

my friends. I don't try to make them heavy or funny, or anything other than, this-is-what's-on-my-mind-this-month.

CWM: Let's talk about how you got into event ownership and what inspired you to buy the Chicago Distance Classic.

JB: I had said on a whim to someone, 'ya know, I'd like to own this race', as a joke. The American Lung Association owned it and they were getting ready to drop it. Shortly thereafter, I was running along the lake front path by the lagoon and the race director, Janet Williams said, "Do you still want to buy the Chicago Distance Classic?" And in an oxygen deprived state I said, 'Sure, fine'. So by Tuesday of that week the lawyers were involved and I asked my business partner, 'Do you want to start a race company?' And he said, "So, what does that mean?" And I said, 'I have no idea.' It was like two guys and a truck...and then we had a race company.

It was the next logical step – inviting people to get active, to run and walk, so let's throw a party for them, and even better than that, let's throw a party in my home town for them. We did our first CDC in 2002. The race grew from 2,500 to 6,500 participants in three years, because people knew this was different.

CWM: You are 'different' – we know of no other race director who stands at the finish line congratulating every runner that comes in. What gave you this idea?

JB: It's my party – so I want to make sure that people know I value everybody that's out there. We'll be there to greet the first person who finishes and we'll be there to greet the last person that finishes. And especially here, where we live, we know all the faces and we want to make sure they had a good time at our party. We want everyone to feel like we'd put the race on even if they were the only ones to show up. I want everyone to walk away feeling that way.

CWM: Has owning the Chicago Distance Classic changed your outlook on racing at all?

JB: I had no idea how hard it was to put on a race! I wrote a column about it, where I publicly apologized to every race director I've ever known, because the things you think

How 'The Penguin' got his name

Bingham's self described "waddle" originated when he saw the image of himself running past a store front window. "It was Gabriel's Furniture Store in Appleton, Wisconsin," he says. "I thought I looked like an elite athlete – till I saw myself. In my mind's eye I was fabulous, but in real life, I was just this short fat old man, waddling on down the street. And I literally did start laughing at myself. It was probably a good thing because it kept me going – because I thought, 'this is it, this is who I am this is what I look like'. So I called myself, 'The Penguin', which since became kind of an icon for the second running generation."



the race director should be able to take care of, they can't. It's a lot about making sausage...there's a lot of moving parts and you really do the best you can and it mostly comes down to having a safe race and getting people to where it is they're going to do what they need to do. I think every runner should try to put on a race once, and then they'd never complain again. And there's not a lot of glory – Jenny and I were up at midnight out on the race path, making sure we had cleaned up everything from race day. And at mile 4, we found a clock that had been forgotten. So it's not all wine and roses, its plain old hard work.

CWM: And then came LaSalle...

JB: Yes!

CWM: What changes have occurred with LaSalle Bank taking over the title sponsorship of the CDC this year?

JB: Let me just start by saying that this whole thing started after about 2 years of breakfasts between Mike Niche, Carrie Pinkowski, and me. Carrie won the race before, was the race director and loved the race; and all the changes that we made were from Carrie telling me, 'John, this is might what work better, this is who you need to talk to at the City, this is who you need to work with in the park district...'. And without him, I could have never done it. Last year, the [Chicago] marathon got behind it enough to say, 'Okay, we'll throw our halfway home party at your race.' There's no other half marathon in Chicago and so after last year's Distance Classic, the race had come back enough that it was going in the right direction – mostly because I was

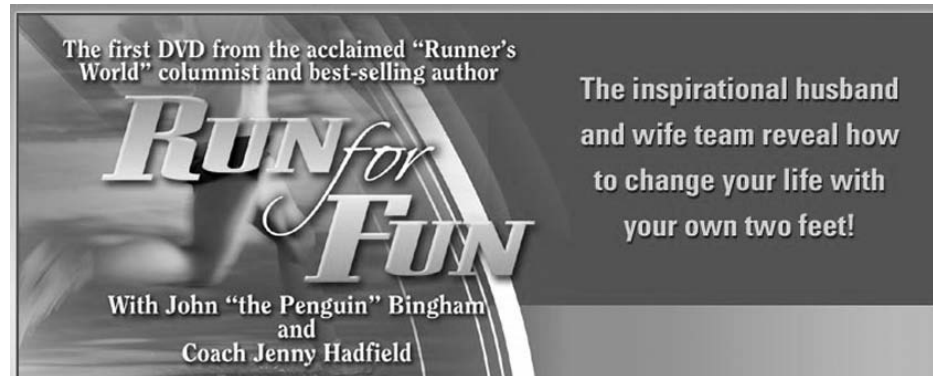
listening to Carrie and then the bank got interested.

