

2015 AWARD WINNERS

Female Youth Athlete of the Year – Gabrielle Williams

Good things come in small packages

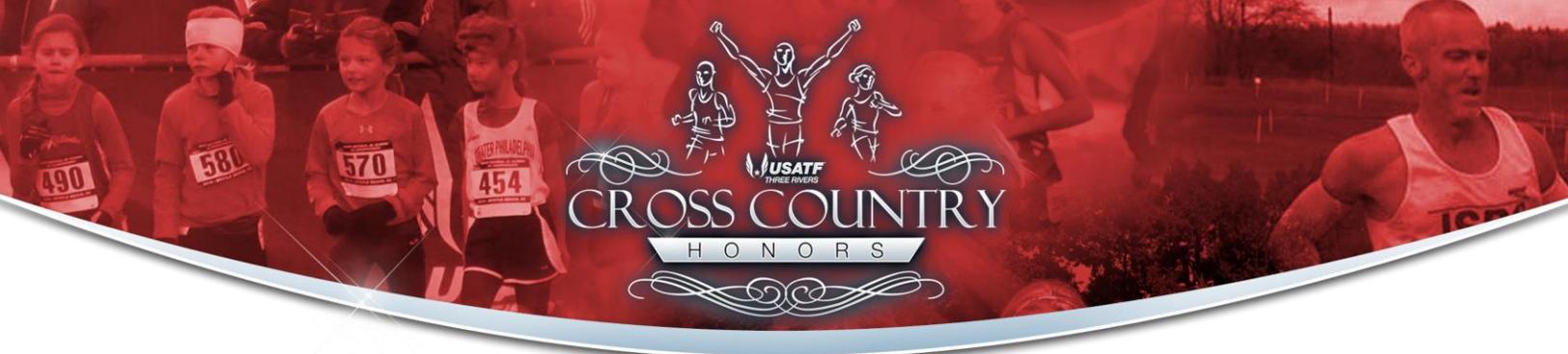
At first glance, the pint-sized stature and shy demeanor of Gabrielle Williams might not seem very intimidating. Yet each and every time she steps up to a starting line, she produces massive performances that remind us the hard work, determination, and the will to win are the greatest measures for potential success. Gabby is a 10 year old 4th grader at Pivik Elementary School in Plum, PA. She has been a member of the Penn Hills Eagles Track Club for the last four years and has grown into quite an amazing runner. Over this time she has been an Association Champion twice (2012 & 2013), Regional Champion twice (2012 & 2013), and has qualified for the National Junior Olympic Championships each year she has competed.

The 2015 Youth Cross Country Challenge presented a new opportunity for Gabrielle. She got to participate in a competition series that required perseverance and showing up week in and week out to earn the ultimate reward. Gabrielle became the inaugural Youth Cross Country Challenge champion in the 9-10 girls age division with 1st place finishes and 3 of 6 of the competitions.

What is most impressive about this young athlete is that she truly enjoys the sport. When asked why she participates Gabrielle mentioned nothing about all her success. Instead, she gushed about all the intangibles of competition, “I like running because everyone is so nice and welcoming. I like playing with my teammates and friends and I love all the different sites I get to see.”

Outside of competition, Gabrielle is a straight “A” student, plays the cello, and loves to read. She has set her goals high for 2016 explaining that she wants to continue to run well and earn a medal at a national competition.





Male Youth Athlete of the Year – Zach Leachman

Born to compete



Some people thrive in the throes of competition and Zach Leachman happens to be one of those people. As a member of Get Fit Families, he has been competing in running, swimming, and triathlon events for several years. His participation in these various competitions has given him a wealth of experience that resulted in an undefeated 2015 cross country season. Zach is an 8th grader at Mars Middle School. Some of the highlights include multiple wins over stiff competitors from North Allegheny, Fox Chapel and Seneca Valley. He crossed the finish line at the 2015 Fox Chapel Invitational in a course record performance of 8:43 for 1.65 miles. Zach also placed first in the 2015 USATF Three Rivers Association Junior Olympic Championships, 2nd in the 2015 Region 2 Junior Olympic Championships, and was a top 100 runner at the 2015 National Junior Olympic Cross Country Championships in Albuquerque New Mexico.

In addition to cross country, he participates in track & field in the 800m, mile and 2 mile competitions. “I just really enjoy running and staying in shape. I like getting faster and performing well against top competition.” Zach shared that the Slippery Rock Invitational and different events at Hartwood Acres were the most

challenging. The Slippery Rock event alone had nearly 700 competitors in his race!

Zach is very active in other sports and activities. He plays center on the North Pittsburgh Wildcats hockey team, is a member of the Adams Ridge Swim Team, and referees youth soccer games when his schedule permits. Zach is also a percussionist in the Middle School band and a high honor student in the Mars Middle School Academic & Gifted Program. He was very gracious when discussing the award and mentioned he was “glad and honored” about the recognition.





