



## 2025 STORY IDEAS

### HEALTH, RESILIENCE & COMEBACK STORIES

**1. Colonie Man Celebrates 15 Years of Troy Turkey Trot After Kidney Transplant**

For Robert Neet of Colonie, the Troy Turkey Trot 5K represents far more than a Thanksgiving morning tradition — it's a celebration of strength and perseverance. This year marks his 15th Troy Turkey Trot and his 20th anniversary as a kidney transplant recipient, milestones that reflect his determination and gratitude for a second chance at life.

A lifelong runner and Fleet Manager at Denooyer Chevrolet for 41 years, Robert often runs the Trot alongside his son, making it a meaningful father-son tradition. He says the race serves as a reminder of how far he's come. "No matter the weather, I finish the race for myself," Robert says. "Even if you have to crawl, you push through."

Robert hopes his story inspires others living with major health challenges to stay active and keep fighting. "I want people who've had transplants to know you can do anything you set your mind to. Every day is a fight — and every finish line counts."

Robert is available for pre-race interviews earlier in race week.

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**2. From Chemo to the Course: Troy Runner's Inspiring Turkey Trot Comeback**

James Cronen, a longtime Troy Turkey Trot runner and Troy resident, will return to the race this Thanksgiving after a grueling battle with stage 3 rectal cancer that forced him to sit out the 2024 event. A 17-year veteran of the race, James has undergone eight rounds of chemotherapy, 25 rounds of radiation, and major surgery, losing 50 pounds along the way—but he's not letting cancer keep him off the course.

This year, he'll walk the 5K with his family and a dozen friends wearing matching shirts, celebrating survival, raising awareness for colorectal cancer, and honoring a beloved local tradition that has been part of his life and his family's for nearly two decades.

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**3. Breaking Barriers: Running My First 5K at 82!**

Diane Bollman-Buyer didn't run a step in her life until age 74, yet she set a goal to run the Troy Turkey Trot alongside her family. After secretly training with a Couch to 5K program, she achieved her dream at age 80 by completing the 2023 Turkey Trot — running alongside her 17-year-old grandson on his first 5K.



Last year, despite rain, she placed first in her age group, running with her daughter by her side. Now 82, Diane is registered again for the 2024 race, proving that determination and family support can break barriers at any age. Her philosophy: “Never say never,” barring health issues. Diane’s inspiring journey celebrates perseverance, family, and the joy of running. She lives in East Greenbush.

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**4. Local Runner Conor McHugh Tackles the Troy Turkey Trot After Rediscovering His Passion for Fitness**

For Conor McHugh of the Capital Region, the Troy Turkey Trot 5K represents more than just a race — it’s the culmination of years of dedication, personal growth, and a rekindled love for running.

After discovering consistency in his fitness routine during the pandemic, Conor has steadily built up his endurance, completing several 5Ks this year and even hiking all 46 Adirondack High Peaks in 2022, before setting his sights on the Turkey Trot.

Conor’s running journey has been one of perseverance and self-discovery. “I’ve always liked a challenge,” he says. “This race is a chance to push myself, improve my pace, and share the energy and excitement with the community.” After moving back to the Capital Region in 2025, he began training seriously for local races, drawing inspiration from fellow runners and supportive friends.

For Conor, the Troy Turkey Trot isn’t just about finishing a race — it’s about embracing a healthy lifestyle, joining the vibrant community, and celebrating the spirit of Thanksgiving. “Despite the nerves, I’m looking forward to the event, seeing all the families, fellow runners, and enjoying a little Turkey at the finish,” he says.

Conor is available for pre-race interviews earlier in race week.

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## **FAMILY & MULTIGENERATIONAL TRADITIONS**

### **1. 60 Years of Turkey Trot: The Rogan Family Story**

For more than six decades, the Rogan family of Saratoga Springs have been a fixture at the Troy Turkey Trot, creating a three-generation tradition that celebrates family, fitness, and community.

It all started with Tom Rogan, who first ran the Turkey Trot in the 1960s and at one point was a competitive 10K runner. He also spent decades as the track coach at HVCC. Today, at 80 years old, Tom continues to participate—last year he ran the 10K, and in recent years has often embraced the fun side of the event, running the 5K in a Gorilla costume.

Tom's son, Paul Rogan, has run nearly every Turkey Trot since the 1970s. This year, Paul plans to run the 10K, continuing his long-standing streak. His children, who have participated every year since around age 6, will again take part, running distances from the grade school mile to the 5K.

Paul's oldest daughter, Keira Rogan, will be running for Syracuse University's cross country and track teams starting next fall. While she is recovering from an injury, she may either race or jog in this year's event. Even extended family joins in: Paul's brother, Tom, recently recovered from a hip replacement but plans to run the 5K this year.

The Rogans' story isn't just about running; it's about family tradition, perseverance, and a love for the Troy community that has spanned generations.

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### **2. 27-Year Streak: Local Mom Keeps a Family Tradition Alive at the Troy Turkey Trot**

For Erin Van Denburgh of Colonie, the Troy Turkey Trot is much more than a race — it's a beloved family tradition that began in 1998, when she first ran alongside her dad. Twenty-seven Trots later, she hasn't missed a single year, even running three times while pregnant with her children.

Now, Erin runs with her sister while her three kids — ages 8, 6, and 4 — cheer from the sidelines. She looks forward to the day they're old enough to join her on the course and continue the family legacy.

This year, Erin is training through the HVCC Turkey Trot Training Program as she prepares for her favorite holiday tradition. She loves the race's festive atmosphere, the community energy, and the opportunity it provides to give back, noting how meaningful it is to support local families through the event's Food Bank fundraising efforts.

Erin will be available for pre-race interviews earlier in race week.

