



Megan Finnesy out for an autumn run in her backyard, near Durango, Colorado.

BY HOLLY GRAUBINS

## Community-Service Crusader

Race director Megan Finnesy aligns altruism and altitude

**RACE DIRECTOR MEGAN FINNESY**, 47, of Durango, Colorado, is equal parts benevolent and bodacious. She spent three long years working toward an event permit for an ultra trail race in the rugged San Juan Mountains. Through her perseverance, she finally received the permit for the Double Dirty 30 in Silverton, Colorado, held last September. While working through copious race details with forest rangers, she also dreamed of raising money for her favorite non-profit organization, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Southwest Colorado.

Her leap to race directing was premeditated. "I wanted to be an event coordinator, but couldn't find a job because I didn't have any experience," she recalls. But her love of mountainous singletrack and knack for juggling miniscule details guided her.

Now, she's the director of the popular Dirty 30 (50K and 12-miler) in Golden, Colorado, currently in its eighth year. The Dirty 30 is known for long, steep climbs, fast descents and rocky scrambles, and features special awards ("Bloodiest Finisher") and live music at the finish line.

"I love this race. The course is brutal, but it's also gorgeous and super well marked," says Boulder athlete Sarah Black, a 2015 finisher. "[Megan] is wonderfully organized

### What I've Learned

**I directed the first Dirty 30** in Golden Gate Canyon State Park in 2009. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing, and it was so stressful that I swore I would never do it again.

But a runner named David Wilcox came up to me at the finish line and handed me \$75 cash to cover his entry fee the following year. He said it was the best course he'd ever run. I am pretty sure that I would not have put it on again if he hadn't done that.

**For me a great race** must be a single loop course in big mountains. It must be difficult, include mostly singletrack trails and spectacular scenery, and involve an element of community service.

**Trail ultrarunners** are a select group of driven, conscientious, supportive and generous people. They inspire me to aim for new heights and make me want to tackle more.

**"Go big or go home"** is a phrase that speaks to me. The fundraising aspect of Double Dirty 30 allows runners to achieve more than they thought possible. We provide tools and tips on the website to help runners achieve their fundraising goals.

**I serve pickle juice** at my Dirty 30 aid stations because it's



a great source of salt and perfect for a hot day.

**When I found I was** moved from the waitlist to the runners list for the 2012 Hardrock just three weeks before the race, I had to put in some tough final miles. I decided then and there to make my Hardrock attempt about something bigger than just my personal desire to complete the race.

I sent letters to friends and family asking them to support my Hardrock journey by making a donation to BBBS. In just two weeks, we raised \$2,500.

**Runners at my two** races have completed 801 man-hours of trail work. I have organized and led trail work in both Golden and Silverton. In 2017 I am organizing a "trail-boss" training program, so we can have more leaders.

**I am sure I spend** over 1,000 hours planning, organizing and promoting each race per year. I am always wearing my race director hat. It is constantly about building relationships, informing, learning, researching. When I think I have it all figured out, it all changes.

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and that is reflected in the event, with its great support, and wonderful volunteers."

Finnesy attributes much of her life path to her college friend Dale Garland, the long-time race director of the legendary Hardrock 100-Mile Endurance Run. Back in 2008, Finnesy managed Hardrock's Cunningham aid station, and has since paced runners, captained other aid stations and once even donned a coconut bikini top and floral lei at the Chapman aid station to boost the morale of spaghetti-legged runners.

"Dale has been my main mentor as a race director," says Finnesy. "I admire and respect him, as managing Hardrock is epic."

"When I first got into this run-organizing thing, I relied on Merilee O'Neal [the former RD at Leadville] to mentor me," says Garland. "So I look at it as paying it forward when Megan asks for advice or help. Now, Megan is one of the most energetic and conscientious young RDs we have in our sport."

Boulder-born and raised, Finnesy had a soulful connection to nature from a young age, climbing 13,916-foot Mount Meeker at age 12. In the ensuing years, her diverse outdoor interests included running for hours in the Colorado mountains. In 2008 she tackled Colorado's multi-day, point-to-point Trans Rockies Race, which ignited her ultrarunning passion. Trim and muscular with blonde hair styled into a tidy ponytail, she has blue eyes that twinkle behind dainty eyeglasses, giving her a scholarly yet athletic look.

It's not just miles and race logistics that Finnesy pursues. "Giving back to our communities is essential," she says. She once mentored a young girl from BBBS, and fondly remembers taking her "little" up Engineer Mountain, "a very technical trail most adults won't tackle."

Double Dirty 30 runners are asked to either do trail work on the course or fund raise for BBBS. In this year's inaugural race, 33 runners raised a combined \$13,000 for the organization. Says Anita Carpenter, the executive director of BBBS, "All of the funds raised have gone directly into one-to-one mentoring. BBBS is serving a new elementary school this year and that's thanks to Megan's runners." **TR**

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