

REFF

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time and traveled to Iowa to officially enlist.

“They gave me a pint-sized jar to fill with urine and I filled the whole thing,” she said with a laugh. “Now I wouldn’t be able to give them a couple drops.”

For six weeks, Reff remained in Iowa for training before relocating to Mobile, Ala.

“I was there for six months,” she said. “Coming from the north, I couldn’t take the heat. I ended up in the hospital crying. Crying of all things. Just because I couldn’t stand the heat.”

The stint in the hospital ended Reff’s misery with the heat, and the night she was released, Reff headed toward Cincinnati, Ohio, to join an outfit called,

“Shot from the Sky.”

“My next two years were spent with Shot from the Sky,” she said. “What a great two years.”

**‘Best days’**

Shot from the Sky was a convoy of about 100 people who traveled the U.S. selling war bonds and recruiting war workers.

“Basically, we did whatever we could do concerning getting the country back in order,” Reff said. “And to show people what the war was like.”

The unit had a stage that traveled with them to showcase what the war was like and provided visuals of German and Japanese plans to educate people about the war.

“People saw things on their TVs, but never what it was really like” Reff said. “So we taught them. We were like a family.”

Traveling all over the country, Reff said she

spent a lot time on the bus, but it was worth it.

“Those two years were the best of my life,” she said. “Absolutely loved it.”

**Lifetime of memories**

Reff never left the United States during her time in the Air Force, although she did sign up to travel to New Guinea at one point.

“I didn’t have ties with anyone so I thought, ‘why not,’” Reff said.

But then, she admitted she was glad it didn’t work out.

“I heard there were Japanese on that island,” she said. “Then I didn’t want to go there. I didn’t want to get captured by the Japanese.”

She spent several months on the West Coast before heading home to International Falls and returning to normalcy.

Shortly after returning home, Reff was working at Ace Hardware on Third

Street, and developed a sweet spot for her supervisor, Bill.

“I was 25 years old,” Reff said. “I figured I better get married. So I married Bill. Best decision I made. We were married for 47 years before he passed away from cancer.”

**Sharing her memories**

When a local fifth-grade classroom was in need of a veteran to visit their classroom in November, Reff jumped at the chance. She said she loves the opportunity to share her past and the love of her country with anyone, especially the youth of the community.

“I told students some of them will be in the service and where they wear their uniforms, be proud,” she said. “All the kids gathered around my table. That made me proud. I was happy to show them my life hasn’t been dull.”

VOYAGE FORWARD

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Frances, is good for Northome,” Hess said. “I think sometimes it’s easy to lose sight of that.”

Consultants split up last week; some crossed international waters and met with people on the Canadian side, while others traveled down Highway 71 to meet with people living in the more rural areas of the county.

“This is a small market competing in a global economy,” Wassmansdorf said. “How does Koochiching County and Fort Frances represent itself to the world from a marketing point of view?”

Hess said meeting with different people helped consultants determine what kind of environment needs to be created to allow people to prosper. The experts will consider how to help create opportunity and new economic value.

At the same time, he said existing businesses won’t be put on the back burner. Of those businesses, Hess and the team will consider what needs to be nurtured, leveraged and positioned for the future.

“It’s not all rosy, but with the right ideas, we can really make something happen here,” he said.

**Job creation**

Hess said the firm’s efforts are about creating jobs, investment, helping businesses flourish and creating a good public and private sector partnership.

While at this point the vision may be big, the men stressed it needs to be applied and realistic.

“A key part of making this strategy effective is saying, ‘no,’” Wassmansdorf said. “We can’t do everything. We have limited time, a limited budget, limited people and limited resources.”

Hess echoed his colleague’s comments adding there might be a top 10 list developed during the assessment.

“Some ideas will be short term, some will be long term,” he said. “Some will require investment, while others are quick hits.”

The men agreed it is easy to let excitement build up, only to end up collecting dust over time. This initiative likely won’t be the case, they said.

“We are teaching strategies that have been done for decades and decades,” Hess said. “And they’ve worked. A big part is just educating people.”

