

Lenn Smith Fun Race/Walk is a key Wits event

From just 20 participants in its founding years, this event now attracts hundreds from across Wits' five campuses.

By Prof. Neil Coville

The Lenn Smith 'round the campus' race is for both runners and walkers and has always had participation as its focus. This is the spirit in which the event has been organised over the years. The race is for all postgraduate students and academic and support staff at Wits. Typically, 80% of the field walk while the serious runners compete for personal and Departmental team prizes.

In 1987 – Lenn, who was in the Metallurgy workshop, organised a type of athletic/swimming event for Metallurgy staff and postgraduate students. Then in 1988, through Lenn's connections to the Physical Sciences Workshop, the Chemistry Department was invited to compete in a running race against Metallurgy. The race started at what is now the Origins Centre, but was then the site of the Metallurgy workshop. The race went down Yale Road, down Empire Road then up past the Gas Works and back to the start. About 20 competitors competed in the first event and this race can be viewed as the start of the Lenn Smith event. Tea and cake were served after the race for the participants.

After Lenn retired in 1989, Chemistry staff and the Physics workshop took over the organisation of race. Steve van der Schyff who headed the workshop provided race marshals etc. and Professor Neil Coville coordinated the timing/advertising for the race. The race then grew in size over the years as other Schools joined in the social and community building event. As the race attracted more interest, *The Varsity Kudus*, a running club at Wits, was roped in to assist as the support team to aid with the race start and finish, while the workshop arranged the marshals. Later the race moved to the Wits track (now the Science Stadium) but with the route still off campus. However, due to the increase in traffic on Empire Road the race moved to take place totally on the Wits campus. The route covered both East and West campuses. When the Science Stadium was built a new starting and ending point was needed and the race then moved to the Bozzoli field, and most recently to the Wits Club area.

After Steve van der Schyff retired in 2002 John Augustine took over the Physical Sciences workshop and the organising of the race marshals. John retired three years ago but the marshalling and help is still provided by the Workshop with Tshepo Mashoene now being the 'organiser'. Over the years, the race has been organised by a small committee whom have all come from Wits staff who have belonged to the Varsity Kudus Running Club. This is still true today. The race has gone on continuously since 1988, except for the two 'covid years'.

The number of participants has grown from about 20 in 1988 to over 400 in one event. Currently the race is 5 Km in length and follows the Wits Parkrun course.