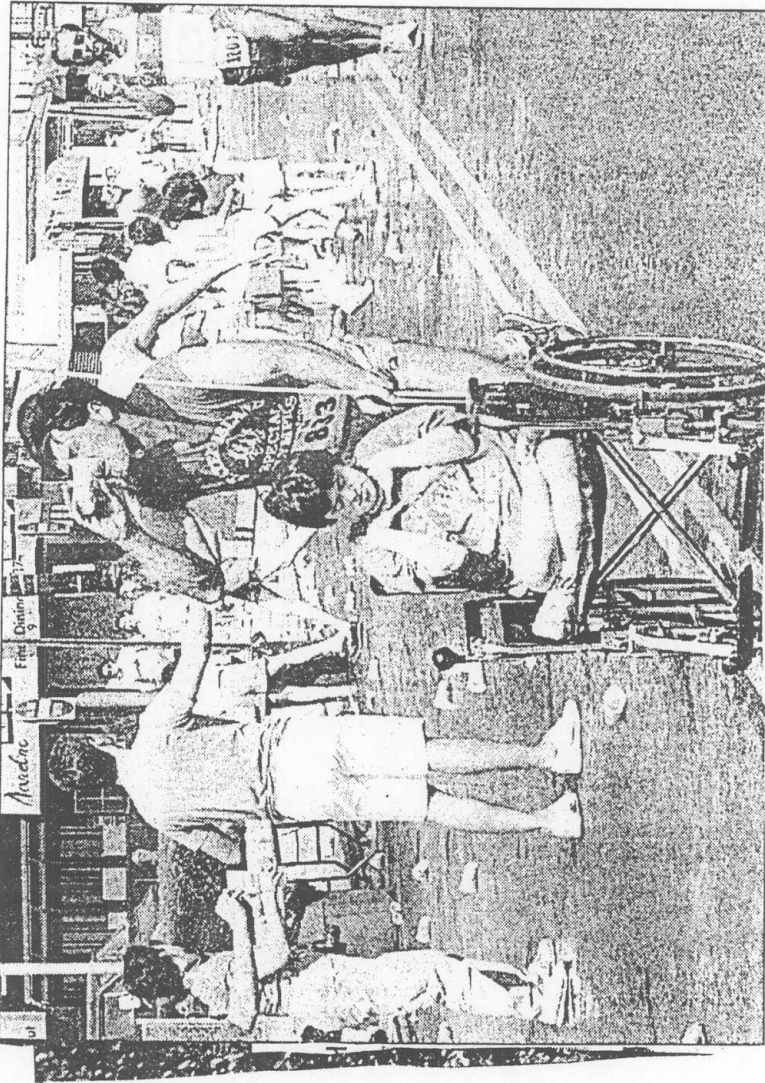


ADVANCE PHOTO ■ HILTON FLORES



McCarren's not the only one who's run every Memorial Day. Bernie Wright's running career began in Dan Kelly's gym class at PS 40 in New Brighton. Thirty-six years later, he's still going hard, 10 races in the last 11 weeks.

Wright's log books show he's run as much as 4,800 miles in a calendar year; earlier this year, he finished third in a national age-weighted half-marathon. Still following his notion that "if you think you're good, you have to bump heads with good people." But as Wright chases the competition, McCarren has learned to get along without it.

He was 42, still playing softball and touch tackle when Sal "Shoes" Pucciarelli, another all-sandlot guy in this neighborhood, introduced him to running. McCarren ran around his block in Oakwood a couple of times, showed up for his first fun run in Clove Lakes Park, and ran the three miles in 20:07. The next week, he ran 19:07.

He didn't know anything about running; he was just stronger than everybody else. When the Advance Run was a five-mile race, McCarren did it in 27:57; five years later he was still winning his age group in 30:47 while pushing Diane.

The knee wore out three years ago. "It took me a good year, if not more," he says now, "to get used to people going by me."

"My ego got in the way," he says.

He shrugs, runs his hand through Diane's hair. "Now I can have fun! Diane enjoys it more, because it takes longer to run the races," he says.

"She gets to say hello to everybody."

So, on Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, Bobby and Diane run in Spring Lake, N.J., where everybody knows them, and would be disappointed if they didn't show up. On Monday they come home to meet old friends, and make new ones, on Hylan Boulevard. And when the pavement bites Bobby McCarren in the knees, he can cheat by leaning on the wheelchair.

After all these years of pushing Diane, now she's taking some of the weight for him.