

GOOD TIMES ON THE BAYOU

by John Farrow

*Down in Louisiana where the black trees grow
live a voodoo lady named Marie Laveaux.*¹

Appropriately enough, the 2005 annual convention of the Road Runners Club of America began in New Orleans on Friday the 13th with a run through a cemetery. And as the rising sun began to poke through the wisps of early-morning fog and light up the listing, moss-shrouded above-ground tombs, you couldn't help but look over your shoulder every now and then whether you believed in voodoo or not.

The New Orleans Track Club hosted the affair, and from an opening ceremony led by Rex from Mardi Gras to the illicit charms of Bourbon Street, it was one to remember.

Why is New Orleans called the Big Easy? As state reps gathered on the deck of the paddle-wheel steamboat *Natchez* for a leisurely cruise down the Mississippi River while lunching on fried chicken and gumbo, the answer became obvious. It was hard not to just lean back with a cold drink and simply watch the banks of the river slip slowly past.

True to form, if this is an RRCA convention, Bart Yasso of *Runner's World* must not be far away. But no matter how many times you might have seen his slides of running at the far ends of the earth ("You smell the penguins long before you see them," at the Antarctica Marathon), to mule-running in Colorado ("If your partner is an ass, don't be surprised if he sometimes acts like one"), to encountering rhinos on the trail in Sri Lanka ("This looks like the turn-around point to me"), to a clothing-optional race in Washington State ("Do you show your medal to your mother?"), his dead-pan delivery is always entertaining.

And every convention is chock-full of informative seminars, as well. The first day featured helpful advice on setting up training groups, media relations and medical issues for

race directors, establishing websites and publishing club newsletters.

Then it was time out for a run along the river-walk followed by red beans, rice and beer at a Cajun *fais do do* while Jeff Darman and Phil Stewart hawked their wares at the *Running Times* auction. But soon runners began drifting off to stroll through the French Quarter, perhaps stop in at the Court of the Two Sisters or shop in Pirate's Alley, take in the music at the House of Blues, later for coffee with chicory and beignets at Café du Monde or a nightcap at Pat O'Brien's.

Saturday dawned early, too early for some, but they nevertheless made it to the Bonne Carré Spillway fun run, the site of one of the largest "trail" runs in the country. But you don't want to be caught there during a hurricane as this is where (hopefully) any storm surge from Lake Pontchartrain is funneled down towards the Gulf of Mexico, a vital precaution for a city located entirely below sea level.

More seminars were on tap for Saturday, these dealing with insurance and safety, race production, women's running programs and running a marathon in all 50 states and seven continents. But there was work to do, too,

The annual business meeting convened Saturday afternoon to consider amending the bylaws to allow membership of for-profits clubs, tighten the requirements for proxies and shrink the size of the board of directors. But unlike several previous business meetings that had witnessed acrimonious exchanges between members skeptical of motives, this session witnessed an earnest give and take before the amendments were approved.

In similar fashion, the members elected a slate of five directors for two-years terms. This group included Lisa Paige of Littleton, Colorado as Western Director, Chuck George of New Orleans as Southern Director, and David Epstein of Anchorage, Bob Holmes of

Atlanta and ARR's John Farrow as Directors at-Large.

The merger of the RRCA and the AARC became final in January of this year and Past RRCA and AARC President Jeff Darman turned over to RRCA a check for \$15,000 as the balance of funds remaining from the former AARC. Some of the money was earmarked for a redesign of the RRCA web page, financial support of the State Rep program and continued Board training. The membership also heard out-going Secretary-Treasurer Todd Neville report on the recent audit of the finances of the RRCA and that the financial health of the organization had returned to a positive level.

Director Brent Ayer discussed the work of the Communications Committee, whose principal task is the resurrection of a quarterly hard-copy publication by this Fall and Director Lisa Paige summarized the Board's efforts to locate a new executive director to replace out-going ED Becky Lambros as it sifted through the more than 50 applications received. And then it was time for the annual Awards Banquet to recognize those who have contributed to the RRCA and the running community over the past year.

Among those recognized were Steve Shepard of the Houston Striders as the Volunteer of the Year (ARR's Patrice Leddy was one of seven finalists), Montana State Rep John Devitt as State Rep of the Year (four in a row for the Western Region) and Sue Brown of the Calumet Region Striders as the Outstanding Club President. Also, Keith Brantly and Steve Spence were installed as the newest members of the RRCA Hall of Fame. Then the gathering heard from keynote speaker Lorraine Moeller, a former winner of the Boston Marathon and four-time Olympic marathoner as she told of the development of her running career from a small-town girl in Canada whose dreams of an Olympic glory were finally realized with a bronze medal in the 1992 games in Barcelona.

The convention closed with the Gospel and Blues 5K through the streets of the Garden

District near Emeril's Restaurant and the gothic-styled home where Anne Rice wrote "Interview With the Vampire." Post-race festivities at the Praline Connection Bar featured beer, gumbo and the music of Ronald Jones and the New Orleans All Stars.

Before heading to the airport, I had a final cup of coffee at Café du Monde and took a walk past the mimes in Jackson Square and through the French Market. Need some *gris-gris*? It's there.

*She got a black cat tooth and a mojo bone
anyone don't leave her alone
she go Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee
another man done gone.*¹

¹ Marie Lavaux, Dr. Hook.