

Welcome to the 21st annual Wayne County Challenge end of season celebration, I am Brian Schleeper, Race Director of the IU East Run with the Wolves 5K. Today we are here to honor the overall and age group winners from the 2024 season and to recognize everyone who completed all eight races of the series. The schedule for 2025 is set and the season schedule is posted on the WCC website.

We are once again offering the Carpe Viam special, which allows you to enter all eight series races at once, at a discounted rate. This year the program is available for \$140, a savings of \$20 over the course of the year on pre-registration rates, getting one race free, and \$60 off day of registration prices. We also have a Youth Carpe Viam package for \$100 for anyone fifteen or under. Signing up for the Carpe Viam program ensures that you get a shirt or other swag from each race. Online and paper registration forms for both Carpe Viam specials will be available February 1st on the WCC website, wcchallenge.org.

Now I would like to recognize the remaining race directors from the 2024 season for all their hard work:

Melissa Soper - Girls Inc. 5K: benefitting Girls Incorporated

Rick Duncan – Fireworks 5K: benefitting the Richmond American Legion Post 65

Paula Wilson & Amanda Nocton – Heartbreak Hill 5K: benefitting Hagerstown High School Athletics

Brad Wilson–Great Pumpkin 5K: benefitting Main Street Richmond.

Sean Andreas– Fall Foliage 5K/10K: benefitting Cope Environmental Center. Claudia Edwards will be taking over this role in 2025.

Mike Day - Pat Bowers Turkey Chase 7K: benefitting the Centerville High School Athletic Dept.

Kristi Cruse-Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K: benefitting the Richmond Parks Dept.

Additionally, I want to recognize the other members of the Wayne County Challenge committee.

Keith Morey is an at large member of the group and part of the timing team and Ashley Stephen who is our lead Timer. Ashley will also be taking over, for the second time, as Chair of the WCC, from Sean who is leaving the Committee. Please join us in thanking him for his service in both directing the Cope race and leading this group.

Finally, I would like to thank our series sponsor Hills Pet Nutrition. We are incredibly grateful for their support of the WCC and our mission to help people become more active through our events and appreciate having them on board in 2025.

Now let us move to on the awards. The mission of the Wayne County Challenge is to promote community health through amateur distance running. Our scoring system is designed to encourage and reward the participation of all types and ages of runners and recognizes both participation and competitive achievement. The 34 overall and age group winners and 49 recipients of the “Elite 8” award for completion of each event are examples of this mission.

Winners, please come up when your name is called, we will start with the overall awards first.

The third place overall female is Kathy Girten. This is Kathy's first WCC award after finishing second, second and third in her age group the last three years. In 2024 she ran all eight races, for the second time, and finished first in each one. She is the only person, male or female, to accomplish that feat in 2024. Congratulations to first time winner and third place overall female Kathy Girten.

The second place overall female is Darcy Talbot. In 2023 Darcy won her first WCC award as she took the top spot in the 30-34 age group running all eight races, finishing no worse than fourth in her division. In 2024 she once again did all eight races and had two age group wins and finished third overall at the Great Pumpkin 5K and second overall at the Fall Foliage 5K. Congratulations to two time winner and second place overall female Darcy Talbot.

The overall female champion is Amanda Nocton.

Amanda has been involved with the WCC for many years as co-Race director of the Hagerstown Heartbreak Hill 5K. In 2023 she won her first award after running all eight races and taking three overall race wins on the way to being named overall female champion of the season. In 2024 she once again ran all eight events, including the one she directs, finishing second overall at the season opening Girls Inc. 5K, third overall at the Fireworks 5K and winning five of the last six races, including the last four straight. Congratulations to repeat winner and two time defending overall female champion Amanda Nocton.

The third place overall male finisher is Zeke Klein.

Zeke began running WCC races in 2023 when he competed in six finishing in the top three of his age group in each, including a division win at the Flying Eagle 5K, en route to a third place finish in the group. In 2024 he ran all eight, taking the top spot in his age group at all but the Fall Foliage 5K where he finished third overall. Congratulations to first time winner and third place overall male Zeke Klein.