Open Athlete of the Year – Marianne Abdalah

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree

When you come from a family that enjoys fitness and running, it's by no surprise that enjoyment ultimately translates to success in competition. This just happens to be the case for Marianne Abdalah who hails from a family of runners. Both her parents competed for Wheeling Jesuit University and brought their children up in the sport. The family will often “schedule” family runs and her younger brothers compete for the Wings of Moon Track Club.

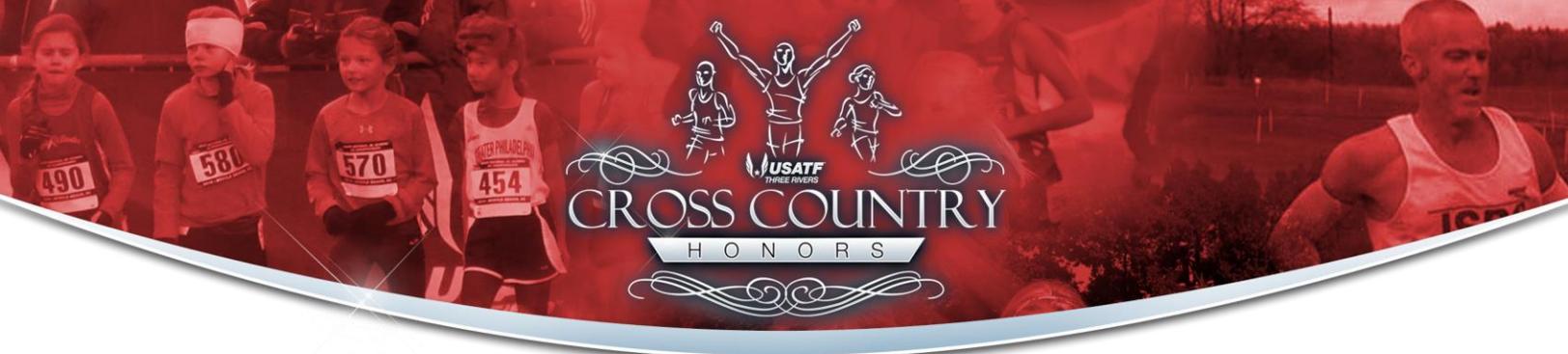
Marianne is 16 years old Junior at Vincentian Academy. This year she had a perfect Championship Cross Country season, winning the PIAA Foundation Championships, the WPIAL Championships, and PIAA State Championships in the Class A division. She's won each of these three competitions for the last 3 years but says the 2015 state meet was extra special because she got an opportunity to showcase another facet of her race and outkick an opponent. Marianne says she thoroughly loves running and started when she was 7 years old with AAU competitions. “Running is a freeing feeling; it does something good for me. It calms me down and is relaxing.” She participates in everything from the mile to 5k but says the 3,000m is her favorite race. “It is long enough to set and keep pace and is not so much of a *sprint* like the mile.”



Marianne keeps a busy schedule off the course. She is involved in the school newspaper as a writer/editor and has participated in the World Quest Geography Bee for the last 3 years. In addition to competing with her school, she trains with the Steel City Track Club. “They have a lot of older, experienced runners who are still competing. I get to train at longer distances and have access to good training partners to learn from.”

Marianne has plans to participate in outdoor track & field with hopes of attending a few national meets. She also has her sights set on competing in a marathon at some point.





Masters Athlete of the Year – Brian Brown

Never know what you are capable of until you try

Brian Brown is a real life example of discovering what one is capable of by simply trying. It was just a few years ago that he picked up running in an effort to live a healthier, happier life and begin a weight loss journey. By putting one foot in front of the other, he not only met some of his fitness goals and lost 102 lbs, but also discovered he was actually pretty good at middle distance running. Brian never competed in High School or College, but through this lifestyle change, really began to enjoy running and staying physically active through lifting, riding and swimming.

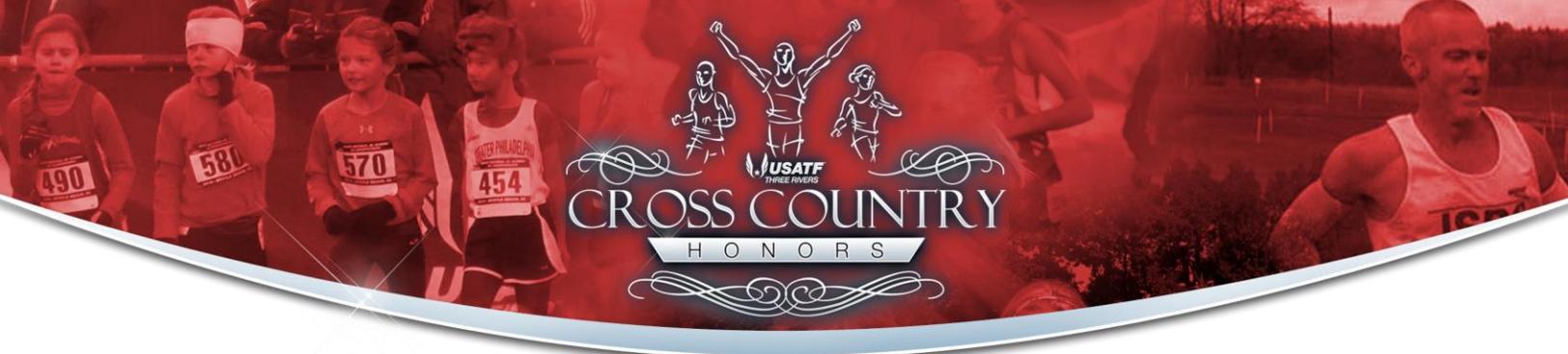
In 2012, just two years after Brian started running, he became recognized as an elite runner with the Brooks Inspire Daily Program (Brooks ID). The program invests in runners of all fitness levels and believes it's the individual that inspires. They define winners as people who lead by example and inspire the love of running every time they lace up and head out. This means winners of headlining races, winners who accomplish personal goals and winners who push their limits. Brian inspires others through running and by coaching youth athletes of the Greensburg YMCA cross country and track & field programs. His goal is to help them enjoy and appreciate running.



