

# THE LONG RUN

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## Jack Quinn's: The Biggest Running Success in Colorado

BY BRUCE BARRON

Drop by Jack Quinn's Irish Pub and Restaurant, on South Tejon Street in Colorado Springs, a little after 5:00 p.m. on any Tuesday and you'll see an unusual sight: large numbers of people in running clothes waiting for their opportunity to go upstairs.

No, they're not looking for discount beers—at least not right away. At 5:15, the runners proceed to Jack Quinn's cozy second floor to sign in and then head out on a five-kilometer route along the Pikes Peak Greenway, north to Uintah Street, and back to the pub.

On a typical Tuesday, 300 to 400 people complete the route, and 100 or more return to Jack Quinn's second floor to socialize, attracted by a variety of beers at special prices along with \$1 tacos and \$2 quesadillas.

Welcome to Jack Quinn's Running Club, now in its 19th year. With over 42,000 unique participants, it is almost certainly the most wildly successful combination of running and socializing in Colorado history.

### An import from the Florida Panhandle

Ryan Shininger had a rather modest vision. He had participated in a running group based at McGuire's Irish Pub in Pensacola, Florida before moving to Colorado Springs in 2006 and wanted to create something similar in his new city.

"I checked out different running groups here," Shininger recalled, "but they mostly met at the running stores. Socializing was limited to hanging out together for 10 minutes after the run and then going home."

While celebrating his 25th birthday with friends at Jack Quinn's, Shininger mentioned his idea of starting a more socially oriented running club. One of his friends introduced him to pub owner Bill Sasz, who was immediately receptive. "He told me to bring the people, and they would put out free food and give beer discounts," Shininger said.



Earning a Jack Quinn's shirt



Jack Quinn's group shot!

All photos courtesy of Jack Quinn's and Tim Bergsten

lowest attendance we ever had," Shininger smiled. The next week they were over 100 and never looked back.

Kerry Page, one of Shininger's first recruits, was working at Boulder Running Company (now Fleet Feet) and occasionally participated in another local running group. "Back then, runners didn't drink a lot of beer or stay up past 8:00," Page joked. "I was thinking he wouldn't get more than 10 people." But after seeing the smashing success on opening night, Page convinced Boulder Running Company's owners to sponsor T-shirts for the new club.

The club founders were quickly overwhelmed with work as they collected sign-in sheets, tracked each participant's number of runs, awarded T-shirts for completing five runs, and posted photos online. One key early improvement came when the club shifted to electronic sign-in, making data management much easier.

As the club exploded to hundreds of weekly participants—the all-time high was 1,783 for their sixth birthday celebration on June 5, 2012—its success spilled over into downtown, since not everyone could fit into Jack Quinn's. Bars and restaurants up and down Tejon Street shared the influx of new business.

"Colorado Springs had a void for this kind of social activity," said Shininger, who kept coming back to Jack Quinn's on Tuesdays for a year after relocating to Boulder and who subsequently formed similar groups in Boulder and Denver. "Also, running groups in general can be a little intimidating for newbies or for people who would rather walk than run. Starting and finishing at a bar makes it less so."

Quickly, Jack Quinn's Running Club got a reputation as a place to make connections. "The chance to earn a shirt got people coming back," Page explained, "and then they would make social connections. It became the place to go if you were new in town, or single and wanted to meet people, or had a spouse deployed.

Shininger and his friends distributed fliers through the pub, at running stores, and at Colorado Springs's vibrant young professionals group, announcing the first meeting in June 2006. They hoped for 20 participants and got 70.

"And that was the





Fun on the Jack Quinn's run!

We were called the best place in town to find a date.”

**Fun for all ages**

Surprisingly, the club also became known as family-friendly, partly because having all activity on the second floor separated it from the traditional pub atmosphere.

“We had a lot of military spouses bringing their kids,” Page

said. “They could run around and burn off energy or gather at one table while the parent could talk with other adults.”

