

'Tough Old Birds' ready to run, kayak at Perche Creek Fall Five

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Runner Nancy Taube, left, helps her race partner Linda LaFontaine attach their baton, a squeaking chicken, to her life jacket before heading out to practice paddling at Perche Creek. The two women will be competing in the Perche Creek Fall Five, which includes a 2-mile run and a 3-mile paddle. | Kile Brewer

Friends Nancy Taube and Linda LaFontaine, who call themselves the "Tough Old Birds," practice for the Perche Creek Fall Five. The race, which consists of a 2-mile running segment on the Katy Trail and a 3-mile kayaking segment in Perche Creek, will take place Saturday.

BY [Jennifer Liu](#)

COLUMBIA — Nancy Taube and Linda LaFontaine have been friends for so long, they can finish each other's sentences.

So when Taube first heard about a new running and kayaking race in town, she knew she could count on LaFontaine to join her for the race.

If you go

What: Perche Creek Fall Five, 2-mile run and 3-mile paddle race

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

Where: Katy Trail at the Providence Fishing Access

Registration is open until the day of the event. [Find more information about the race at Heartland Paddler.](#)

"I thought, 'Well, I can't do the kayaking part,'" Taube said.

"And I can't do the running part," LaFontaine said.

So they teamed up for Saturday's Perche Creek Fall Five, the first combined running and kayaking race in Columbia.

Taube, 52, will run a 2-mile course on the Katy Trail before handing off the team totem — a rubber chicken they have named MoJo — to LaFontaine, 61.

LaFontaine will finish the race with a 3-mile paddle down a section of Perche Creek. Together, they call themselves the "Tough Old Birds."

"We'll show those young'uns how it's done," Taube said in the weeks leading up to the event.

Running in the same circles

Before they shared a passion for fitness, Taube and LaFontaine met off the track. It was nearly 20 years ago, and LaFontaine served as director of Walnut Creek Day School. Taube was looking into day care for her son when the two met.

"I enjoyed chatting with her even then," LaFontaine said. "She was always friendly and has a positive outlook on life."

The two would talk nearly every day after Taube and her husband arrived to pick up their son. It wasn't until years later that the two became reacquainted as members of the Columbia Track Club.

"We've maintained a connection through volunteering at Columbia Track Club races and social events like happy hours and ice cream socials," Taube said. "She can always make me laugh."

Whitney Dreier, the editor of the club's newsletter, joined the club in 2008 and instantly recognized the chemistry between Taube and LaFontaine.

"They're both genuinely nice people," Dreier said. "They have a love for the track club and want to see it do well."

The combination of friendship and athletic ability will give them an edge in the race on Saturday, Dreier said.

"I think they'll be a great team not only camaraderie-wise, but also competitive-wise because they're both

strong athletes," she said.

"They may call themselves old, but you need to take them seriously because they're going after it."

A new kind of competition

Taube and LaFontaine learned about the run-kayak event from their friend Charlie Lockwood , the event's coordinator.

Lockwood has been promoting paddling events in the mid-Missouri area through his online business, [Heartland Paddler](#). He decided to add the running-kayaking race as a season bookend to races he holds in the spring.

"We don't believe it's the Olympics, but we do like to get out and have fun," Lockwood said of his events.

Taube and LaFontaine said they have noticed increased interest in races that cover both land and water.

"It's amazing the amount of interest in paddling," LaFontaine said. "It seems like running is getting a revived interest, too. There's a lot of things going on now."

Taube, who didn't become serious about running and competing until her early 40s, agreed.

"There are novelty things, too," she said. "Zombie runs, color runs. It's all about novelty. This has a novelty angle, too."

Lockwood is especially eager to see how the "Tough Old Birds" will do in the competition.

"I think they're going to smoke that course," he said. "I really think they're going to tear that course apart."

Off the starting block

While this is the first time Taube and LaFontaine are teaming up for a race, the two have been competitive athletes as individuals for years.

For both, the passion to run began early.

"I liked to run just for fun," LaFontaine said. "And I had two brothers who were always teasing and chasing me, so I was running faster than they were."

A member of the Columbia Track Club since 1973, she primarily ran road races and served as president from 2004-09. She began kayaking in her 50s to stay fit without causing as much stress to her body.

Earlier this month, she competed in the [third annual 2DamDays Marathon](#), a paddle race at the Lake of the Ozarks. She took second in the women's solo division by paddling nearly 90 miles in a little more than 22 hours.

Even moving from land to water is rewarding and has become another common ground between the two

friends, LaFontaine said.

"Both sports you can do in a park setting, a really pretty setting with animals, birds and whatnot," she said. "This is especially true for the rivers and the creeks. It's kind of an outdoor adventure, and you get exercise in that nice environment."

Taube also began taking an interest in fitness-related activities during her childhood in Mexico, Mo.

"I've always just loved running since I was a kid," she said. "I really didn't start competing until I was in my early 40s."

Taube, who now serves on the board of directors for the Columbia Track Club, has already taken several titles in her recent years of competitive running. She is currently one of the USA Track & Field cross country national champions for the 50 to 54 age group.

Health benefits at every age

While Taube and LaFontaine laugh about competing against younger racers, both are serious about the importance of staying active, even at an older age. In some ways, they say, it's easier.

"Your personal bests are over, so there's less pressure," Taube said. "For me, it's like 'go out and have a good time.' "

Age is just another reason to keep on moving, she said: "It's never too late."

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