**Looking ahead**

With or without NGKF’s help, local leaders and volunteers have a long road ahead.

“People need to have the right attitude,” Hess said. “They need to accept change and what it means.”

Wassmansdorf agreed.

“We can’t market one tiny place,” he said. “People need to focus on this region as a hole. It’ll attract more attention...Priorities will be set based on what can be influenced and what can be controlled.”

The men said before leaving the area this time, they told people involved to continue thinking outside the box.

“People need to continue talking to each other,” Wassmansdorf said. “They need to galvanize around key issues versus just letting them go. We’ll be back in touch with everyone over time.”

“We have some champions to carry this cause... This isn’t only going to be a city of International Falls initiative, it’s going to be rural, too...It all matters.”

**Robert Hess**  
NGKF executive managing director, consulting

ICEBOX DAYS

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“People come ready to run in the cold, they’ve done it and they know about it,” Ostroot said. “I’ve always felt if you run outside in the fall and winter, the FYGBR isn’t a shock to your system.”

What brings Ostroot back year after year for the FYGBR is the feeling of coming home and seeing old friends and running buddies, he said. Even though he left the area 20 years ago, he said there’s always people to reconnect with.

“There’s a group of runners coming every year from all over, and we see each other one time a year at this race,” Ostroot said.

A group of runners from Winnipeg used to have gimmicks or themed costumes when they’d run the race, Ostroot said. The most notable was the year they showed up in full business suits, complete with ties, attaché cases and running shoes, Ostroot said, under the theme “we mean business.”

“There were two guys ahead of me running with attaché cases, and I’m thinking, ‘there’s no way they can beat me carrying those things,’” Ostroot said. “But they did. I never caught them.”

**Background**

A runner in high school and college, Ostroot said he began running regularly again during his first year teaching in southern Minnesota in the early 1960s, after a brief, post-college hiatus. At 74 years old now, he’s been running regularly for the better part of 50 years.

“I’ve seen videos of the race, and it looks like we’re running on Neptune. There’s wind and snow blowing across, and you see a figure come out of it, and you can’t even see their face.”

**Dick Ostroot**

As a difficult endeavor, Ostroot said it can be tough to love running from time to time.

“What do I enjoy about running?” Ostroot said. “At times, nothing, when it’s not going well. But when it’s going well, it’s such a nice feeling.”

Running gives him a sense of freedom, and of freedom of movement, Ostroot said. When he’s out running a trail, in summer or winter, that’s when he’s having the most fun.

“I just feel like a part of nature, a part of the woods, when it’s calm and quiet,” Ostroot said. “It’s a nice feeling that I can still do it, and I’m doing something most people can’t or don’t do.”

That freedom is part of the reason Ostroot eschews running on a treadmill, and prefers instead to run outdoors year-round.

“I used to own a treadmill, but I seldom used it,” Ostroot said. “It’s just so boring, I like to go outside.”

At his peak, when he was training for marathons,



FILE PHOTO

At left, Dick Ostroot (421) starts the 2013 5-kilometer Freeze Yer Gizzard Blizzard Run. Ostroot, a former longtime track and field coach in the Falls, was the oldest in the 5K race at age 72.

Ostroot said he would run 40-50 miles per week, and his biggest week ever was 76 miles. Now, he’s scaled back considerably, but still puts in 10-12 miles per week.

His race preparation now centers around being able to run the full distance, regardless of pace, Ostroot said. Instead of running a specific distance in training, he’ll run for a certain amount of time.

“When I was younger I would do pace work, intervals, and speed training,” Ostroot said. “Now it’s about knowing I can

do it and be alright at the finish. Time is really irrelevant.”

Ostroot said he can’t exactly recall his personal record for the FYGBR, but his best 10K time for the race was a little over 40 minutes. His pace may have slowed over the years, but he still topped the more than 70-year-old and over male age group at last year’s 5K.

For now, the FYGBR is the only race Ostroot runs every year, he said.

“It’s the only one where I figure if I can run it, I will run it,” Ostroot said.

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