

By Jan Rahn
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With the ease of a well-seasoned runner, Grant High School graduate and local business owner Lauren (Poppe) Klima captured top place in the women's division of the Omaha Marathon on Sunday.

With a finish time of 3:04:19, Klima beat her personal-best time by approximately 15 minutes. The early morning race at 7 a.m. CDT on Sept 26 greeted runners with mid-50 temperature and bright clear skies.

"It was a perfect morning, the whole family was there and it was awesome," said Klima, becoming choked up describing the hug she got at the finish line from her dad, Kevin. Her husband, Jeremy, mother Monica and sister Adrienne were also there cheering her on.

Three races drew participants numbering nearly 2,600. The marathon attracted 453 runners, the half-marathon drew 1,488 and 636 ran the 10-kilometer race.

The course is known as one of the tougher ones in the midwest, said Klima.

"I fell in love with cross country in high school when Anita Burge was coach," said Klima.

The Omaha race was her third full marathon. The 26-year-old has been running in various road races since she was 21. Known as shy and reserved, Klima said she needed to do things on her own and decided to enter some races where she was immediately drawn to the support and encouragement from others she enjoyed meeting.

"Everyone was always positive and excited," she said.

Mike Huggenberger, a co-worker at Great Plains Communications where she works in Omaha rode his bike alongside, pacing her, keeping her informed and adding encouragement. Both of them wore Lance Armstrong "Livestrong" t-shirts.

He definitely knows what he's doing, said Klima—Huggenberger finished his 75th marathon in Sidney, Australia the week prior.

Klima received a finisher medal and prize money, and instead of a trophy, received a nature print with a nameplate of her accomplishment.

Klima established Image Total Fitness in Grant five years ago and travels from Omaha on a frequent basis to check on how things are being managed.

She is in charge of the annual Firecracker Fun Run during the Fourth of July event at Grant City Park.

Still excited on Monday after her accomplishment in Omaha on Sunday, Klima said, "I encourage people to just set a goal and go for it," no matter what it is.