The second place overall male finisher is John Wesler. John won his first WCC award in 2017 when he took the 30-34 age group. He returned in 2022 finishing as the second place overall male. In 2024 he took that spot again after running in seven of the eight races and volunteering at the remaining one. He had three age group wins and finished third place overall three times. Congratulations to two time winner and second place overall male John Wesler.

The 2024 overall male winner is Scott Meinardi. Scott is no stranger to winning WCC awards as he has six age group wins, a second place overall male title and now his second overall male crown. In 2024 Scott ran seven races and volunteered at the eighth. He won his age group at the first three events then finished third overall twice and second overall twice. Congratulations to nine time winner and two time overall male champion Scott Meinardi.

Now we will move on to the age group winners. There are several categories where there was no winner because no one completed at least five races, a requirement to win an age group award.

The winner of the female nine and under age group is Isabella Klein. This was Isabella's first season competing in WCC events and she completed five races. She finished third in her division twice, second once and had age group wins at the Great Pumpkin 5K and Turkey Chase 7K. Congratulations to first time age group winner Isabella Klein.

The winner of the male nine and under age group is Lucas Turner. Lucas began his WCC career in 2022 running the Frostbite 5K, at the age of four. In 2023 he ran five races finishing third in his age group. In 2024 he ran all eight finishing in the top five of his division in each one, including two wins at the Heartbreak Hill 5K and Great Pumpkin 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Lucas Turner.

There was no winner of the female 10-12 age group.

The winner of the male 10-12 age group is Logan Turner. Logan won the nine and under group last year when he ran all eight races. In 2024 he once again did all eight races and had a high finish of third in his division at the Fall Foliage 5K. Logan has now taken age group wins in two different divisions, by the age of ten. Congratulations to two time winner Logan Turner.

The winner of the female 13-15 age group is Ryleigh Roberts. Ryleigh ran one WCC race in 2023 and came back to compete in five in 2024. She finished in the top three in each one, including an age group win at the Great Pumpkin 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Ryleigh Roberts.

The winner of the male 13-15 age group is Hunter Biava. Hunter started running WCC races in 2021 and finished second in the age group in 2023 after running seven races. In 2024 he once again ran seven of the eight races finishing in the top four of the division each time, including age group wins at the Girls Inc. 5K, Fireworks 5K and Heartbreak Hill 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Hunter Biava.

There was no winner of the female 16-18 age group.

The winner of the male 16-18 age group is Gideon Morford. Gideon ran five races in 2024 finishing in the top three in the division twice, including an age group win at the Great Pumpkin 5K. Congratulations to first time age group winner Gideon Morford.

There were no winners of the female or male 19-24 groups.

The winner of the female 25-29 age group is Paige Gray. In 2023 Paige ran all eight races and finished second in the age group twice and won the other six events on her way to her first age group title. In 2024 she repeated that feat by again completing all eight events finishing in the top three each time, including four age group wins. Congratulations to two time age group winner Paige Gray.

The winner of the male 25-29 age group is James Bottoms. James ran all eight races in 2024 finishing in the top spot in all but the Fall Foliage where he ran the 10K finishing fourth overall. Congratulations to first time winner James Bottoms.

The winner of the female 30-34 age group is Mariah Wright. This is Mariah's seventh age group title spanning three different groups. In 2024 she ran all eight races finishing in the top five in her division at each, including a win at the Great Pumpkin 5K. Congratulations to seven time age group champion Mariah Wright.

The winner of the male 30-34 age group Dylan Halcomb. Dylan began his WCC career in 2022 when he ran six of the eight races and was named Most Improved Runner. In 2023 he ran all eight races, finishing first or second in his age group in each race and ended up second in the division for the year. In 2024 he ran all eight again. He had one second place finish in the group and six division wins. In the remaining race he was the overall winner of the Fall Foliage 10K.

He earned enough points to finish as the fifth place overall male. Congratulations to two time winner and first time age group champion Dylan Halcomb.

