

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO – Albuquerque, the largest city in New Mexico, has a population of over 550,000, with 47% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Albuquerque’s population has been growing steadily for decades. Local government attempted to respond to this population spike by instituting their Planned Growth Strategy in 2002. Part of this plan included accounting for active lifestyles and attributes to why Albuquerque is a Runner Friendly Community. Albuquerque’s city government has a Recreational Trails Advisory Committee that has specific positions reserved for pedestrians and runners. This committee advises city agencies and plays a major role in monitoring projects for trail extensions, trail maintenance and trail safety.

Albuquerque’s urban infrastructure improvements have produced over 140-miles of paved pedestrian/bicycle trails separate from roadways. The city also has over 100-miles of unpaved, natural-surface trails in the city’s open spaces and more in the Cibola National Forest and Petroglyphs National Monument. Throughout the metropolitan area, there are over a dozen pedestrian/bike bridges that cross over major interstates and over underpasses for major roadways, which keep runners and trail users away from cars and trucks.

Businesses in the city reflect the community’s commitment to running and fitness. Albuquerque has a number of outstanding run specialty stores, notably ABQ Running Shop, Athletes’ Edge, Bosque Running Shop, Fleet Feet Sports, and Heart and Sole Sports, which organize training groups and generously sponsor many local races. Numerous local companies have generously supported running as well from supplying volunteers to assisting with race logistics to hosting fun runs.

The Albuquerque Road Runners (ARR), who submitted the Runner Friendly Community application, is the largest running club in the city. The ARR organizes a number of races, hosts the Women’s Distance Festival training program, and raises money to support school-based running groups, including Running 505. The club has adopted two local trails, the unpaved La Luz trail and a paved trail section on the city’s west side. ARR organizes trash clean up and brush trimming work on these trails.

“The City has been working with community leaders and citizen groups to provide activities that support the running community,” said Albuquerque Mayor Richard J. Berry in his letter of recommendation. “As a runner myself I see the value in running as a lifelong commitment to health and vitality.”

Community leaders providing support and letters of recommendation include: Richard J. Berry, Mayor of Albuquerque; Jason Coffey, Trails Planner - City of Albuquerque; Ian Maddieson, Albuquerque Road Runners Board Member; Tico Navarro, Race Director, Duke City Marathon.

HELENA, MONTANA – Helena represents a fascinating confluence of characteristics including being the Capital City of Montana and the County Seat of Lewis & Clark County. Nearly 31% of the city’s population of 28,190 works in government. The other defining trait of Helena is its geography; surrounded by the Big Belt Mountains, Helena National Forest, Lake Helena, Gates of the Mountain Wilderness, and the Continental Divide. Helena is the dream location for anyone with a penchant for the being outside.

While there is a network of sidewalks in the central part of Helena surrounding the Capital complex and nearby neighborhoods, Helena has completed an inventory of sidewalks to identified existing gaps and will implement improvements. There are share lanes for cars and runners/cyclists along with a world-class trail system that includes city property. A community track is used for competitive events by the middle and high schools as well as Carroll College. It is well lit, safe, and open to public at other hours.

Running is deeply rooted in the culture of Helena, which is evident through the city’s commitment to youth fitness. Physical education is part of the curriculum for grade, middle, and high school students. Tread Lightly run specialty store engages youth in both fun runs and competitive programs.

The Helena Vigilante Runners (HVR), who submitted the Runner Friendly Community application, are the largest running club in the city. HVR coordinates with the City of Helena, Lewis & Clark County, and the Helena School District to host nearly 24 events per years. They host programs that benefit residents of all ages, and one of HVR’s premier events is the Mount Helena Run. This 9 kilometer course starts on historic Last Chance Gulch in downtown Helena. It quickly changes from urban running to mountain trail running in Mt. Helena City Park. The course takes runners to the top of Mt. Helena, 1,300 feet above the starting line, and offers outstanding views of the City of Helena, Prickly Pear Valley, and Elkhorn and Belt Mountains.

“We believe that the City of Helena and other local organizations and agencies work together to support the efforts of the running community to make running safe, convenient, and accessible,” wrote Ryan Kettel, Chair of Helena’s Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council. “Existing infrastructure, existing support for running events, and planned infrastructure improvements that will benefit runners and other citizens, shows that our community is definitely runner-friendly.”

Community leaders providing support and letters of recommendation include: James E. Smith, Mayor of Helena; Sarah Johnson, owner, Tread Lightly Running Store; Patrick Judge, President, Helena Vigilante Runner; Ryan Kettel, Chair, Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council; and Karen Lane, Prevention Program Manager, Lewis & Clark Public Health.

TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN – Located in Northern Michigan, Traverse City is one of the more popular, small-town tourist destinations in the U.S. Located along Grand Traverse Bay, its proximity to freshwater beaches, skiing, and prestigious vineyards make Traverse City a popular spot for visitors. However, there is also a vibrant local population of 14,600 people. Fitness and physical activity are a priority for both year-round residents and tourists alike, which can be seen in all the aspects that make Traverse City a Runner Friendly Community.

