

## **Arkansas Runner Interview – Laura Babbitt, President**

**AR:** Tell us about yourself and your family, work history, etc.

**Laura:** I was born in Gettysburg, PA and have lived in 7 states to include Arkansas. I have been here the longest out of any of them and really enjoy the natural state. I am an aircraft mechanic by trade and work for Aircraft Engine manufacturer Pratt & Whitney.

I have an Associate degree in Industrial Technology: Aircraft Maintenance, a BS in Professional Aeronautics with a double minor in International Relations and Aviation Safety, and an MBA. I also have an aircraft and powerplant license which lets me work on airplanes and engines.

I started working for Pratt & Whitney Canada as their first female Field Service Representative (FSR) which took me from Orlando, Florida to Bryant, Arkansas. I worked as an FSR until 2013 at which point I went into sales selling a maintenance plan for the engines. It is kind of like a maintenance plan you can get on your car, but as you can imagine the engine maintenance on an aircraft engine is a bit more expensive. At the end of 2013 I was promoted to Senior Manager of Commercial Services for our Turbofan market. From there I managed our Warranty department and now I am in sales and marketing. I love airplanes and miss actually getting to work on them and smell the oil and fuel but I enjoy what I am doing now. Fun fact: de-ice fluid smells like pancake syrup.

I am married to an amazing man, Don, who I met when I moved to Bryant in 2007. I call him coach Don as he is often giving me advice on running and is my crew at ultramarathons.

We have 2 cats, Gabby (5) that we rescued 4 years ago and Wilma (11) who is also a rescue. We have officially become those weird cat people that have cat paraphernalia all over the house. If you come to our house you would think we have kids with the toys spread around.

**AR:** How long have you been running and what got you started?

**Laura:** When I moved to Arkansas I had a hard time adapting and finding friends because the hours I was working were crazy. I was not very healthy and smoked and drank a little more than I should. A friend suggested we run the Susan G. Komen 5k together in 2012 which I thought was absurd since I had not run since high school. Side note: I ran track in school as a hurdler and did okay.

We trained for that 5k for about 2 months and then I ran my first race ever that October. One day Hobbit and Tom Singleton came to speak at Falcon Jet, where I was based, about the Little Rock Marathon. I thought what the heck, I should sign up for it as I just did a 5K. My husband, then boyfriend, thought that was the craziest thing ever which made me determined to do it. I ran my first marathon in 2013 at the Little Rock Marathon. After that I was hooked and only wished I would have found the love of the sport earlier. The

running community is amazing and welcoming and I only wish I was running when I moved here as being part of that community would have helped me adapt quicker to the area. I stopped smoking in 2013 and laid off the booze which surprisingly does affect your running.

**AR:** What is a typical running week for you?

**Laura:** My running vacillates a lot as I am on the road quite often. I do attempt to run when I travel but that can be hit or miss for me. A typical running week, when I am in my routine, is about 30-100 miles a week depending on the distance of the next race I have signed up for.

**AR:** Do you do any cross training, biking, weights, etc.? If so, what sort and how often?

**Laura:** My husband got into biking, which I was terrified to do after a bad 10 speed bike accident when I was 13, but resigned myself to try it. We have ridden in the BDB ride several times and will do the 75 miler this year after only doing the 50 miler in past years.

I also like to do kettlebell workouts at lunch. Weight training to me complements running well as it ensures you work other areas of your body that running needs but does not help build.

**AR:** Favorite place to run? Why?

**Laura:** I really like to run in the Heights and on Rahling Road. I have had some great, relaxing early Saturday morning runs with the Little Rock marathon training group in those areas. They are challenging and hilly which I really enjoy. I like running anywhere new and really anywhere as long as I have someone that likes to talk running with me.

**AR:** How about training partners? Do you have any or do you train alone?

**Laura:** I run alone a lot especially when I am out of town. There are some amazing folks that I run with in the wee early morning hours at Hurricane Lake Estates (when I can drag myself from my bed): Christy Wells, Evelyn Cathcart, Kris Ledoux, Lauren Baxley and Michael Warren. I enjoy running in the woods with Missy Harken and like pushing myself with Lennon Bates. I ran my first sub 9 minute mile with Lennon and I did it all while not knowing it.

