

**RUNNING**

## 'Exceptional legacies'

Kathrine Switzer talks Seneca Falls 19K, Tubman on the \$20, marathon training at 69 and more

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**K**athrine Switzer wants to be part of history again. She was in 1967 when she became the first woman to run the Boston Marathon as a numbered entry. And she hopes to be again next weekend when she comes to Seneca Falls for its inaugural Right to Run 19K/5K.

"I think it's going to grow to become a powerful and a traditional event," Switzer said in a Friday phone interview. "It's always wonderful to be there for the first. You're part of a cohort, a class of exceptional legacies."

Switzer is the spokesperson for the race, which takes its length from the 19th Amendment that granted all U.S. women the right to vote in 1920. In that role, she'll appear at book signings, a panel talk and other related events Thursday, May 5, through race day Saturday, May 7.

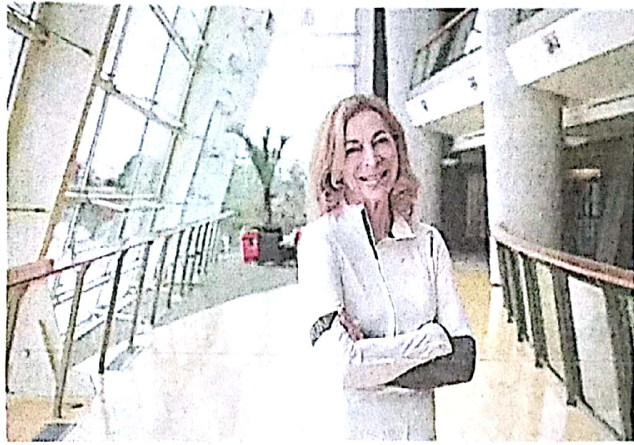
The author and Syracuse University alumna will also be representing her Reebok-sponsored nonprofit, 261 fearless, which seeks to empower women worldwide through running. It takes its name from Switzer's bib number in her history-making Boston race. I spoke to Switzer about her involvement in the Right to Run 19K/5K, her recollection of the 1967 Boston Marathon and her training to run the marathon again next year, 50 years later, when she will be 70.

**Q:** I know that since you were inducted in the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2011, you've wanted to come back and give back to Seneca Falls. Given that, as well as your history in the Boston Marathon and what you do now through 261 fearless, when you heard about the Right to Run 19K/5K was there an element of, "I have to be a part of this?"

**A:** Indeed, when I was inducted into the hall of fame, it was overwhelmingly important for me and gratifying. I guess the next highest award or recognition an American woman can get is the Presidential Medal of Freedom. I don't know of anything else that big for women. So to be inducted was really very special for me. Having said that, it's an organization that needs funding and they're building a wonderful center at the knitting mill. Many women who've been inducted can contribute thousands — I can't, I'm just not in that category. But I do have great name recognition and a following in terms of running. So when they came up with the idea of the race and making it a 19K, it was just out there and quirky enough and resonating at a time when the world is really getting on alert for the anniversary of the women's suffrage movement. I thought, "This is terrific. I can't make a major contribution to the hall, but I can give you three days of my time." If I can make a speech every day, that would be substantial. I said, "I'm at your service." And they're really taken that and run with it. As it turns out, my foundation, 261 fearless, ties in very neatly with it, which is great. So that's what I wanted to do: I wanted to pay back the hall, but also anything to do with running. A 19K is a distance that involves training, but then there's a 5K, which is accessible to everybody. I love that there's also an emphasis on women's equality, but we're also welcoming men, which is terrific because men have always been helpful, although not always enough.

**Q:** What is it about running that you think makes it such a great vehicle for empowering people?

**A:** There are emotional reasons and then there are real chemical



**ABOVE:** Kathrine Switzer. **LEFT:** The race director and Roger Robinson in Wesleyan Chapel at the Women's Rights National Historical Park, 136 Fall St., Seneca Falls. Free and open to the public. PROVIDED



placed on the \$20 bill? **A:** I love it! Running is always ahead: A friend of mine is the race director for the Niagara Falls Women's Half Marathon, and in January he decided to put Harriet Tubman on the medal. He's very excited.

