

LEE'S SUMMIT JOURNAL

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Community News



Jeff Kirchhoff The Journal
Rick Roeber of Lee's Summit, a marathon runner for more than 15 years, began challenging himself in a new way by training to run barefoot. He completed his first barefoot marathon, the Boston Marathon, in 2004.

Baring his soles

Lee's Summit marathon runner kicks off shoes for youth

By [Ann Scheer](#) The Journal Staff

When most people think of kicking off their shoes, the thought usually is followed with visions of reclining in a chair while sipping a cold drink.

But not for Rick Roeber of Lee's Summit. When he thinks about kicking off his shoes, chances are he has visions of running a marathon to challenge himself athletically and offering a little goodwill to a local elementary school.

It all started when Roeber, a marathon runner for more than 15 years, was searching various runners' Web sites and discussion boards one day in October 2003. He noticed an entry by a runner in another part of the country who offered insight into running barefoot.

"I thought, 'Wow. Barefoot — I love going barefoot. I can really relate to this guy,'" Roeber said. "I'd never thought about running barefoot."

In fact, Roeber was so intrigued by the idea he went out that day to take a shot at running without the comfort of shoes. He started out robustly, running about three miles on wood chips, and immediately felt the difference in how sore his feet were after ending up with blisters and bandages. But Roeber wasn't discouraged. He knew it



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would take some getting used to, but it offered a more unique type of challenge than most other sports and he was ready for it. Roeber was out running barefoot again just three days later.

“I just started incorporating it into my running,” Roeber said. “I was fascinated by barefoot running because barefoot running kind of forces proper technique.”

Roeber said running while wearing shoes forces a runner to step from the heel to the ball of the foot because shoes are built up so much in the heel. However, proper technique calls for running from the ball to the heel of the foot, he said.

And his new technique seems to be working. Since April 2004, when he began running solely shoeless, he’s logged more than 2,000 miles as a barefoot runner — including miles logged in his first barefoot marathon on April 14, 2004, the Boston Marathon, a 26-mile, 109-year-old test of will.

For many people, just the idea of running is enough to cause an anxiety attack — let alone blistering the bottom of one’s feet by running barefoot. But aside from it being an attention-grabber, Roeber has found another calling to continue with his barefoot endeavors, a project he has dubbed “Soles for Souls.”

He uses the uniqueness of running barefoot to raise money for Lee’s Summit Elementary School through sponsorships for running the Boston Marathon.

Last year, Roeber raised approximately \$700, donating all of it to LSE through the Lee’s Summit Educational Foundation. The funds help provide essential school supplies for students who wouldn’t otherwise get them because of financial limitations.

This year, Roeber has set a goal to raise \$1,000 for LSE through the Boston Marathon, and he’s already working to collect sponsors. So far he’s been pledged \$300 and he hopes to reach his goal before the race on April 18.

“(The Boston Marathon) is just kind of a special race in that it’s so well-known,” Roeber said.



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“I just felt — and I don’t want to get overly spiritual on this — but I just felt like the Lord laid this on my heart to do it once a year,” he said.

What makes Roeber’s efforts even more a labor of love is that his choosing LSE wasn’t some random selection of a charitable cause. He chose LSE because he understands through personal experience how disheartening it can be for a young child, excited for his first day of school, to show up with hand-me-down school supplies and be teased relentlessly for not being “wealthy” even though it’s out of the child’s control.

Roeber said he wants to do anything he can to give every student at LSE a chance to get their school careers off on the right foot, so to speak.

“I don’t think we can totally level the playing field,” Roeber said, “but I think if you can get kids everything they need, it can help them.”

In addition to his efforts through the Boston Marathon, Roeber participated last year in the Run for the Summit 5K run/walk sponsored by his church, Lee’s Summit United Methodist Church, which is across the street from LSE. The run raised additional funds for the school.

Roeber said the school has graciously accepted his offerings and he hopes to continue the tradition as long as he is able.

“It does take others in the community (besides teachers) to educate students,” Roeber said. “It does take a collective effort to watch over children.”

Roeber is already working to collect donations and pledges for this year’s Boston Marathon in April. To make a donation, visit Roeber’s Web site at www.barefootrunner.org.

For more information on this year’s LSUMC Run for the Summit 5K run/walk on Saturday, May 7, in downtown Lee’s Summit, call Carol Johnson at LSUMC at (816) 550-4455, or e-mail her at carol@emeraldprinting.com.

Beginning March 25, registration forms will be available at Lee’s Summit United



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Methodist Church, 114 S.E. Douglas St.,
and at various downtown merchants, or can
be downloaded from the church's Web site
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