The winner of the female 35-39 age group is Miranda Moore. Miranda ran her first WCC race in 2023 when she completed the Run with the Wolves 5K. In 2024 she ran all eight races, finishing in the top three of her division five times, including a win at the Run with the Wolves 5K. She also finished as second overall female at the Great Pumpkin 5K. Congratulations to first time age group champion Miranda Moore.

The winner of the male 35-39 age group is Matthew Beaty. In 2023 Matthew ran all eight races, had two overall race wins and was named the top overall male for the season. In 2024 he came back and once again did all eight races, taking four age group wins and a second place overall male spot at the Fall Foliage 5K. He earned enough points to finish as the fourth place overall male. Congratulations to first time age group winner and two time champion Matthew Beaty.

The winner of the female 40-44 age group is Britni Gettinger. Britini participated in all eight races for the eleventh straight year and is claiming her eleventh WCC award. In 2024 she had five age group wins and was third overall female at the Fall Foliage 5K. She earned enough points to finish as the fourth overall female. Britni now has five age group titles, to go along with three third place overall finishes, two second place overall titles and the 2021 overall female title. Congratulations to eleven time winner and five time age group champion Britni Gettinger.

The winner of the 40-44 male age group is Andy Shepherd. Andy has a number of top age group finishes in his career, including two wins in the 30-34 division and now his second in the 40-44 group. In 2024 he ran seven races, finishing in the top three five times including division wins at the Great Pumpkin 5K, Fall Foliage 5K and Turkey Chase 7K. This was the closest men's race being decided by only eighteen points. Congratulations to four time age group winner, Andy Shepherd.

The winner of the female 45-49 age group is Amy Russell. Amy began competing in WCC races in 2022 and did all eight in 2023. She did all eight again in 2024 finishing in the top four in each, including a win at the Heartbreak Hill 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Amy Russell.

The winner of the male 45-49 age group is Dave Snow. In 2024 Dave participated in all eight races, for the fourteenth straight season. He finished in the top five in each of the seven races he ran, including wins at the Run with the Wolves 5K and Heartbreak Hill 5K. He volunteered at the eighth event. Congratulations to ten time age group champion Dave Snow.

The winner of the female 50-54 age group is Polly Puckett. Polly began running WCC races in 2022 when she did six, then came back to do all eight in 2023 finishing second in her age group. In 2024 she once again did all eight finishing in the top three six times, including a division win at the Fireworks 5K. Congratulations to first time age group champion Polly Puckett.

The winner of the male 50-54 age group is Jim Puckett. In 2024 Jim did all eight races for the second straight year and finished in the top four in the division three times. Congratulations to first time age group winner Jim Puckett.

The winner of the female 55-59 age group is Renee Crist Lefter. Renee has been knocking on the door of an age group award for several years, finishing third in the division the last three seasons. In 2024 she finally took the top spot by running seven races finishing in the top four at each, including a division win at the Fireworks 5K. This was the closest women's category, being decided by only five points. Congratulations to first time winner Renee Crist Lefter.

The winner of the male 55-59 age group is Brian Fisher. This is Brian's second division title after winning the 50-54 group in 2022. In 2024 he ran all eight races finishing on the podium in each, including five age group wins. Congratulations to two time age group champion Brian Fisher.

The winner of the female 60-64 age group is Judy Pierce. This is Judy's third age group title to go along with a third place overall female award. She was also the 2023 Gene Black Spirit of the WCC award winner. In 2024 she ran all eight races, a feat she has accomplished before, finishing second three times, and taking the top spot in the division the other five. She earned enough points to finish as the fifth place overall female. While we have her up here it also seems like a good time to recognize Judy for an unofficial award as having the longest consecutive race streak. Judy has completed every event for eighteen straight seasons, a total of 143 races. Congratulations to three time age group champion Judy Pierce.

The winner of the male 60-64 age group is Rod Waltz. Rod won his first age group title in 2023 after coming close many times. He repeated the feat in 2024 by participating in all eight races and taking six age group wins. Congratulations to repeat and two time age group winner Rod Waltz.

