

In early 1987 I was working with my then husband Garth in his printing business. Our accountant, Jim Cook came into our office one day with a couple of boxes of files and told us he had just walked out of the Athletics Manitoba (AM) office and didn't know where he would set up the Manitoba Runners' Association (MRA). Garth told him we had room and he could move them in here. He then said, "but we don't have anyone to work as the Executive Director." Again, Garth said, "Oh Leni can do that." So that's how I became the MRA Executive Director. It worked out really well because we had the ability to print the MRA newsletter, On the Run. We had full colour on the front and back covers, both front and back. We also printed the MRA race calendar in colour on 11" x 17" paper. I worked both my jobs from the same desk for about 4 years. When the MRA joined up with Athletics Manitoba again in about 1990 or 91 and moved into the new Sport Manitoba building, I resigned because I didn't want to work in two different offices. Jim Cook also resigned as president of the MRA because he didn't want to be associated with AM again.

In March 2002 I was getting burned out on my baby business (sewing and manufacturing baby products for 9 years) and was wondering what I would do next. Out of the blue Jim Cook (who was back on the MRA board) called me and asked if I would like my old job back with the MRA. I immediately said yes and faxed Jim my resume. The next day I met with the MRA board executive and was hired back immediately. I worked in the Sport Manitoba building in the Athletics Manitoba office for 2 days per week. I was amazed how fast everything came back to me. I had only been working there for about 9 months when a letter was on my desk saying we had to vacate the AM office because we could not agree on the terms of an agreement with them. I ended up working from home and had a very nice office. To me it was not a job but a labour of love. I loved dealing with the members, planning the MRA races, doing the newsletter and everything else about my job as Executive Director. I think the most fun I had was planning the Walmart Walk for Miracles for 10 years. I was contacted by the National Walk Coordinator and offered a contract. I wanted to help the MRA out so I gave them the contract but with an agreement that the walk would become mine if I ever left or retired. They stopped doing the walk after the 2014 walk and I retired at the end of 2015.

The biggest challenge after we separated from AM in 2002 was financial. A couple of times Jim Cook and John Wichers loaned them money so that I could get paid. The board and I worked really hard at building the membership, getting some sponsors and putting on several of our own races. We gradually got the MRA into a much better financial situation. We also applied three or four times for a grant from the Manitoba government that enabled us to buy a lot of race equipment, aluminum

trailer, new computer and computer programs, and other things we needed to grow the MRA. It was such a satisfying feeling for all of us to finally have money in the bank and not have any financial concerns. My brother owned Merlyn Self Storage and gave us a storage locker to store our race equipment and a space on his lot for our aluminum trailer. It worked perfectly because race directors would let our equipment manager know what equipment they needed for the race and he would load it into the trailer for the race directors to pick up. When my brother later sold his storage facility the new owners gave us a discounted rate and the MRA is still there.

In 2012 I was given the wonderful honour of being inducted into the MRA Hall of Fame as a Builder. It was such an amazing and special night with a delicious banquet at the Holiday Inn South. I will remember that night forever!

With Jim and Morna Cook at the Hall of Fame banquet

Over my working lifetime I have had a few different careers but the one that meant the most to me was being the MRA Executive Director. I have so many great memories of my 17 years at the MRA!