

chicago athlete

MAGAZINE



CHICAGO'S FIRST LADY OF TRASH

Paige Troelstrup

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Paige Troelstrup AND HER CHICAGO TRASH RUNNERS

Tucked away in a distant part of the Internet, the Chicago Trash Runners recruit, meet and schedule cleaning events throughout the city. “Chicago Trash Runners is exactly what it sounds like. We run and pick up trash,” says founding member Paige Troelstrup.

The organization is admittedly small, 62 members frequent the group’s portal www.meetup.com/ChicagoTrashRunners. From those 62 internet-bound members only about seven members will meet for any given event. But to hear the group’s de facto leader and ultra distance runner Troelstrup talk, a seven-member turnout is hardly disappointing. “My favorite and most successful [trash run] was at Washington Park in Hyde Park. Oh my goodness! That was our biggest group, there were seven of us,” says Troelstrup. “Apparently there had been a parade the day before that I didn’t know about and they chose not to pick up anything. So we made quite a dent there and it was a lot of fun.”

The Chicago Trash Runners were born from a chance encounter between Troelstrup and fellow ultra runner Jeremy Litchfield. Litchfield was the creator of the original Trash Runners in Portland, Maine and met Troelstrup while they were both training for an ultra distance race in Virginia. The two runners traded environmental ideas and philosophy over long runs. Troelstrup took Litchfield’s ideas to heart and returned to her hometown with a desire to unite Chicagoans under the banner of running and picking up trash.

“I think Chicago is a fairly clean city compared to other cities that I’ve been to, but I feel like there could be more done. It takes people like myself or Jeremy to say ‘pick it up.’ People don’t really do that

as much as they should so that’s where we come in. We also separate and recycle the stuff that we pick up at the end of our runs,” she says.

The trash runners currently meet about once a month and dates are entirely dependant on Troelstrup’s busy schedule, but she hopes that the number of clean-ups will increase and that other members will take the initiative to make their own plans.

“I hope that people don’t rely on me to organize things. I want them to think ‘hey, I’m going for a run in Andersonville this weekend and I was wondering if anyone wanted to go for a trash run.’ I want them to feel comfortable with people doing that,” says Troelstrup. “This is something everyone can do and it doesn’t need to be limited to one weekend a month.”

And while the name “Trash Runners” implies a specific amount of physical exertion and Troelstrup can probably run circles around most endurance athletes (she recently finished the “Rocky Raccoon” 100-mile race in Huntsville, Texas), she says that most runs are only around three miles long and members can run or even walk as far as they feel comfortable. Basically, the group is all-inclusive. Troelstrup’s only requirement for membership? Pick-up trash and recycle it.

“It’s something to do that’s good for yourself and for everyone else, all in one hour. We’re out there saving the world.”

For more information or to become a member of the Chicago Trash Runners, please visit: www.meetup.com/ChicagoTrashRunners

