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Tabitha Barnett, left, poses with her mother, Tessy, prior to the start of last year's Pancake Race. Tessy has been running the race since 1999 and was especially thrilled to be running her 14th race with her then 18-year-old daughter. Tessy has signed up to run again, her 15th race, on Shrove Tuesday, March 4. Courtesy photo

By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

Since 1950, the town of Liberal has become synonymous with Pancake Day, and in commemoration of that day, the community comes together.

Schools along with several businesses are closed and there's also a Shroving service in honor of Shrove Tuesday and the famous Pancake Day race also takes place.

Every year, the race brings out both newcomers and veterans of the event.

Liberal's Tessy Barnett is one of those veterans.

Barnett entered her first Pancake Day race in 1999, which also happened to be the 50th anniversary of the race. She says that she had heard about the race after the birth of her second child and had planned on participating in 1998, but she became pregnant with her third child and had to wait. This will be her 15th time participating in the race.



“Seeing how the community got together and businesses got together, it was just really fun,” she said.

Barnett admits that her first race brought on a bit of nerves and said that she was hoping that she wouldn't drop her pancake or skillet throughout the length of the race.

After her first race, she received a complimentary frying pan, which has hung in her kitchen ever since – until a recent move. She says that it's a daily reminder of her first race and was an inspiration to do it again the next year.

“I think it's the idea of staying fit and healthy all year long because there's a race to go to in February,” she said. “I think that's it and then just being involved with the community, and I love the idea of running against Olney, England.”

Barnett also mentioned how she appreciates that the race also attracts several local politicians, including Senators Tim Huelskamp and Garrett Love, former governor Kathleen Sebelius and the state treasurer.

One of Barnett's fondest memories from participating in the race happened last year when she competed against her then 18-year-old daughter, Tabitha.

"It was really cool, and I'm pretty sure she beat me," joked Barnett. "I don't remember what all happened, but I'm fairly sure that she beat me."

Barnett also mentioned that while she participates in the race in more of a recreational fashion, she pushes herself and admits that the race itself isn't 100 percent easy.

"I'm not going to lie, it is tough, but it's only a few minutes," she said. "I do push myself, but I don't always expect to place first because there's always a bunch of younger girls running. One year, I did like third place, and that was amazing, but I don't expect to get that all the time."

Barnett also admits that her training methods are a bit unusual, saying that she occasionally runs against the kids in her day care.

"Our backyard is large and they love to run against me," she said with a laugh. "To make it fair, since their tiny legs can't run as fast as mine, I have them stand halfway in front of me. Sometimes they win and sometimes I do."

Barnett also expressed a desire to one day run the race with her British sisters.

"I would love to be able to race over in England. I think it's really great that we can enjoy this event together with them," she added.

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