**Q:** What sort of significance do you think it brings to the women's rights movement?

**A:** I think it's huge not only for the women's rights movement, but also the abolitionist movement. Most people don't understand they were going on at the same time, and also out of Seneca Falls for a variety of utopian reasons. Certainly, people kind of know her story; but it's a great story of women's power and strength and conviction and fearlessness. My whole movement is about fearlessness, and she was doing some scary stuff. People say I'm doing scary stuff, but we might be doing scarier stuff when we take 261 to the Middle East. But you have to do these things.

**Q:** So how is your marathon training going? Is it habitual for you, or do you have to ramp it up for the marathon?

**A:** For a marathon, you always have to ramp things up. Running a marathon is the difference between writing an article and writing a book. You're not going to get a book done unless you get the pages written. You need time — you have to take the time, and that's hard for me because I'm way overcommitted. The training now has to be calendared into the day just like an interview or an appointment. And I have to go out and do it. Fortunately, I love it, and it has all of the benefits of cleansing my brain, making me creative, re-energizing me and making me empowered. I'm up to a long run of about two hours now, but that has to get up to 4.5, maybe a five-hour run. And the longer you run, the more time it takes and also the harder it is. So the three-hour run is going to be harder than the two-hour. And you have to factor in time to recover, as well, so there are going to be a few naps as well (laughs). I also decided I have to get professional help. Having mostly trained myself the last several years, I decided this time to get professional help because the science is so far ahead of what it was. I always did a lot of yoga and stretching and I'm sure that helped keep me injury-free, but now they're also saying I have to go back to work on my core. I said that I used to come in every

reasons. When you run, your brain does all kinds of creative things, determination things, compassionate things, persistence. All these things are a part of brain secretions like oxytocin and serotonin, brain synapses connecting. The bottom line is: You feel good when you run. The endorphins, in women more than men, is amazing. Everybody runs and feels empowered, but I would especially so. It could be that women don't have as many opportunities to feel as empowered as men through sports, or getting together with the gang. Also, running is cheap and accessible. So if you have three kids, two dogs and a husband, you can go out for 20 minutes and get a dose of empowerment that's going to last for the day. That moment of peace and meditation and that sense of "I can do it and overcome and blast through this day" is really very potent for women. That's why a run is very important in celebrating the suffrage movement: We can take a long-term challenge and overcome it and make it happen. That's why longer distances are very appealing to women: It doesn't require power and strength, it requires endurance and persistence.

**Q:** Before you ran the Boston Marathon in 1967, did you predict at all the kind of impact it would have?

**A:** No, not at all. I thought there'd be a minor kerfuffle with the guys, but in a positive way — men have always been very supportive. I thought they'd say, "Wow, a girl's in the race. Isn't this great?" I didn't think I'd be making a political statement. Bobbi Gibb had jumped out of the bushes and ran it the year before without a number. I was just wearing a number because my coach made me. He said, "This is a serious race." I understood; I'd been running track and cross-country, but I didn't have any idea with the marathon. I thought it was just something that ran through the streets. He made me register, and that's what made the difference. Anyway, it wasn't the running that created (the impact), though I did fall in love with the running — it was the incident

that took place (race director Jack Semple trying to remove her from the course) that changed things. I knew that night, because it was in all the newspapers, that there was going to be a lot of follow-on. I was very radicalized by the experience. If they hadn't attacked me, I'd have gone on to run, I'd have campaigned. I was already organizing track club at Syracuse. But I wouldn't have imagined the legacy that was created.