**AR:** Have you been a member of any running clubs other than the Striders?

**Laura:** The Striders are the first running club I have ever been a part of. I really enjoy it and the people who are in it. I have learned so much from the members and have made great friends because of it.

**AR:** How long have you been racing?

**Laura:** I started racing right off the bat after I took up running. I have run about 35 marathons, ultra-marathons (50k-100) and a dozen or so of other distances since I started running in 2012.

**AR:** What has been your longest racing distance?

**Laura:** My longest distance to date is 100 miles. I ran the Arkansas Traveller in 2019 in 28:02. I loved the journey to that race more than I think I loved the race. It's an amazing thing to see how much you can endure both physically and mentally.

**AR:** How many races did you do last year?

**Laura:** I typically run about 5-10 races a year of varying distances but most of them are 50ks. Last year was a little weird as we still were enduring Covid ('21).

**AR:** Do you have a favorite racing distance? If so, what?

**Laura:** I like the 50k a lot, it's not too terribly long but long enough to burn some good calories. I like trail racing a lot as the food at the aid stations is really good and there is often beer.

**AR:** What have been your favorite races?

**Laura:** I ran the Pikes Peak marathon in 2017 and that was such an experience. It was beautiful and difficult and completely outside my comfort zone. I was so nervous going into that race but had such a great time. By far I love the Full Moon 50k. It's at night and in the woods. I enjoy the people and trail.

**AR:** What are your PR's at various distances?

**Laura:** My marathon PR is 4:23, 50k 6 something, 50 miler 11 something and 100 miler 28:02.

**AR:** Most memorable race? Explain.

**Laura:** My most memorable races are the firsts i.e., first 5k, first marathon, first 50k etc. I also really enjoy the races with my friend Missy. We did the Arkansas Big Fork last year and even though the race did not go as planned we stayed in Mena overnight and met some pretty cool locals.

**AR:** What have been some of your other most memorable events, moments, or achievements in running?

**Laura:** After I ran my first 50 miler I had to drive to Austin the next day to attend a trade show for work. I remember standing in heels the night after I ran the 50 and not being in too much pain. To me that meant I was in good shape and had really accomplished something.

**AR:** Non-running achievement of which you are most proud?

**Laura:** I am proud of what I have achieved at work as there are not a whole lot of women aircraft mechanics and it can be a bit challenging at times. I was the first female aircraft mechanic at Eagle Aviation in South Carolina and the first female FSR at Pratt & Whitney Canada.

**AR:** How about shoes? Do you have a favorite?

**Laura:** I was a long time Asics girl until I developed Morton's Toe and had to move to a zero drop shoe. Now I am all over the place with my shoes, always

looking for something new and shiny, but run mostly in Nike for racing and speed work and Altra's for trail and long runs.

**AR:** How about significant injuries? Have you had any and if so, what sort and did they require any special treatment other than rest?

**Laura:** I developed a hip issue early into my running and required several cortisone injections. I chalk it up to not being in good shape and have not had an issue in years. I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis back in 2012 which creates its own challenges but I will continue to run as long as I can.

**AR:** Are there any runners you particularly admire or respect, or perhaps who have helped you in some way? Explain.

**Laura:** I admire any runner who challenges themselves to do and try anything they don't think they can do. I don't follow the racing scene enough to have a favorite but there are plenty of runners here locally that I respect due to their grit.

**AR:** How about hobbies and activities other than running?

**Laura:** Knitting, putting together puzzles and reading are things I really enjoy doing. I also take French lessons twice a week.

**AR:** Favorite non-running spectator sport?

**Laura:** I love the atmosphere of a football game. I don't really watch the game but enjoy the people watching.

**AR:** Running goals for the current year? Long term?

**Laura:** I am still developing my running race plan for 2022 still but my personality requires I have one on the books in order to keep me training. No goal to look forward to means less desire to get out there and run.