Contact: Erin Van Denburgh 518-265-6041 / erin.vandenburgh@gmail.com



3. **A Family of Veteran Troy Turkey Trotters Keeps a 40-Year Tradition Alive**

For nearly four decades, Bonnie Blanchfield and her husband, Gregg Meyer, have made the Troy Turkey Trot the centerpiece of their Thanksgiving holiday — running the race together nearly every year since 1985. Though they’ve lived in Boston since 1987, the couple returns home to the Capital Region each Thanksgiving to run alongside their adult children, Caitie (34) and Ian (31), who grew up participating in the event.

Caitie even won the 5K during the virtual race in 2020 and earned top finishes as a grade-schooler in the early 2000s. Over the years, siblings, cousins, and nieces have joined in, but the Blanchfields remain the core four keeping the tradition alive. Their post-race ritual now includes a celebratory stop at Emrys, a restaurant owned by Bonnie’s brother, Mickey Blanchfield, who traded running for hosting after hip issues sidelined him from the race.

The Blanchfields will be driving in from Boston on Wednesday morning and are available for pre-race interviews that afternoon.

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4. **Siblings Reunite Each Year for the Troy Turkey Trot — and a Tradition Born from a Burned CD**

For Sandra Gallardo of Averill Park and her brother, who lives in Puerto Rico, the Troy Turkey Trot 5K has become an unexpected family tradition. This Thanksgiving marks their third consecutive year running the race together — a ritual that began almost by accident and has since become a cherished sibling reunion.

Each year, they meet at their sister’s home for Thanksgiving dinner, where post-race storytelling has become part of the holiday. Their pre-race ritual began the first year they ran together, when they found an old burned mix CD her brother had made years ago — now their go-to pump-up soundtrack for the drive to the start line.

Last year’s cold, rainy conditions turned the race into a shared test of endurance and laughter, strengthening their bond even more. Sandra says she isn’t a runner outside of the Turkey Trot — but the event’s energy and community spirit keep her coming back year after year.

Sandra will be available for pre-race interviews on Wednesday afternoon at her sister’s home in the Capital Region.

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5. **Local Woman Marks 27 Years of Troy Turkey Trot Tradition**

Erin Van Denburgh of Colonie is gearing up for her 27th Troy Turkey Trot, a family tradition she started with her dad in 1998. Over the years, Erin has run the race while pregnant, now runs alongside her sister, and brings her three young children—ages 4, 6, and 8—to cheer her on.

“The Troy Turkey Trot is my favorite holiday tradition,” Erin says. “It’s a fun way to stay active, enjoy the community, and support a great cause.” This year, she’s training through the HVCC program in preparation for the race, which raises funds to fight local food insecurity through the Food Bank.

Erin encourages others to join, calling the Trot “a great workout before Thanksgiving that makes a difference in our community.”

Photos from past races, including three years she ran while pregnant, are available for media use.

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6. **How a Turkey Trot Brought a Family Closer**

Eighth-grader Eva Shatynski of Farnsworth Middle School shares how her family’s annual Turkey Trot 5K has become more than a race — it’s a cherished Thanksgiving tradition that brings her busy family together. What began when she was six as a chilly, nerve-filled morning run has grown into a ritual of encouragement, laughter, and connection.

Despite running at different speeds and juggling sports, college, and work, the Shatynskis come together each year to cheer one another on, celebrate personal milestones, and enjoy post-race moments of joy, humor, and reflection.

For Eva, the race isn’t just about exercise; it’s about family, gratitude, and shared happiness — a reminder of how even small traditions can create lasting bonds.

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## **COSTUMES, CHARACTER & FUN**

### **1. Local Dad Runs the Troy Turkey Trot 10K as a Minion — Inspiring His Young Family**

For Mark Nersesian of the Capital Region, the Troy Turkey Trot brings back the same energy and camaraderie he once felt playing high school football on Thanksgiving Day — a time to laugh, connect, and celebrate fitness and family.

An avid local runner, Mark has completed two full marathons, one half marathon, a sprint triathlon, and numerous 5Ks and 10Ks. But this year's Trot will be especially memorable: he's running his first 10K in costume — dressed as a Minion, inspired by his three young children (ages 5, 3, and 6 months) who insist he reminds them of Gru.

Mark says running has been a powerful outlet for his physical, mental, and emotional health, and he hopes to pass that love of movement on to his family. His wife and kids will be on the sidelines cheering him on — and he dreams of the day when they'll all cross the finish line together in a future Troy Turkey Trot.

Mark is available for pre-race interviews earlier in race week.

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### **2. Turkey Onesies & Friendly Rivalries: A Softball Team's Annual Thanksgiving Reunion**

For Sierra Bailey and her close-knit group of friends — who first met playing on the same softball team — the Troy Turkey Trot has evolved into a cherished annual reunion. Over the years, this circle of teammates became family, united by laughter, tradition, and a shared willingness to wear matching turkey onesies in public.

Each Thanksgiving, regardless of rain, snow, or biting wind, the group zips into their costume suits and takes to the course. Their most anticipated moment? A good-natured rivalry with a fellow group dressed as giant Christmas presents — a competition that's become legendary among their circle and provides bragging rights until the next November.

For Sierra and her friends, the race is less about time and more about traditions, community, and joyful chaos. And, of course, the celebration isn't complete until after the finish line — when they gather for well-earned pie and laughter.

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## LOCAL PERSONALITIES & RACE AMBASSADORS

### 1. **Bill “The Voice” Springer – 30 Years of Trot Traditions**

Bill “The Voice” Springer has been the iconic race day announcer for the Trot for three decades. Known for his colorful, Thanksgiving-themed hats and infectious enthusiasm, Bill brings the history and heart of the race to life. He’s an ideal voice to share stories and colorful insights about the Trot through the years.

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