney Olson, Trudy Townsend and Tim Foster.**