

## **YRMPA President's Report November 2022**

It is my great pleasure to write a report on the past year AFTER putting on a race this year!

A thousand thanks to the army of people who made that possible: the Board, Race Director Mia Lee, our many, many volunteers, our community supporters and sponsors, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Ta'an Kwach'an Council here in Whitehorse, Selkirk First Nation Development Corporation who own Minto resort, Dale and Samantha at Coalmine Campground, Dawson, Whitehorse and Carmacks, for getting a race off the ground/down the river this year. And last but not least, to the racers and their supporters.

There were definitely challenges. The high and very volatile water levels meant that the Board was in constant contact with local officials and communities to assess, re-assess and re-re-assess the rapidly changing conditions and communicating information as we learned it to racers and media. There were many, many extra meetings. My personal thank-you to each of my fellow Board members.

In this year's race, we had some technical, human and process issues, all good learning which will hold us in good stead going forward. Very special thank-yous to Race Marshall Stephen Mooney and Minto Coordinator Anne Jessup, who, along with their team of volunteers at Minto, did a great job of managing in very difficult circumstances.

The Board also acknowledges the many contributions made by Lidwien Hanrath, our former Treasurer, who died in July. Lidwien joined the Board in 2018 and was our Treasurer until this past March when she had to step down. Lidwien loved serving the community through volunteer work and she loved being part of the YRQ. Our condolences to her family. Many thanks to Spencer Edelman, who stepped in as Treasurer.

After careful consideration, the Board has decided to move the race start to early July, when water levels are less changeable. While some racers may be disappointed with this decision, it does create less uncertainty for everyone - the Board, racers (especially those who travel here), volunteers and local communities. It also allows for a longer on-the-water training for locals and for anyone connected to the K-12 school system to attend and bring their family

This year we experimented with an expanded field and a new event, the half-race. We were full after registration with 150 teams; 106 were at the start line, including 4 for the half-race (now to be known as the YRQ 300). After careful assessment of capacity at the start line and major checkpoints, the Board has decided that the field for the full race will be held to 125, with an additional 25 spots in the YRQ 300 in 2023.

There were many other new things this year: the split start, flexible layovers times between Carmacks and Minto (done to provide an additional strategic element to the race), the Minto stop, the half-race to Carmacks, a risk management plan and communication strategy, a paid Race Director position, a regular newsletter to racers, changes to pre-race sign in, and a different post-race ceremony in Dawson. Many of these will remain in place for 2023.

Another 'first' was an online racer evaluation, which had great response (124 responses from approx. 200 racers) and has already provided helpful feedback for 2023 race planning. We looked carefully at

your responses when doing our first-ever day-long planning session, held in September, for the 2023 race. Your comments were very much appreciated and will help us to improve the race overall and 'tweak' some of the new things we tried.

Mia Lee, our Race Director, has left us with many resources we did not previously have, such as a detailed operations timeline, a Google drive of our records, including some past records, contact lists and other things that were previously on paper or individual computers somewhere or in people's heads. This will be a big help going forward.

I'm excited to announce that YRMPA has secured a grant from the Yukon Government's Community Development Fund to develop a comprehensive business plan. The plan, which will look at everything from our IT infrastructure and human resources needs to marketing, a sponsorship plan and a business recovery plan, is underway, led by Kalin Pallet of Eddyline Consulting and his team. I hope this plan will help the race continue to be as successful in the future as it has been in the past.

It has been my honour to be the President this year, which marks my 4<sup>th</sup> on the Board and as a Board executive. My Director's term expires at this AGM and I am not standing for re-election.

Given full-time work responsibilities and other commitments, I am not able to put in the considerable time needed to continue. The hours needed to be on the Board, run the organization and put on a major international event is, in my opinion, past the point where it can be managed on volunteer labour.

I also feel that future Boards need to give serious consideration to being less operational; it is difficult to find Board members who are able to put in the time needed to manage the many tasks that take place over the entire year as well as the race itself. Many younger potential volunteers just do not have the kind of time in that is required. Further, the need to be so hands-on does not allow the YRMPA the capacity to develop the governance infrastructure needed to navigate the changing context of today's world.

I am very proud to have been part of YRMPA for the last 4 years. As a Board, we have together accomplished quite a bit over that time: created and implemented our first-ever strategic plan, managed through COVID and floods, developed our first YRMPA bylaws and a risk management plan, improved our relationships with our First Nation partners, developed and implemented a Race Director position and made the changes to the race that we rolled out this year.

My last huge thank-you goes to my husband, Ted Ackerman. He has been my unfailing support person, whether I've been a racer or a race marshal/president, running about before, during and after every race, keeping me going to the finish line and beyond. I could not have done this without him.

Over the last 25 years, the Yukon River Quest has grown from a small local event to a major international marathon paddling race known around the world, a huge accomplishment shared by everyone who has been on the Board since 1998. This is something to be very proud of. I hope this success continues, and that the business plan will provide direction for another 25 successful years.

It has been a pleasure to have played a small part in this.

Deb Bartlette