Traverse City’s commitment to being runner friendly starts with its infrastructure. The Traverse City Commission works with local groups to promote a safe and active community. The city is the central point of the Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation trail network (TART). TART, a nonprofit organization, is responsible for maintaining and expanding the trail system to include both paved and natural surfaces from the downtown area to the multiuse VASA trail system in the Manistee National Forest. TART works closely with the city in planning and development of pedestrian friendly infrastructure.

Local government’s support of runners and walkers goes beyond sustaining an expansive trail network. The city and other local townships are positive partners when it comes to running events. Fees, when charged at all, are reasonable, as are other requirements for insurance, crowd control, and parking. The Traverse City Police and Grand Traverse County Sheriff Department are always very helpful with traffic and crowd control at local events. They are proactive about taking care of every-day safety issues for pedestrians. Because Traverse City is a vacation destination, the local government is well versed in working with event management groups and is always in tune with the recreational needs and services required not only by local citizens but also out of town guests.

The local businesses are a key factor in making Traverse City runner friendly. Run specialty store, Running Fit, helps organize group runs for runners of all skill levels. Bayview Inn, Right Brain Brewery, and Little Fleet food trucks are particularly friendly to runners looking for water while on a run, and they offer great locations for pre-and post-run meet-ups. Local insurance company, Hagerty, one of the largest companies in the region, sets an unmatched standard for fostering running and an active lifestyle among employees. In addition to a brand new state of the art fitness facility for employees, Hagerty will pay for race entry fees for their employees, no limit. If an employee runs three races put on by non-profit groups the employee gets a pay bonus. Hagerty also has a running club with multiple runs scheduled each day and led by different club members.

The largest running club in the community is the Traverse City Track Club (TCTC), who submitted the Runner Friendly application. TCTC donates funds for many groups that are committed to promoting running, including schools and nonprofit groups. TCTC awards college scholarships (over \$30,000 in 2016) to local runners who demonstrate a love of running along with school and community involvement. The TCTC hosts a summer series of ten races over 10-weeks that are free of charge and attract a wide variety of runners.

“All in all, Traverse City is a wonderful Runner Friendly Community that thrives on the mutually beneficial relationship between runners, and the runner friendly paths used to support local businesses,” said Jeff Houser, Right Brain Brewery Production Coordinator.

Community leaders providing support and letters of recommendation include: Martin Colborn, City Manager of Traverse City; Jim Graham, Traverse City Track Club President; Jeff Houser, Production Manager/Marketing Coordinator Right Brain Brewery; and Daniel Sideman, Bayshore Marathon Race Director.

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA – Tuscaloosa is the fifth largest city in Alabama, with a population of over 95,000, according to the city's official website. Located on the Black Warrior River, the presence of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa makes the city a regional hub for industry, commerce, healthcare, and education. The school's presence creates a strong appreciation for athletics and physical fitness in the community that goes beyond the hugely successful University of Alabama football team. In fact, in 2008, Tuscaloosa hosted the USA Olympic Triathlon trials for the Beijing Games.

The infrastructure of Tuscaloosa indicates the community's commitment to being runner friendly. Three major parts of the city, downtown Tuscaloosa, the City of Tuscaloosa Riverwalk, and the University of Alabama campus, are all connected by a series of sidewalks and trails. The esthetic beauty and connectivity of the sidewalk system between these three different areas of town create a multitude of route options and lengths. Tuscaloosa residents can practically run from any point in the city to another.

Tuscaloosa has gone out of its way to support running in the community. The local government has hosted annual races including the Mayor's Cup 5K benefitting their charity partner, Tuscaloosa Pre-K. To increase participants at the Mayor's Cup 5K, the city offers comp time to employees that participate. The city is also a major supporter of the area's largest race, the Tuscaloosa Half Marathon. Local law manages road closures and provides the manpower necessary to properly execute most races by providing a high level of safety and hospitality.

The Tuscaloosa running community has good support from local businesses. Taziki's, Five Bar, Billy's, and Southern Ale House, have donated food and drink to runners after group runs each month and provide a spot for post-run gatherings. Additionally, The University of Alabama's campus buildings are open to the public during business hours for those in need of a restroom or water, cover during bad weather, or a safe location. Along the Black Warrior River, the most popular trail in the city, several business are open to runners as well.

The Tuscaloosa Track Club (TTR), who submitted the application, is the largest running club in Western Alabama. TTR has served as a liaison between public and private organizations for many years, bridging the two sectors to create a unique partnership. Club President Ed Freeman and many other Club members have donated countless hours to serve as consultants for new and developing races in the area. In partnership with City of Tuscaloosa, the TTC works together to put on several large-scale events each year. These races bring in large participant fields to Tuscaloosa and put countless dollars back into the community.

"When it comes to being runner friendly, we are dedicated to setting the bar high," said Walter Maddox, Mayor of Tuscaloosa. "I can assure you we will continue to work to make Tuscaloosa a safe and welcoming haven for all runners."

Community leaders providing support and letters of recommendation include: Walter Maddox, City of Tuscaloosa Mayor; Dan Bakley, City President of Regions Bank; Gina Simpson, President/CEO Tuscaloosa Tourism & Sports Board; and Matt Wagner, Vice President Wagner's Run/Walk