

The Plain Dealer
Cleveland, Ohio
May 13, 2008
Page D3

Story of first marathon: two winners, one key to city

BY BILL LUBINGER

Plain Dealer Reporter

blubinger@plaind.com, 216-999-5531

She won the Boston Marathon. Successfully lobbied the Olympics to adopt a women's marathon. Was the first woman to run a marathon under 2:40, and set 14 other world running records.

Yet something's still missing from Jacqueline Hansen's trophy case: the key to the city of Cleveland that she earned 30 years ago, but never got. "It's been a standing joke in the family ever since," said Hansen, now 59 and an assistant athletic director at the private Brentwood School in Los Angeles.

How was she left key-less?

It was May 14, 1978, Cleveland's first marathon. Conditions were ideal – cool and overcast. About 1,000 runners slogged from Cleveland State University to Bay Village and back. A motorcycle cop had led him off course at Public Square, but Tom Fleming, a storied marathoner from New Jersey, still won the men's division. Hansen, with a résumé of marathon victories and record times, easily won the women's. Fleming and Hansen had run Boston Marathons together and knew each other well.

When it came time for Cleveland's mayor to reward two winners with a key to the city, Dennis Kucinich had only one to give. "He thought there was only one winner," recalled Hansen, whose knees are overdue for replacement surgery and no longer runs. "He probably chewed his people out when he got back to his office, I don't know," she said. "He was just looking kind of ashamed."

Hansen resolved awkward moment. She knew Fleming was flying out that same day, whereas she planned to stay overnight, so she deferred the only key to her friend, believing the city had time to find a second key before she left. Fleming, 56, a teacher and track/cross-country coach at the private Montclair Kimberley Academy in New Jersey, doesn't remember confusion over the awards or a discussion about who should get the only key. What he does remember is first class mayoral treatment.

"Kucinich was very nice to me. [He] thought it was really wonderful that I came all the way from New Jersey to win his race," said Fleming, who retired from racing at age 37 after winning 27 marathons. "I think Dennis even got me the car to the airport. He was great." The gold key to the city still hangs on a wall in one of his trophy rooms.

And Hansen, whose neighbor drives around with a yellow "Kucinich for President" bumper sticker on her aging BMW, got bupkis. She's never returned to Cleveland since that first marathon – but would for a key.

"Well sure, why not," she said, laughing. "Sounds like fun."