The fun story was when we went to meet with the bank about operations and so forth. We were sitting around this enormous conference room with all the latest technical doodads, (my office is in my bedroom), there was David, my partner, me and 27 people from LaSalle. We started talking about website development, and they said, 'So do you guys want to continue to do your own website or would you like our web team to do it?' And we said, 'Well...why don't you just let the team do it.' And then

that. It's like shooting a movie in two days. They came in and did it all in Chicago, some at the Lake front, some in a store, some of the pre-race shtick I do – they created a space that looked like a comedy club.

CWM: The DVD is being billed as, "part comedy album", why is that?

JB: Because of all the stories of my transformation – and you have to have a sense of humor about that stuff. So it's got a lot of the classic Penguin stories in it. And then from there it sets the context for all the other stuff, so Jenny comes on and talks about all the smart stuff, the



they said, 'What about operations? Do you want our operations people...', and we said, 'Yeah...why don't you do that too.' That's what they do best. What we do best is at the race, and now, it's liberated us, totally liberated us to focus on what we do well. They have all the operational strength and I couldn't be happier. Some people have questioned if the race will still have "The Penguin" flavor, but registration was bigger than ever before, and we have to cut it off at 10,000 this year just because of how the permits are. Carrie would like to see it grow to 15 or 20,000. So, do I care about being teal and gold? No, it's fine with me and we still do what we do.

CWM: So, you'll be standing at the finish line?

JB: Absolutely!

CWM: And you and Jenny won't have to be out till all hours cleaning up after the race any more now will you?

JB: Nnnnnn-no. This is one of those great situations where you have two completely different sets of strengths. Because they're big, they're cold. Not because they're cold people but because of the structure of who they are. So they want the warmth that we bring. They want it at Shamrock and for the Marathon too, so I expect I'll be more involved with their other events. Now the City of Chicago will have a half marathon that will draw world class athletes too. I couldn't have done that.

CWM: And how did you make the leap from race director to film star? How did the DVD, "Run for Fun" come about?

JB: The same people that did "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" called us. They had a freelance producer working for them who's story was similar to mine – the guy lost 100 lbs. and fell in love with running. He liked my columns and books and told them, 'I was ripe' to do a DVD.

CWM: So how was it?

JB: It was a different medium for me. It was a lot of work, I'll tell you

training and so forth.

We actually take a group of runners through a 10 week Training Program and show this is what you do in Week 1, Week 2, etc. And other things like, how do you buy your first pair of shoes, because I certainly didn't know when I started out, and other apparel, we really put a lot of information in it. The funniest bit is where when Jenny takes me through a round of stretching and I don't stretch. People think I'm kidding when they see the DVD and tell me, 'it's pretty funny how you did that', but I really am that way.

CWM: Why don't you stretch?

JB: Because there's not a shred of evidence that stretching does anything for your running. It's good to be flexible, so if you want to do yoga, pilates and stuff like that, to live a healthy life, you probably should. But all the research on it for perform-

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ance, says you're more likely to get injured if you stretch than if you don't stretch. I'm as flexible as I am, which it isn't very flexible. But it's not getting any worse and it's not getting any better. I can run all the way I want to run.

CWM: And does Jenny disagree with you?

JB: Oh my God, yes! If you're a sprinter, that's one thing, you need a full range of motion. But if you're a long distance runner doing a half marathon, you're using a muscle in a narrow range of motion and so to stretch that muscle beyond the range of motion you're using it actually hurts more than it helps. It's better to be active than inactive and it's good to be flexible rather than inflexible. All of us should be doing something...I just don't.

CWM: What about strength training – are you doing any strength

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The Penguin's "Bear"

A poodle/shitsu mix that goes everywhere with John and Jenny. (Also present on the couch, page 5.)