

Blake Norwood – In Memoriam

By Rhonda Hampton

July 27, 1946 – Oct. 29, 2014

On October 29th, Blake Norwood passed away while walking his beloved dog, Bucky, on the Mountain to Sea trail near his home. He was a loving husband to Myra, his wife of 46 years and caring father to his daughter Laurel.

In the running community, Blake is best known as the long time, 20-year Race Director of the Umstead 100 Mile Endurance Run, retiring to RD Emeritus after the 2014 race.

Myra would like for you to know that Blake was far more than an incredible race director. He was also a civil engineer with the NC Department of Transportation where he became Branch Manager of Statewide Planning for the Thoroughfare Planning Unit. Upon retiring from the DOT, he was awarded the Governor's Order of the Long Leaf Pine in recognition of his service to his state. He served his country in the U.S. Army and the Army Reserves where he retired as a Colonel. Above all, he was a caring, supportive and loving husband who put his family first.

Blake was also an ultra runner. He finished The JFK 50 Mile, 10 times, he regularly ran the Uwharrie Trail Run –



Rhonda Hampton and Blake Norwood, April 2014

the 40 mile run, in the early years of the race and he finished nine 100 mile races, his favorite of those was Western States 100s.

Blake's success as a race director came from his love and understanding of ultra running and runners. He incorporated into Umstead 100 everything he could think of that would help runners achieve their goal. These things ranged from year-long detailed planning, providing great aid stations, feeding and caring for runners' families and crews, and appreciating race volunteers because happy volunteers make happy successful runners. He was a master at all of these.

One thing Blake did for every Umstead 100, was to ride his bike around the

course for most of race day. During his ride, he would take pictures and encourage the runners. His quick wit and good banter would raise low spirits and bring smiles to all runners. I am not sure there is another person who has encouraged, guided, inspired and provided an exceptional platform for more ultra-runners to complete their first 100 mile run more than Blake.



I had the honor of shadowing Blake for the last 5 or 6 years as Associate RD for Umstead 100. During these years I had a front row seat to why Blake was respected and loved by so many. Blake, in ultra runner fashion, wanted everyone – family, friend, runner, volunteer - to succeed at their goals. He expected you to carry your weight, but he would help when and wherever you needed him. He advised when appropriate, encouraged when needed, pushed when required, and most importantly, believed in you when you did not believe in yourself. He did all of these for everyone who entered his life; may we each follow in his shoes.

Blake Norwood was a generous, honorable and just man, whose word was his bond. He was truly a rare gem and a great American and will be missed by all who knew him. 🏃