



## **Hugh Stobbs** – *Sports and Athletics*

Hugh Nevin Stobbs, the only child of Hugh Nevin Stobbs and Adelaide Bachmann Stobbs, was born in 1935 in Montgomery, Alabama. At the age of three, his family moved back to their hometown of Wheeling.

Stobbs graduated from Linsly Military Institute in 1952. An outstanding athlete, he was offered an athletic scholarship to continue his football play at the collegiate level; however, an on-field injury ended his playing career.

Hugh received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from West Virginia University. In addition, he also served six years in the military with three years in the West Virginia National Guard and three years in the Army Medical Corps. Hugh's professional career primarily was spent managing his family's real estate holdings.

In his mid-30s, Hugh made a New Year's resolution to quit smoking and to lose weight. To achieve this goal, he started on a lifetime career of fitness running. This defining act would lead Hugh down a path of national prominence in a sport he never intended nor expected.

In 1976, Hugh, with the support of several friends and fellow runners, shared a vision for a road-racing event that involved replicating the experience of running a marathon, without running 26.2 miles. This is when the Elby's First National Bank 20-kilometer Distance Classic was born.

With Hugh as the founder and race director, on May 28, 1977, the inaugural Elby's First National Bank 20-kilometer Classic firmly established Wheeling on the international road-racing map for many years. The inaugural event included participation by the premier elite distance runners in the world, featuring Olympic gold medal winner Frank Shorter and Boston Marathon winners Bill Rogers, Tom Fleming, and

Jack Fultz. Future events would typically include the best world-class distance athletes, both men and women, from around the globe.

With Hugh continuing at the helm as race director for the next 25 years, more than 30,000 runners from 69 different countries have taken their place at the starting line on Fourteenth and Main streets in downtown Wheeling on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend.

This annual road-racing classic was selected to be a United States Olympic team-qualifying event on several occasions as well as being named the United States 20-kilometer national championship race eight years in a row. "Runner's World" magazine ranked it as one of the top 10 annual road-racing events in the country. That annual Memorial Day weekend event continues today as it has evolved into the Ogden Newspapers Half-Marathon Classic.

Not one to be a spectator, Hugh found the time to complete 56 marathons (26.2 miles) throughout North America and Europe as well as competing in numerous ultramarathons and ultra-endurance running events of 50 to 100 miles.

Since his retirement as race director Hugh still had the time and energy for another fitness evolution, an annual running and walking event to honor military veterans. That event evolved into the Lois Stobbs Memorial Veterans 10K and celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2019.

There was more to Hugh than just the business of running. He served on the Ohio County Board of Education for 22 years, with eight of those years as the board president; five years as head coach for cross country and track at West Liberty University; member, Wheeling Traffic Commission; classroom reading tutor; board of directors, YMCA; chair, Wheeling Heart Association; board member and president, RESA 6; track and sideline football official; team sponsor, Wheeling Outdoor Basketball Recreation League team(s) that included players Jerry West and Hot Rod Hundley; was named Distinguished West Virginian by the governor, and received the Dapper Dan Award for Outstanding Achievement.

Hugh had three children: Cathy DeFruscio, Susan Brossman, and Tracy Capuder. Hugh died on December 8, 2020.