

Run Helga, Run!

Vista del Monte resident has laced up her running shoes for five decades

During her time as a competitive runner, Vista del Monte resident Helga Carden estimates she has amassed about 25 trophies and medals. For anyone who has competed in this exhilarating sport throughout his or her life, that number of awards would be considered quite an accomplishment. That rings even more true for Helga, since she did not start running competitively until age 55.



Anyone—at any age or stage of life—can become a runner. But it’s the moment when a person’s mindset shifts and they are not just lacing up for another training run, but they are actually looking forward to it and find themselves truly happy that they have fallen in love with the sport.

“That’s how it happened to me,” Helga says. “My husband liked to run so I started running with him a few days a week and then with friends or by myself more often. It evolved from a hobby to an important part of my life.”

Helga soon found running intoxicating and thrived on competition. She started with small goals: 5K, 10K and then longer competitive runs. While training or competing, she prefers running on the open road rather than a track so she can soak up all the beauty that surrounds her.

She placed second in her first competitive run and has not looked back since. She eventually joined a “track club” and its coach, an Olympic runner, encouraged her to train for and compete in L.A.’s first marathon in 1986, at age 60. Helga placed fourth in her age group out of 12 runners who finished. “After three months of training I expected to do better,” she said emphatically.

“Running is so convenient because you can do it anywhere,” Helga said. “Wherever you are, you can put on your running shoes and you’re off!”

Helga has always embraced physical fitness. She was an avid skier and hiker and is a frequent visitor to the local YMCA, where she enjoys Pilates, weight training, stretching kickboxing and aerobics ... activities she continues to practice at Vista del Monte, thanks to the community’s state-of-the-art fitness center and park-like grounds. Since the “Y” has been closed due to the pandemic, Helga is spotted six days a week walking the meandering paths within Vista’s large greenbelt known to residents as the “park.” She uses the metal handrails throughout the campus as make-shift ballet

barres for stretching.

Benefits of running after age 60 include reductions in the risks of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cancer; reduced depression and anxiety; weight control; improved bones, muscles, and joints; improved mobility and coordination, and a psychological sense of well-being, according to the U.S. Department of Health.

“The pandemic has made exercise more difficult for me,” she said. “Going to the ‘Y’ and seeing others competing, motivates me, but staying at home makes it more challenging. For me, exercise not only has physical benefits but mental and social benefits as well, particularly during these times. At Vista, I’m able to continue exercising in a beautiful setting. If I was not living here, I don’t know if that would be possible.”