Current President Brian Maguire remembers his first Jack Quinn's run, on April 8, 2008. He has rarely missed a Tuesday since then. In April, he became the first Quinnian to log 800 runs.

“We have such an eclectic group of people coming in,” Maguire said. “Young people, families with children, and more sedentary types. What makes it enjoyable is that there are no restrictions, requirements, or time goals.”

Actually, there was a reward for speed at one point. In early years, Jack Quinn's provided free salad and spaghetti, which usually ran out well before the evening ended. “The people who got back fastest after the 5:15 check-in got the food,” Maguire stated.

Maguire leads a seven-member executive committee that handles the club's main management functions, including operations, marketing, finance, sponsorships, and communication. Chief Information Officer Bill Kivela produces an expansive e-newsletter every weekend, packed with photos of happy runners and people reaching various milestones starting at 10 to 800 runs.

Along with the over 43,000 people who have completed at least one run, the biggest beneficiary is the pub itself. Meredith Klube, who became a Jack Quinn's manager in 2006 and an investor in 2014, enjoys seeing the impact even though she's too busy working to be a runner.

“They treat me as an honorary member,” Klube quipped. “I've done enough running around the pub that I should get credit.”

Klube said that when she tells people where she works, they almost always make a reference to the running club.

In return, Jack Quinn's is so loyal to the running club that when the pub gets a request to host a special event on Tuesday, it asks for “permission” to use its own space, said Michael Yowell, past president and current VP of marketing. On those occasions, the club goes on a “field trip,” starting the run at Fleet Feet or longtime sponsor Bristol Brewing.

Bar manager Cooper Davidson is another big fan. He says he hasn't missed a Tuesday at Jack Quinn's in the last five years, except when on vacation. Davidson offers a selection likely to satisfy any runner's palate, with about 10 beer choices ranging from light to dark, hoppy to malty. Five of them are Bristol Brewing taps, including a signature red ale known as “Quinn's Red.”

“Some runners were ready to kill me when our discount beers went from \$3 to \$3.50 a glass,” Davidson laughed. But that's still a good deal, since the regular happy-hour price is \$4.50.

Jack Quinn's also provides breakfast burritos and beer for the awards ceremony following Pikes Peak Road Runners' Super Half Marathon and Game Day 5K each February.

The club made particularly heroic efforts to keep people running through the COVID-19 pandemic. “We transitioned immediately to virtual check-in,” Yowell explained. “When in-person activity resumed around early 2021, people were meeting in front of the pub and ordering takeout. We hooked up our computers to a cable and master controller, ran the cables out a second-story window and onto the patio, and checked runners in there, all while watching closely for bad weather that could have ruined the computers.”

Newcomers at the running club get warm welcomes from an ample collection of “green shirts,” the volunteers who manage check-in and answer questions. There's even a separate check-in computer on the first floor for runners with dogs. Fleet Feet offers a group run at 5:30, and various sponsors and friends make regular appearances, including a Pikes Peak Road Runners table once a month.

“People are always dropping by to ask if the running club is still going,” the appreciative Davidson said. “You won't find many Irish pubs with an 18-year running history.”

**Community Cup Standings as of July 8, 2024**

Place	Team	Division	Points
1	OCC	Stout	459
2	JAKs	Stout	379
3	Urban Animal	Stout	353
4	Red Leg	Stout	331
5	Black Forest	Lager	271
6	Goat Patch	IPA	269
T7	Fossil	Lager	267
T7	Metric	Lager	267
9	Bell Brothers	Lager	251
10	Trinity	Stout	241
11	Dueces Wild	Stout	236
12	Storybook	IPA	235
13	Cerberus	IPA	217
14	Wackadoo	Lager	203
15	Lost Friend	IPA	201
16	Roman Villa	IPA	187
17	NEAT Whiskey House	IPA	132
18	FH Beerworks	Lager	107



Urban Animal Community Cup team  
Photo courtesy of Community Cup