

Fitness guru is walking tall

BY DANIEL BEEKMAN

WHEN IT comes to fitness, Lon Wilson not only talks the talk. He walks the walk.

Wilson stepped lightly down the icy track at Macombs Dam Park in the shadow of Yankee Stadium one frigid day last week.

He wore high-tech workout gear and a big smile. He spoke in a fast Bronx staccato, racing from one sentence to another without taking a breath. A cap hid Wilson's gray flattop.

At 63 years old, the Bronx's walking guru and outspoken fitness freak covers more than 6 miles a day by foot, and helps people of all ages stay fit.

"We can't all run, but we can all walk," said Wilson, a retired Xerox engineer.

Next Friday, Wilson will take his fleet feet to Madison Square Garden for the 104th Annual Millrose Games, the city's top track and field event.

But he's not competing; he's judging the mile walk.

"The best race walkers in the world will be there," he said. "They walk a mile in less than six minutes."

While growing up near the Stadium, the Samuel Gompers High School grad preferred Ring-o-levio, baseball and running marathons.

"I was always active," said Wilson. "I would run to the schoolyard to play and drink up all the Kool-Aid."

After high school, Wilson traded running for disco dancing at Manhattan clubs such as the Electric Circus and the Tunnel.

He stumbled on race walking by chance, in Central Park in 1979, when he took his mother to a walking class and met coach Jake Jacobson.

As a runner, Wilson was often injured. Jacobson suggested

race walking because there would be less wear and tear on the body.

Wilson was hooked.

"Running felt like a boxing match," he said. "I was getting beat up. But race walking felt like dancing, like poetry in motion."

Wilson admits race walking is a funny-looking sport. Competitors are required to keep one foot on the ground at all times. They pump their arms and swivel their hips. Many people poke fun at Wilson's sashay.

"You hear guys yell out the window," he said. "I just yell back and pick up the pace."

After traveling the world as a champion race walker, Wilson helped coach three New York race walkers to the 1984 Olympic Games and co-founded the New York Walkers Club.

Now he coaches the Gompers track team and leads fitness classes at Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council.

Wilson also volunteers for the Parks Department at Macombs Dam Park. He keeps an eye on troublemakers and hands out hula hoops.

"My parents never had much money, but Parks always had free programs for us," he said. "That's why I give back."

Wilson calls walking the answer to the Bronx's high rates of diabetes, cancer and asthma.

"Hippocrates said 'Walking is man's best medicine,'" said Wilson. "It keeps you fit and slows down the aging process."

WILSON'S WALKING TIPS

- Walk tall and keep your head high.
- Take short steps.
- Focus on technique, not speed.
- Come down on your heels and push off your toes.
- Breathe deeply and have fun.



Lon Wilson, 63, keeps a swift pace as he race walks near Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Wilson walks up to 6 miles a day. Photo by Norman Lono

More Local News

Ballets at Lehman

Lehman Center for the Performing Arts continues its 30th season of headliners with a number of dance legends, including the Paul Taylor Dance Company and Savion Glover and Company.

The State Ballet Theatre of Russia will present "Swan Lake" and the Russian National Ballet Theatre will perform "Romeo and Juliet." Visit www.lehmancenter.org for information, or call the box office at (718) 960-8833.

Reimburse bills

City officials remind low-income homeowners and renters they may be eligible to have their energy bills, as well as the cost of heating equipment and repairs, reimbursed through the Home Energy Assistance Program. For more information, call 311, or call the program's hotline at (800) 692-0557.

Pet evictions advice

Bronx County Housing Court will be hosting a free Community Outreach seminar including a question-and-answer session called Pet Evictions. It will provide information about pet laws in NYC and how to defend yourself in court against a pet eviction.

The seminar will be held today from 1-2 p.m. at the court at 1118 Grand Concourse, room 320.

CORRECTION

A story last week about the Archdiocese of New York closing six Catholic schools in the Bronx incorrectly stated that enrollment for next year at St. Barnabas School in Woodlawn is full. The school is still accepting students for next year. Bronx Boro News regrets the error.

Critics want tennis club to change membership system

Continued from page 1

Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-East Harlem) called the perks "ridiculous."

"What benefits are there for the average Joe off the street?" she said.

Croft said Parks could force Sportime to change its membership system or even revoke the club's contract.

Boden defended the facility, noting that from May 1 to Columbus Day, the club reserves 10 outdoor courts for Parks permit holders, who pay \$100 per year.

It offers free lessons to youngsters through RISF, including students from five East Harlem public schools, and program scholarships.

Sportime pays 10% of its revenue to the RISF in fees — about \$750,000 last year, cash Boden said is used to improve the park.

The old Randalls Island tennis facility had only 11 courts and generated just \$70,000 in annual fees.

Critics say the RISF fees should go to the city's general fund, as most concession fees do.



Tennis legend John McEnroe offers instruction at Sportime. Photo by Craig Warga

"Rather than provide a public service, they are generating revenue from the rich on the backs of the poor," said Harry Bubbins, of Friends of Brook Park, a South Bronx advocacy group.

Matthew Washington, chairman of East Harlem's Community Board 11, which includes Randalls Island, compared the facility to Chelsea Piers.

"We want the public to have access and need ways to pay for our parks," he said. "Finding the right balance can be challenging."

Mark McIntyre, president of United States Tennis Association eastern region metro division, called it "a net positive for the tennis playing public."

"The courts that were there before were pretty beat up . . . now there are more courts and the courts are much nicer."

Sportime rents court time to Manhattan private schools. The club's shuttle bus stops only on the upper East Side.

In 2006, private schools offered funding for new ball fields on Randalls Island in exchange for exclusive field time, and advocates blocked the deal arguing Parks bypassed the city's public review process.

Boden said the review was unnecessary for Sportime because there already were tennis courts on Randalls Island.

But Croft said those courts were located elsewhere and noted that the process is required for buildings over 15,000 square feet, such as the tennis club.

BRONX BORO NEWS OFFICES

News Desk (718) 822-1174
News Fax (718) 822-1562

Email your news and pictures to BronxBoroNews@nydailynews.com

Sports Fax (212) 210-1678

Email your sports information to BoroSports@nydailynews.com

The name and logo of Bronx Boro News is a trademark of Daily News, L.P., and may not be used or copied in any manner without the express prior written consent of Daily News, L.P. All submissions become the property of the Bronx Boro News and may be used by Bronx Boro News in any form or medium. Bronx Boro News is not responsible for the return of unsolicited submissions.

© 2010 Daily News L.P.

The Bronx Boro News is published by the Daily News L.P., 450 W. 33rd St., New York, N.Y. 10001.

Bronx Boro News Offices:
P.O. Box 3316, New York, N.Y. 10116

Advertising (212) 210-2166
Joseph Anzalone - janzalone@nydailynews.com

Home Delivery (800) 692-NEWS