

## Dr. Bryan Traubert steps down from Chicago Run

After launching the nonprofit in 2007, Traubert says it's time for a change



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Bryan Traubert at North Ave. beach Wednesday, May 14, 2014. Traubert will be stepping down as chairman of Chicago Run. (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

**Melissa Harris**  
**Chicago Confidential**

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Chicago Park District board President Dr. **Bryan Traubert** is stepping down as chairman of Chicago Run, the school-based running program he founded with his wife, U.S. Commerce Secretary **Penny Pritzker**, in late 2007.

Traubert, an ophthalmologist and marathon runner who will remain on the board, will be feted Thursday night at the organization's annual fundraiser. Chicago Run works in 44 Chicago schools — with some 13,400 elementary students starting the day with a 15-minute run or working one in just before lunch at least three times a week. Middle schoolers train after school for a 5K.

Creating the program took some time.

"We hadn't found a successful way to get involved in

MELISSA HARRIS

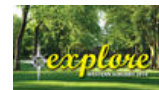


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fitness," Traubert said. "We had tried a number of things. We did some one-offs, and we revisited it a year later and the curriculum had gathered dust on a shelf. Despite everyone's best intentions, nothing had been accomplished."

So Traubert and Pritzker borrowed an idea from the New York Road Runners, which ran an in-school running program in New York City, and tailored it for CPS.

"I went to (then public schools chief) **Arne Duncan** in the fall of 2007 and told him we were working on this, and that I'd be ready to go in the fall of 2008," Traubert said. "And he said, 'I need you to do it in the spring.'"

Traubert and Pritzker are die-hard runners, with Traubert estimating he had run more than 20 marathons. In April, they competed in the St. Anthony's Triathlon in St. Petersburg, Fla., which entails a 1.5-kilometer swim, 40-kilometer bike and 10-kilometer run. Pritzker finished sixth in her division with a time of 2:58:30; Traubert 18th with a time of 2:35:51.

"Penny actually just killed it," Traubert said. "She beat her time of two years ago by about 30 minutes."

Traubert, 59, said that as a high school athlete, running was a form of punishment; his basketball coach would put the team through wind sprints at the end of practice. Not until his ophthalmology residency at Michael Reese Hospital, when Traubert said he was assigned to a surgeon "who screamed and threw things," did he take up running after a friend suggested it for stress relief.

With Chicago Run, students run in the gym or a parking lot or the hallways or amid orange cones erected in the street. The goal is that children in the third grade and under run about 30 miles and older children run about 50 miles over the course of a school year. Schools pay \$1,000 a year to participate in the program. Chicago Run recorded about \$514,000 in revenue in its last fiscal year, ending June 2013, according to tax records.

"There's an individual component and a group component in that you're compiling your class' miles as you go along — when the miles get greater, you can show them running out of the city on a combined distance chart," Traubert said. Children are given incentives, such as medals, for hitting milestones. "The concept is I can get great things done by doing little things every day. And over many days, then look what I have done. I think they get a sense of accomplishment and self-discipline, in addition to the health benefits."

**Gary Rozier**, a senior vice president of Ariel Investments, will take over as chairman of the organization, which is run by its founding executive director, **Alicia Gonzalez**. Traubert said that after more than six years, it was time for a different set of eyes. He's also splitting his time between Chicago and Washington, now that his wife is working there.

Gonzalez said she went through a two-month vetting process to get the job — "Bryan and Penny had me over for dinner, and I wasn't even officially hired yet." Meeting Traubert, Gonzalez said, was intimidating, not the least of which is because he is 6 feet, 4 inches tall, or about a foot taller than she is. Gonzalez estimated that during the organization's first year and a half of existence, she did not go a day without speaking to or exchanging emails with Traubert.

"He was very invested in making sure the organization flourished," Gonzalez said.

For the organization's first fun run, Gonzalez persuaded Nike to donate more than 1,000 running shoes to the participants, but the organization had no office in which to store them. Traubert and Gonzalez were often holding staff meetings at Panera Bread at the time.

"He coordinated donated office space, and then by the time 1,200 pairs of Nike shoes arrived,



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we counted through them, me and Bryan, 1,200 pairs of Nike shoes, matching them up one by one with run participants," Gonzalez said. "It was quite a feat."

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