The winner of the female 65-69 award is Linda Wellman. Linda ran her first WCC race in 2021 by completing the Turkey Chase 7K. In 2024 she ran seven races finishing second in the division at each. Congratulations to first time age group champion Linda Wellman.

The winner of the male 65-69 age group is Ed Wellman. Ed began running WCC races in 2021 and was a perfect six for six in division wins. In 2024 he ran all eight races finishing second in the group four times and winning the other four. Congratulations to first time age group winner Ed Wellman.

The winner of the female 70-74 age group is Geri Schick. This marks the seventh straight year Geri has run all eight races and her sixth straight age group title. She finished second in the division six times and took the top spot at the Heartbreak Hill 5K and Frostbite 5K. Congratulations to six time defending age group champion Geri Schick.

The winner of the male 70-74 age group is Gary Girten. This is Gary's fourth straight age group title as he ran all eight races for the second time. In 2024 he had one third place finish in the division, six second place finishes and took the top spot at the Heartbreak Hill 5K. Congratulations to four time age group winner Gary Girten.

The winner of the female 75-79 age group is Ellen Johnson. This is Ellen's seventh age group title. In 2024 she ran six races and finished first in the division at all six. Congratulations to seven time age group winner Ellen Johnson.

The winner of the male 75-79 age group is Steven Stoller. 2024 was Steven's first season participating in WCC races and he started off with a bang. He ran six races and finished first in the division at every one. Congratulations to first time age group champion Steven Stoller.

There were no winners in the female or male 80 and over group.

Let us congratulate all our age group and overall winners one more time.

Our next award goes to the most improved runner. This honor goes to the individual who shows the highest degree of race improvement over the course of the season.

The 2024 most improved runner began their WCC career by running the Run with the Wolves 5K in 2022. In 2023 they ran seven races and finished third in their age group. In 2024 they ran all eight races and had a division win at the Fall Foliage 5K and finished second in the division for the season. They also improved their time from the season opening Girls Inc. 5K to the Frostbite 5K by over five minutes. **Congratulations to the 2024 Most Improved runner Daniel Terhaar.**

We have just given out 35 awards to the overall and age group winners, along with the most improved runner from the 2024 season. We commend and congratulate each of these individuals for their achievements and appreciate their support of the WCC and our member organizations.

Now we will give out our final honor of the day, the Gene Black Spirit of the Wayne County Challenge Award. This honor is intended to recognize someone who embodies the mission of the WCC which is “to promote community and national health through amateur distance running...and to encourage and reward the participation of all types and ages of runners.” It is named after a long time participant in our events that had a tremendous impact on the series, both as a competitor and someone who embodied what the WCC is all about. This year’s winner has contributed to the Wayne County Challenge in a variety of ways since our very beginning, both as an athlete and volunteer.

This year's honoree is no stranger to the stage as they have won multiple age group titles, in fact more than anyone else, man or woman. They have not been beaten in their division in over twelve years. But those accomplishments as an athlete are overshadowed by their contributions as a volunteer, Race Director, Officer and founding member of the WCC.

This year's winner directed multiple races throughout the years while also serving on the WCC committee as Treasurer. One of the races they directed was recently renamed in their honor as a reflection of their impact on the event. Unfortunately due to an injury midway through the 2024 season they were unable to complete the second half of the season after winning their age group in the three earlier races they participated in. In true fashion they volunteered at one of the remaining races, being unable to run the race named after them. It is our honor to present the 2024 Gene Black Spirt of the Wayne County Challenge award to Pat Bowers.

We will now present certificates and awards to the runners who completed all 8 races this season. We appreciate the dedication and support these individuals have shown to the WCC and the organizations that put on and benefit from each race. Congratulations to each of you. Please come forward when your name is called to receive your awards and please remain so we can take a group photograph.

Thank you again for attending today's event and for your support of the Wayne County Challenge and our member organizations. We look forward to our 22nd year and the season opening Girls Inc. 5K, Saturday May 10. Remember registration for the Carpe Viam programs will be open on the WCC website February 1.