**Q:** How did you react when you first saw the famous photos of the incident?

**A:** There were many, many photos. When I saw them for the first time, it was midnight on the Thruway, coming back. After the race was over, we went to get something to eat, shower and get a couple beers, and drove back to Syracuse. We stopped about in Albany. When we went in, the guy across the counter was reading the paper and I saw the front and back covered with our pictures. I ran over and said, "That's me! Can I look?" He tossed it at me like it was on fire. We went through, and there were pages of pictures. The definitive one is that three-part one. That became the definitive one because Harry Trask got all three by just jumping off the press truck. That's the one that hit the wire services. I was a journalism student at Syracuse, so the next couple of days I went into our archive room with all the dailies from around the world and looked at them, and on the front page — The Asahi Shimbun, The London Times — the pictures were in all those papers. And that's when I realized it was global news. News is instantly forgotten the next day, so one could have said "She just had her 15 minutes of fame," but I knew the picture was very important. But it became a huge vehicle as we continued — it became a really strong, galvanizing photo for the women's rights movement. It wasn't just about running, it was about women's rights, too.

**Q:** What did you think about the news that Harriet Tubman will be

### Right to Run 19K/5K schedule of events

**Thursday, May 5**

- 1 p.m.: National Women's Hall of Fame visit and book signing at the National Women's Hall of Fame, 76 Fall St., Seneca Falls. Free and open to the public.
- 6 p.m.: Right to Rally Cocktail party at 6 p.m. at the Aurora Inn, 391 Main St., Aurora. For tickets, visit righttorally.com.

**Friday, May 6**

- 9:15 a.m.: "How to Be the Hero in Your Life" presentation and book signing by Kathrine Switzer at the Mynderse Academy auditorium, 105 Troy St., Seneca Falls. For free tickets, call (315) 568-1163 or email marketing@mygenbank.com.
- 1:30 p.m.: "Running the Rough Road to Equality: A True History of the Pioneer Days of Women's Running" panel and book signing with Switzer and Roger Robinson in Wesleyan Chapel at the Women's Rights National Historical Park, 136 Fall St., Seneca Falls. Free and open to the public.
- 4 to 8 p.m.: Right to Refuel pre-race dinner with Switzer at the Gould Hotel, 108 Fall St., Seneca Falls. Tickets \$19, all inclusive. To RSVP, call (315) 712-4000.

**Saturday, May 7**

- 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.: Vendor Village, at the Seneca Knitting Mill, with a special stamp collection from 8 a.m. to noon. Vendors include the Inns of Aurora, the Gould Hotel, Kathrine Switzer and her global nonprofit, 261 fearless, Lace Locker, the National Women's Hall of Fame, WomenTIES, the Seneca Falls Rotary Club, New York Chiropractic College, Fleet Feet Sports, the postmaster of Seneca Falls, Dr. Kingsley Kabari, fingerlakes1.com and the Finger Lakes Radio Group.
- 9 a.m.: Right to Run 19K/5K; course closes at 12:20 p.m. The race is open to men and women; both courses are USA Track & Field-certified. Participants can run or walk the 5K, run the 19K or volunteer at the race. The registration fee for the 19K is \$55 through May 1 and \$60 from May 2 through race day. The fee for the 5K is \$32 through May 1 and \$35 from May 2 through race day. Registration includes a gender-specific tech shirt for all 19K registrants and a unisex cotton T-shirt for all 5K registrants, post-race food and more. Volunteers will receive a T-shirt custom-designed by MacKenzie-Childs.
- Noon: Awards ceremony at noon at the Seneca Knitting Mill's Vendor Village, with post-race food provided by Cafe XIX.
- 1 p.m.: Special toast of Three Brothers Wineries & Estates' Inspiring Ale with Kathrine Switzer at the Gould Hotel.

For more information, visit righttorun19k.org.

night and do 100 sit-ups. I can't do them anymore because I'm old and my back hurts. Now they have me doing all these weights and planks and it's exhausting (laughs). It is a big commitment of time and I'm under a lot of obligation to finish and to be able to do it because there are a lot of women who want to run with me. Probably 200 women are going to be running with me in Boston. It's going to be exceptionally wonderful. It's going to be a great anniversary.

(Editor's note: This interview has been condensed.)

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