



## Mahomet-Seymour notes

By Fred Kroner

# Running legends

*In upcoming weeks, the Citizen will profile the individuals selected as the charter members in the Mahomet-Seymour Alumni Association Hall of Fame. The entire group will be inducted at the next M-S football homecoming game, Sept. 22, 2017. This week, we touch base with Eric Mark Johnson and Maureen Scott Renaud.*

### Eric Mark Johnson

Known by his middle name in high school, Mark Johnson literally came out of nowhere to become the most successful distance runner in M-S history.

As a freshman and sophomore, Johnson did not participate in extra-curricular activities. He was not on the preseason cross-country roster as a junior.

An early-season physical education class in the fall of 1973 featured a distance run. Johnson's time caught the attention of the instructor. "Coach (Merv Correll) said I should go out for cross-country," Johnson recalled. "For some reason, I did. I'd never had anyone ask me at all. It started there and turned out to be a good thing."



JOHNSON

More than four decades after he graduated, Johnson not only owns school records for dual-meet wins in a cross-country season (18) and consecutive dual-meet wins (36), he ranks second or in a tie for second in those categories on the all-time Illinois High School Association record book.

Johnson remembers his first practice with the cross-country team.

"We ran to the Lake of the Woods and back," he said. "I was trying to survive and see what it was all about."

Trying to establish a lasting legacy wasn't even a thought for the teen-aged runner. "When you're young, you're trying to get your way in the world and trying to do your best," he said.

Running turned out to be a major influence in his life.

"It really taught me to work hard and you can succeed if you keep a positive attitude," Johnson said. "It was a real good thing for me confidence-wise and that confidence spread to everything else. Running is what got me going."

His school-record three-mile cross-country time (14:41) stood until 2015 when Alex Keeble lowered it to 14:36.

Johnson was a two-sport All-Stater for the Bulldogs, running 13th at state in cross-country as a senior and finishing as the state runner-up in the mile the following spring then capturing the third-place medal in the two-mile run.

His memory of the day wasn't strictly disappointment about not winning.

"I wouldn't characterize it as a good day," Johnson said. "I had side stitches I couldn't get over."

The previous year, as a junior, Johnson ran a nine-minute, 31-second two-mile time indoors, but contracted mononucleosis and missed six weeks of outdoor training.

He returned "a day or two before the district meet (which was held at the UI's Memorial Stadium)," he

said, but didn't have a time to qualify for the fast heat in the postseason race.

"I ran in the slow heat (and won) and got second overall to qualify for state," Johnson said.

His success continued after graduation. Johnson enrolled at Wisconsin-Stephens Point, then an NAIA school with an enrollment of 8,500.

He earned All-America honors in cross-country, indoor track and field and outdoor track and field (where he was also a conference champion in the steeplechase) before earning a bachelor's degree in wild-life management.

In 1984, Johnson earned a master's degree from Illinois in computer science and spent nearly a quarter of a century working in California's Silicon Valley.

"I found a niche in programming at the right time, when the computer revolution took place," he said.

Johnson competed in numerous triathlons, including the Hawaii Ironman five times between 1988 and 1998. Since retiring, he has relocated to Wyoming and occasionally runs uphill 10K mountain races.

"I still have a competitive urge inside me," he said.

Johnson, who recently celebrated his 59th birthday, is thankful for his inclusion to the Hall of Fame.

"It's quite an honor to be grouped with people from different areas, not just sports," he said.