

Foreword

Astronomers gaze outward from Earth into the heavens, scanning the galaxies for planets with environmental conditions conducive to the existence of life. Now, consider what might have happened if one had taken a similar approach in the 1970s, looking outward from Eugene, Oregon, the quintessential distance-running hotbed (both then and now) in search of another community with similar characteristics. It's quite likely that a small city 384 miles to the South would be identified as a prime candidate for supporting a distance running haven. That city is, of course, Chico, California.

The physical environment of Chico resembles that of Eugene in several key running-relevant ways. Like Eugene, Chico is situated in a predominantly flat, agriculture-intensive river valley with ample access to hills. Further, like Eugene, Chico has relatively mild winters and is rich in natural beauty, with an abundance of scenic roads and soft-surface trails. The physical features that the two cities have in common are, not surprisingly, facilitative to year 'round running and training for both speed and strength in pleasant surroundings.

Of arguably greater importance than the physical similarities between Chico and Eugene were commonalities in their social environments. Like Eugene, Chico was (and still is) a university town, free of big city distractions, with a regular influx of talent, energy, and enthusiasm to boost the rolls of runners. During the running boom of the 1970s, Eugene and Chico both evolved strong social networks of clubs (both with "tree" logos, no less), teams, gifted coaches, dedicated race directors, devoted volunteers, and generous sponsors to support the activities of runners. Above all in the social realm, however, it was the combined efforts of individual people who helped make Eugene and Chico into the running meccas they became.

Eugene had Phil Knight, and the Bill Bowerman's legendary waffle iron; Chico had, late in the decade, Sally Edwards and Fleet Feet Store #2. Eugene had Dyrol Burleson; Chico had Darcy Burleson. Eugene had the McChesney brothers; Chico had many dynamic sibling combos of its own, including the Buzbees, the Greggs, the Growdons, the Navas, the Parks, the Richters, the Scotts, the Zickers, and... Literally

hundreds of active individuals across the youth, junior high school, high school, college, open, and masters levels—from Greg Williams and William (Bill) Gregg to Toni Ruggle and Everett Riggle (and beyond)—contributed to the colorful tapestry of Chico distance running in the 1970s.

In *Toe the Mark*, David Bruhn chronicles a golden decade of distance running in Chico with the careful attention to detail befitting the work of a naval historian. Interweaving personal observations with information gleaned through interviews, media accounts, and primary source materials, David breathes new life into a bygone era. Chico had a heck of a run—and was a heck of a place *to* run—in the 1970s. Eugene’s running star may have shone more brightly, but its California cousin a quarter-day’s drive down I-5 had a luminous running glow of its own in the 1970s. Thanks to David and *Toe the Mark*, we need neither a telescope nor a time machine to view a collection of stellar moments that resonate to this day in the hearts, minds, and legs of those who experienced them.

Britt Brewer