

## EVENT PROFILE

### Etzikom run is all about community

What's that old Corner Gas theme song line about the dog taking three days to run away from home?

When you're smack dab in the middle of the Canadian prairie, running room is never a problem. This they know in Etzikom, and they know how to make the most of the geographical advantage: the Etzikom Fun Run.

For 32 years, regardless of the early June weather, up to 100 runners, some from as far away as Holland and New Zealand, have lined up for the 10 a.m. start, sporting their event T-shirts depicting local historical significance.

The event was started in 1978 by Tom Lee, Wayne Street and Marvin Genno, local folks with penchants for fitness and running. Ahead of its time, the event focused on family physical activity, making it unique. Now, as society ages, children lead sedentary lives, and families spend less time together, the run has become essential in promoting physical and psychological health.

"The Etzikom Fun Run has been an excellent way for our family to keep in touch with community members we don't often see," says Lisa Jetter. "When I first moved to this community 16 years ago, it was a great way to meet my new neighbours. I've participated since my first year in the community, and for the last 10 years with my daughter. It's something we look forward to every year and I look forward to the day when my future grandchildren will participate with me."

That's quite likely: the race often draws up to three generations at once.

The Fun Run is one of the few family oriented, community-run events left in rural southern Alberta. With a few words of welcome from co-founder and race volunteer Tom Lee, children

under six start the event with a one-km bike race through town. The main event follows, with participants running, walking, biking and even pushing strollers out to Highway 885, past the award-winning Etzikom Windmill Museum to the halfway point, a water/first aid station run by local volunteers, and back to finish at the Etzikom Hall.

Here, the local playgroup hosts a fundraising luncheon, while prizes are handed out for the preschool race, the top two runners and bikers, and the youngest and oldest participants in the five-km race. Registered participants receive something from the prize table, all made possible by generous donations from local families, ranches, farms and businesses reaching to Lethbridge and Medicine Hat.

Participants have come from as close as the house next to the start line and as far afield as Holland and New Zealand. Many local residents invite out-of-town family and friends to participate. Truly in the spirit, the Sehn family of Foremost and beyond make it a "family fitness challenge" each year. The local school cross-country and track team is often entered.

Up to 25 volunteers collect prizes, register participants, mark the route, man water stations and first aid, time the racers, and provide a beef-on-a-bun lunch. All ages help maintain the grounds and park prior to the event, many of who participate in the race as well.

"It is the event that pulls us together each year and gives us a chance to showcase our rural community and our local spirit," says Jetter. "The youth of our community learn about volunteerism and show that ideas and combined skills of a group can make something special happen. It's something to be proud of."

