fulfillment at the finish line

Eric Lerude left the rat race in order to start a different kind of race: The Reno-Tahoe Odyssey Relay Run

story Eric Lerude

The night I returned from running the Hood to Coast Relay in August 2003, I could not contain my enthusiasm. I said to my wife, Stephanie, "Wouldn't it be great if I could put on a relay like that right here?" I thought such an event would be a great way to show off Reno, my hometown, and this region that I love so much. Plus, it would be a lot of fun.

There were a couple big issues. One, I was a full-time corporate attorney. Two, I had never organized a running event.

But the reality was that I wasn't enjoying law anymore. Putting on a relay seemed like the perfect thing for me. After all, when I was in middle school and I took one of those career aptitude tests, the result for me was playground supervisor. Directing a relay was just that, but on a much larger level. I wondered, "Could I make a living producing a running event?"

The Hood to Coast is more than a great running event. It's also a large and lucrative business. The races have 1,000 teams with 12,000 runners participating in the main relay. The entry fees alone exceeded $1 million. Organizers had to turn away almost another 1,000 teams with 12,000 runners. There appeared to be a demand for this type of event.

I would have to give up being a full-time lawyer, but ironically, about this time, my position was eliminated. Instead of moving on to another corporate lawyer job, I devoted myself to my new dream: putting on the Reno-Tahoe Odyssey Relay Run Adventure.

Fast forward to today. The 4th Annual Reno-Tahoe Odyssey will occur June 6-7, 2008. Each of the first three Reno-Tahoe Odysseys have been successful. The number of participants has increased each year. Runners from our area, around the U.S. and even throughout the world have run the relay, and have had a blast.

The Reno-Tahoe Odyssey would not exist today without the support and efforts of many. First and foremost, my wife, family and friends. Also, a growing running community, many volunteers and organizations ranging from major sponsors, such as Intuit and Squaw Valley USA, to smaller but critical players, such as Pendola Training and the Silver State Striders.

The relay has helped re-brand Reno as "America's Adventure Place," which has been the goal of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority for the last few years. They played a key role in helping me start the Reno-Tahoe Odyssey, and they continue to be supportive.

I partner with Angel Kiss Foundation, the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway and Avon Foundation's Need For Speed Against Domestic Violence program to help them raise funds for their respective worthy causes and get more exposure. The association with these nonprofits has been gratifying, and it's been a great way to give back to my community.

The relay also has been a reason for many people who did not consider themselves runners or athletes to change their lifestyles. Now they're into fitness. This event has helped them make a big change in their lives.

I still practice law, but I'm self employed and I practice on a part-time basis. I handpick legal work that I enjoy doing. Being my own boss allows me to spend the time I need developing my running event business.

And that business is taking off. Last October I launched the Arizona Odyssey in Tucson. I'm working on the creation of the American Odyssey from Gettysburg, Penn. to Washington, D.C. The inaugural event will be in April 2009. There may be additional Odyssey relays in other locations both inside and outside the U.S. And stay tuned for news about other running events that I intend to get involved with in Reno. Now, when people ask what I do, I just say with a big smile: "I'm a race director." [R]

4th Annual Reno-Tahoe Odyssey Relay Run
June 6-7
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RenoTahoeOdyssey.com