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## At age 80, longtime runner not slowing down

By Pete Iorizzo May 27, 2017



Photo: Cindy Schultz

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Runner Libby James of Fort Collins, Colo. is in attendance during a news conference for the Freihofer's Run for Women on Friday, May 29, 2015, at Taste in Albany, N.Y. (Cindy Schultz / Times Union)

Those of us reaching for Icy Hot after an hour of weeding the garden, or feeling in need of a

deep-tissue massage after legging out a double in the company softball game, might consider the advice of Libby James.

"Keeping moving," the 80-year-old woman from Fort Collins, Colo., told me by phone this past week. "A lot of people just don't like to move their bodies. When I look around at some of my contemporaries, I see some people can't get down four or five steps. It's consistency. It doesn't matter how far you go or how fast you go — you just have to keep going."

James will be in town next weekend to run the Freihofer's Run for Women — and I emphasize the word *run*.

This past fall, she set an American record in the 80-84 age group by finishing a 5K at the Syracuse Festival of Races in 25 minutes, 14 seconds, beating the previous mark by more than four minutes. That's an 8:07-per-mile pace, a feat beyond the reach of most adults one-third her age.

## More Information

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### Freihofer's Run for Women

**When:** 9 a.m. Saturday

**Where:** Downtown Albany

**More information:** [freihofersrun.com/](http://freihofersrun.com/)

Contact Pete Iorizzo at 518-454-5425 or email [piorizzo@timesunion.com](mailto:piorizzo@timesunion.com)

Because of some recent back issues, James anticipates being closer to 30 minutes at the Freihofer's – not that she'll be any less of a marvel. She laughs off suggestions she's any sort of celebrity, but wherever she runs, the crowd can't help but notice the diminutive woman with short gray hair and an ever-present smile zipping past runners who weren't yet born when she ran her first marathon.

Her story will sound familiar to many runners: Looking for a way to improve her fitness and get some time to herself, she started at age 35. She'd run one mile every morning before returning home to get her four teenage children out the door to school. After a few months, she decided to try a local 5K race. A habit became a lifelong passion.

She recalls wanting to enter the 1980 Boston Marathon, only to be dismayed to find there was no qualifying standard for women older than 40. She wrote the race director a letter, wondering why he wasn't more accommodating to women. The response: If she could post a qualifying time faster than 3:30, he'd allow her to enter. A few weeks later, she finished the Denver marathon in 3:29:47. She sent her \$5 registration fee for Boston shortly thereafter.

James always thought she'd give up running at age 70, but she dismissed the notion when she realized running wasn't any less enjoyable than it was at 69. It was then that she began setting age-group records in 5K, 10K and cross country.

"Honestly, I've had more fun since I've turned 70," said James, who ran her first Freihofer's in 2012 after being invited by race organizers. "I've gotten noticed a lot more."

We're used to hearing about elite athletes and their impossible-to-replicate lifestyles, like Patriots quarterback Tom Brady having his personal chef make sure his diet is devoid of white sugar, white flour, dairy, caffeine and iodized salt, among many other things. But there's a simplicity to James' approach to health that could benefit us all.

She tries to eat healthy but doesn't follow any specific diet. And she tries to walk or run four miles a day, a time investment of less than an hour daily, leaving plenty of opportunities for her other interests – writing children's books, finishing a historical novel and running her small business, "oldBags," for which she turns empty tea bags into art. ("I'm the old bag," she explained with a laugh.)

She says the best part of running isn't setting records or even improving her own health, but rather the legacy she's created in her family. All four of her children run, as do many of her 12 grandchildren. She's run the Bolder Boulder 10K twice with her oldest grandson.

There is no secret to running, she says. You just step out the front door and put one foot in front of the other. And then you keep doing it.

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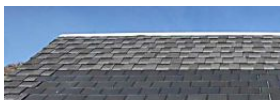
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