In 2015, Brian participated in several local road races earning top 3 finishes in multiple 5ks. He also placed first in the TRA Cross Country Championships for his age division and 3rd overall. Brian's achievements have been recognized on a national level as well. He is a recipient of the 2015 USATF Phidippides Award which recognizes outstanding performances and endurance in long distance running.

Brian is currently serving his second term on the TRA Board of Directors as an athlete representative. When asked about being selected for this award, "I think this is terrific! I wish more masters athletes would get involved. The Honors program will hopefully provide more exposure and get more adults interested in competition."





Coach of the Year – Robert Williams

It's all about the kids

When you run into a coach that consistently places their athletes' experiences, health and well being ahead of his or her own interests, you know your child in the right hands! Coach Robert Williams is one such coach overseeing distance and cross country for Penn Hills Eagles. He took on this role after initially hitting it off with Head Coach Chuck Carter and noticing the opportunity for growth and development in those disciplines. In 5 years he has completely revamped the program producing Association and Region and national qualifiers.

Robert's passion for his athletes is palpable. He has a vested interest in each and every child's success and wants them to succeed no matter the competition. Whether it's a rigorous practice schedule, motivational speeches, or training on MEGATRON (125 meter hill with a 9° incline) with the team, he finds creative ways to inspire athletes and bring out the best in them.

Robert, along with the rest of the coaching staff, led Penn Hills Eagles Track Club to the 1st Place Club finish in the inaugural Youth Cross Country Challenge. They bettered the second place team by nearly 600 points and produced 5 of the 12 individual champions.

Coach Williams admits that winning the crown was always a goal for the team but maintains that he encouraged his athletes to focus on the life lessons of always doing your best and never quitting that ultimately lead to the team bringing home the trophy. Some of the performances that stand out most were Jacques Moye Jr battling the last 75 meters of the 2015 Association Championships to remain undefeated in challenge. He also applauds Taylor Tomman for her great attitude and for rehabbing from injury to stay in shape. Robert has big goals for the team in 2016 hoping to see the team grow and even take some athletes to the 2016 National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships in Sacramento, CA.



Coach Williams is also a member of the TRA Board of Directors is not afraid to speak up, introduce, and implement new ideas for the betterment of the Association. He wears a few different hats serving as the Vice President of L&L and Youth 2nd Chair on the Youth Executive Committee. He is a strong believer in taking action and knows that good leadership impacts change and sets a good example for young athletes.





Official of the Year – Tom Erny

Runners on your mark!



If you attend a TRA Youth developmental meet, there's a good chance you'll see the smiling face of Tom Erny. Whether at the starting line or setting up timing equipment, Tom enjoys volunteering and giving athletes of all ages and abilities the opportunity to compete. He started attending track meets in 1993 as a parent of his 3 children who ran for the Pacers Track Club. Two years later, he found himself volunteering when a meet was short staffed. The volunteer roll morphed into light officiating duties, then timing, and eventually starting races.

Tom credits his development to several long time TRA Members and various officials including Norm Crawford, Len Johnson, Nick Pecraro and Bill Phelps. He is a national level official and spends most of his time starting both track & field and cross country competitions. In addition to TRA events, he also starts for the Pennsylvania Special Olympics Summer Games and times for the Pittsburgh Marathon and Pittsburgh Great Race. Tom also sneaks in a few high school and collegiate meets when time permits.

When asked why he officiates and remains involved, it's because he delights in others' success and happiness. "It always amazes me when I see little kids run and never give up. Year after year I watch them improve and gain confidence in themselves. Every meet has its special moments. It's always great when I talk to kids at the starting line and they smile and say 'hey, I remember.'" Tom was surprised that he was chosen for the award and explained that it's not the recognition that keeps him coming meet after meet and year after year. "I feel honored to receive this award. It's the clubs, runners, participants, and other volunteers that make USATF so much fun!"

