

Rhea Snyder, 80, ranks as No. 1 racewalker in the world

Rhea Snyder is a walker. She's not your typical senior citizen who takes a spin around the



SLIDELL TOWN TALK

Suzie Hunt

block or hits the mall for a few laps each week. Rhea is a member of a rare breed known as race walkers, and at

the young age of 80 years old, she has definitely hit her stride.

Involved in the Rock 'n' Roll Competitor Grand Prix, Rhea Snyder is ranked No. 1 in the world for 2014 half marathons in her age group, 80 to 99 years.

The Grand Prix hosts more than 25 marathons/half marathons across the globe, and the standings are calculated on a point system based on the competitors' times in the each



Slidell Resident Rhea Snyder, second from left, is ranked No. 1 in the world for 2014 half marathons in her age group. Participating with her in the San Antonio Rock 'n' Roll Marathon/Half Marathon were several members of her family, including, from left, grandson John Jennings, daughter Davina and son-in-law Bryan Lock, granddaughter Katie Lopez, and son Martin and daughter-in-law Chandra Snyder.

completed race. In 2014, Snyder competed in Grand Prix events in Virginia Beach, San Antonio and in the Mardi Gras Rock

'n' Roll Half Marathon in New Orleans, placing first in her age

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group in each race.

Starting at the age of 56, Snyder took up race walking for the same reason a lot of people take up exercise.

"My dress sizes had started to go up, and I told myself that was not happening," said Snyder. "I enjoyed walking and wanted to be faster, so I found a race walking teacher and just kept going."

Over the years, she has completed more than 15 half marathons and one full marathon. Since most of the races are not judged as true race walking competitions, she uses a combination of the strict walking technique and jogging to finish the 13.1 mile events.

"I've done one marathon, and it just takes too long," she said of the 26-plus mile race she finished in about six and a half hours when she was 71 years old.

I have to say I tried a race walking lesson from Rhea about a year ago, and it's not a walk in the park, pun intended. By definition, race walking is the sport of rapid, continuous-foot-contact walking, requiring that the trailing foot not be lifted until the other meets the ground and the knee locks momentarily, and executed in an upright, rhythmic stride. Just try walking across the kitchen floor, fast, with one foot always touching the ground. It's not easy and Snyder uses

the technique to complete a half marathon, on average, in the three hours, ten minutes.

The retired registered nurse walks with her training partner, Barbara Pennington, three days a week and works out with weights and a trainer another three days a week to keep in shape and to prepare for her race schedule.

"All of this helps me to stay healthy," she said. Her exercise regimen works in conjunction with her volunteer work with the Dos Amigos dental/medical mission and at Aldersgate United Methodist Church.

It has also become a family affair with children and grandchildren meeting Snyder at different race events across the country. Son Martin Snyder and his wife Chandra, Rhea's daughter Davina Lock and her husband Bryan, her granddaughter Katie Lopez and grandson John Jennings all participated in various races at the San Antonio Rock 'n' Roll event last month.

"Martin ran the marathon and finished a few minutes behind my time for the half marathon. Chandra and John ran the half marathon relay race," she said.

Although they live across the country, many of her family members seem to share Snyder's passion for long distance races. When Davina showed an interest in the sport, her brother Martin, a long distance runner since his time at Slidell High School, became her coach and

supporter via long distance. It was also Martin who let Snyder know about her international standing.

"I don't really keep track of how I finish compared to other people. He's the one who saw my name in the standings and let me know," she remarked.

"I just go out and do my best. Martin always says that how you finish doesn't matter and that your (participant) medal doesn't look any different than the person who finished first," said Snyder.

She is a big proponent of exercise and believes anyone can start at any age. "You don't have to be young to start walking, running or bicycling. The important thing is to start slow, keep your mileage low and don't get discouraged," said Snyder. She also participates in local lower mileage walking/running events like the recent Tammany 10K fundraising race.

The New Year finds Snyder gearing up to compete again in the Mardi Gras Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon in the Big Easy at the end of the month. Her granddaughter, Chelsea Snyder, will be joining her from Texas for the event.

It sounds like she's got another recruit for the family team. Good luck to you both!

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