

# Shorelines

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PUBLISHED EACH SATURDAY

## Perfect Timing



Runners begin the race at the starting line for the PRS Running Club Summer Race Series in July at Jacksonville Beach.

Photos special for Shorelines

## Local race timing company puts emphasis on community

By Amanda Durish Cook

amanda.durishcook@jacksonville.com

Local runner Matthew Reimer says that he and his partner's latest business venture was a product of "right place, right time."

He could say "right race, right time." Reimer and partner Paul McRae started PRS Race Timing in March. The company is up and running, hosting more than 15 races this year since its launch.

"We thought we'd set up and do a few races per year, but in fact we've had a much bigger response than we initially thought we would," Reimer said.

"It just kind of all came together, and it's taken off — pardon the pun," he added. Now, the company has found its niche by catering to smaller local races and area fundraisers, dealing with sundry themes from firecrackers to beer.

"It was a natural progression. It just made sense," said McRae, a 40-year Jacksonville resident, president of PRS Running Solutions and coach of the 300-member PRS Running Club.

McRae said that he's happy with the forte that the duo have found in local running circles, insisting that larger race timing companies take the personal touch of community footraces.

"When I create an event, I try to put together a unique experience for everyone. Whether it be your first 5K or your 10th marathon, you'll get a personal experience," McRae said. "Each individual, regardless of how old or what their goal times are, will feel like part of a family, almost like part of a tribe."

In September, PRS Race Timing set up a Nease High School band fundraising run in Nocatee, aptly titled "Band on the Run." On National Donut Day in June, PRS Race Timing put together a relay race where all team members had to eat four donuts and then run a mile with their three-person teams.



Runners cross the finish line at the Hunger Fights Family Fun Run organized by PRS Race Timing and held at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens in August.

This year, it organized a three-race series at Deerwood on Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day where staff passed out fake deer-head mounts for people who'd won their category.

"Women were trying to avoid winning them," Reimer acknowledged.

The company also recently timed a prediction run for the Jax Stroller Strength group, where runners were not allowed to wear a watch and had to guess the time that it would take for them to finish. Predicted times were entered into the software component and — upon completion of the race — the results were sorted by who came closest to their predicted time.

Reimer, a 43-year-old Jacksonville Beach resident, got into running eight years ago when he signed up for his first River Run.

"I was trying to work some weight off and just

thought, I'll try running. Now, 104 races later, I'm still at it," said Reimer, who's completed six marathons, including three Donna races and a Marine Corps Marathon in October.

Reimer and McRae met when Reimer enlisted McRae, a New Zealand native and former UNF grad assistant coach in track and cross-country, to become his running coach.

"I saw him at some races, and I decided a year and a half ago that I wanted to get a little faster," said Reimer. "I had been running with him for about a year when we decided to get this whole thing going."

About five years ago, McRae was working in a running supply store where he fielded a steady stream of requests for running coaches.

See RACE PAGE 10

# Race

From Page 1

McRae's PRS Running Club began in August and has quickly grown to more than 300 members. He believes that the First Coast could become a destination for runners as a year-round venue for racing.

"I feel like Jacksonville is really turning into a major running city. It seems like there's three to four events on any given weekend. I think it has wonderful potential."

Three years ago, Reimer started timing the "Running of the Seahorses" on a volunteer basis at Seabreeze Elementary School, which his son and daughter attended.

Some of the first races put together involved manually typing numbers into a computer, handing out index cards with numbers written on them to indicate race placement.

Today's footraces require more sophistication and technology than a guy holding a stopwatch. Set-up for a race that PRS Race Timing organizes includes assembling race clocks, a PA system, banners, timing chips, runners' bibs and mile markers — and the equipment represents thousands of dollars in investment.

"It's a pretty decent investment," admitted Reimer, who also owns construction company Intracoastal Builders in Jacksonville Beach. "There's timing maps on the ground that are the size of a big dormat, and we attach chips to a runner's shoes to electronically deliver times."

Reimer said that the technology is almost to technological used to track inventory in a warehouse.

Basic components of footrace timing are a shoe chip, which runners attach to their shoes. Chips are doled out before each race and worn on the shoe the entire race, and timing mats are set out at the finish line.

When a runner crosses the mat wearing a chip at the finish line, a low frequency signal is sent to energize the chip, and then a high frequency signal is returned from the energized chip through the timing mats to a chip reader system. Each chip has a unique code which is synchronized to the runners' bib numbers pinned to the front of their shirts. Results can be sorted by overall finish, by gender, by age groups and other options.

"We can group people by first-time racers, or if they are part of a corporate team or school or group, pretty much anything you can think of," said Reimer.

## Wanna race?

PRS Race Timing has several races slated for Jacksonville Beach in the coming months — all starting on the beach at the Seawalk Pavilion Boardwalk — starting Dec. 21 with the Patrons of the Hearts 5K & 10K, the Running of the Seahorses 2.5K and 5K sponsored by Patel-Carden Beaches Orthodontics on Jan. 25, and the Fletcher Middle School Wave of Success 5K sponsored by Lazzara Orthodontics on March 8. They are also working with the Faithful Servant Missions, a Beaches group, to put together a 5K and 10K run in Nocatee on Feb. 1. For more information on these races, visit [www.prsracetiming.com](http://www.prsracetiming.com).



Runners line up for Krispy Kreme doughnuts before beginning the Donut Run relay in June.

Running is a family affair for the Reimers. Wife Kathy Reimer teaches at Seabreeze and puts together a training group for girls, while son Andrew, 14, competes in track for Fletcher Middle School. Matthew Reimer routinely sets up clocks and mile markers during FMS track meets, free of charge.

"We're kind of all involved," he said.

Kathy runs every race with PRS Race Timing, and shows up hours prior to a race in order to register runners.

"She'll be signing up the last person, then she'll dart to the starting line and take off running," Reimer said.

PRS Race Timing staff show up about three hours before a race, with a goal of finishing striking the set 90 minutes after the last runner crosses the finish line. Altogether, Reimer estimates that a race is a start-to-finish six-hour affair.

"It's definitely for everybody," Reimer said. "Our goal is to make everyone feel like the event was created just for them. When they leave, [we want] the runners and walkers as well as our customers wanting to come back and run with us again."

From start to finish, planning a race is about a six-month process that involves pulling permits, ordering shirts and medals, even purchasing bottled water en masse.

"Everybody wants to do it on the beach, but what people forget about is high tide in the mornings," Reimer laughed. "Afterwards, it takes three hours the next day to get all of the sand off the equipment."

According to McRae, the most challenging aspects of race planning is getting runners to attend. He said most runners sign up in the last 10 days before the race, while advertising for the race can begin about two months prior.

For PRS Race Timing, roughly 10 volunteers are needed for a 200-person race. Additionally, PRS keeps a race calendar, as well as the results of runners, online at [prsracetiming.com](http://prsracetiming.com).

"It's all the legwork that nobody sees ... it gets a little nerve-wracking," Reimer said.

Reimer and McRae plan get-togethers after the race with an awards ceremony, and strive to give every participating child a medal.

"The goal is to get everybody to come back again and have fun," Reimer said.

Amanda Durish Cook: (904) 359-4665