

# Joe Lugiano epitomized the spirit of NCRC

By Jack Threadgill

More than anyone, Joe Lugiano represented the spirit of the North Carolina Roadrunners Club. Joe and his family were charter members of NCRC in 1979, and he became our first elected president in 1981. He remained active in the club, serving as club historian until 2017 and an at-large board member in 1994, mentoring many subsequent presidents, and participating in numerous club activities, as recently as the member rewards celebration in March.

Joe, who died in his sleep on Dec. 3, just short of his 82nd birthday, was also instrumental in the Umstead 100 Endurance Run, serving as assistant race director and race statistician from 1995 to 2020 and as a “very active” emeritus assistant race director since 2020, says Rhonda Hampton, co-race director. For those 30 years, Joe gave out buckles to virtually every runner who finished the race between midnight and 6 a.m. “His sage advice to runners before, during, and after races enabled countless numbers of runners to reach their goals and recover for their next race,” she says.

Rhonda says Joe also spent numerous volunteer hours in Umstead State Park, home of the Umstead 100 race, including restorations and repairs of historic cabins and dining halls in the park in 2012 and 2022 and collecting trash, cleaning trails, and helping the park’s maintenance crew.

Ben Dillon, NCRC president in 2002 and 2003 and a board member of the North Carolina Ultra Running Association, shares Joe’s love of working with his hands and joined him on many of the park projects. “He was like the Energizer bunny, just kept on going and going,” Ben says. He says Joe “was the true definition of a friend, and I will miss him greatly.”

Joe grew up in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and met his wife Hannah in middle school when they were 12. He went to work for IBM as a programmer at age 21 (with no college background), becoming a project manager with stops in Endicott, N.Y., Manassas, Va., and the Raleigh area before retiring at 53 to become a consultant. The Lugianos initially moved to the Raleigh area in 1978. The Lugianos have two sons and a daughter.

Joe started running to lose weight in 1979, and Hannah says he lost 50 pounds in four months. She says he began entering races after watching their daughter Kathryn participate in the Junior Striders track program. He ran seven marathons in one year to qualify for the Boston Marathon, she says.

The North Carolina Roadrunners Club was officially established on Nov. 10, 1979, according to Joe’s club history, written in 2017. Joe wrote the initial history on the club’s 10th anniversary (1989) and updated it on the 20th (1999) and 25th anniversaries before the 2017 version, which is available under the Resources tab of [ncroadrunners.org](http://ncroadrunners.org).

NCRC was initially founded by Tom Phillips of Hackney’s sporting goods store in North Hills Mall. The club’s first activity was a fun run in Umstead State Park. The first NCRC race was the North Carolina Roadrunners Club Invitational 5K on Feb. 24, 1980. In that active first year of NCRC, Joe was a member of the club’s initial eight-member coordinating council, appointed in May, and was responsible for the newsletter together with Rodney Johnson. Joe and Rodney were co-race directors of the Raleigh Marine Corps Reserve/NCRC Half Marathon on Oct. 11, 1980, and Joe and his wife Hannah coordinated the first annual Christmas covered dish supper that year. When NCRC held their first elections in 1980, they also formalized the club’s bylaws.

IBM transferred Joe to Manassas, Va., midway into 1981 after 3½ years in Raleigh. As NCRC vice president, Rodney Johnson became president. Hannah says Joe remained involved with NCRC during their 12 years in Virginia and also became involved in a Washington running club. The Lugianos returned to the Raleigh area in 1993.

Ben Dillon has known Joe since the early 1990s. Joe would host speed training sessions at the Carroll Middle School track. “I was still relatively new to ‘real’ running, so this was helpful to me,” Ben says. They both volunteered at NCRC events, with Joe teaching Ben about running history and motivating him to run his first marathon, Shamrock, in 1994 (Ben ran Shamrock, an NCRC favorite for many years, six times). Ben began volunteering, including pacing, at the Umstead 100 in 1996 or 1997.

“[Joe] and the other race officials were great motivators. He encouraged me to ‘bump it up,’” Ben says. Ben’s first ultra was 50 miles at the Umstead 100 in 1999. He “fell in love with endurance events,” became more involved with race planning, and ran the 100 in 2008 in 25:59.

Rhonda Hampton says Joe’s first ultra was the JFK 50 Mile race in Maryland in 1988, and he was planning to run the Umstead 100 in 2025. She says his ultra accomplishments include 13 finishes at the Vermont 100, 10 finishes at the JFK, 12 50-mile finishes and one 100-mile finish at the Umstead 100, and six finishes at A Race for the Ages (all after the age of 72). His wife Hannah says Joe developed timing programs for both the Vermont 100 and Umstead 100 races.

Chuck Petersen, a longtime friend of Joe’s who is an NCRC member, estimates Joe “logged in much more than 100,000 running miles on roads and trails,” totaled more than 1,000 miles at A Race for the Ages, and maintained about 30 hiking trails in Umstead, “an important responsibility” that he hopes someone in NCRC will assume.

Eric Johnson, NCRC president in 2004 and 2005 and a prominent leader in the Raleigh running community, says he learned a lot from Joe during the 2002 Raleigh marathon, the ice storm year.

“It’s the same info I’ve used to plan and coordinate hundreds of water stops since,” Eric said in a Facebook post. “Hopefully, others have learned his tips from volunteering with me and for me over the years.”