Troy Turkey Trot 2026 Story Ideas

IN-PERSON STORIES

1. At 84, Louise Liberty Is Closing In on 50 Consecutive Turkey Trots

Louise Liberty of Troy will turn 84 on November 28, two days after completing her 47th consecutive Troy Turkey Trot. She's never missed a year. Her remarkable streak, longevity and commitment to running make her a terrific human-interest story.

Contact: Clara Hunt. Phone: 518-274-6384. Email: chunt15@nycap.rr.com.

2. Two Kidney Donors, One Turkey Trot Comeback

Within the span of a week this spring, Albany resident Marissa Barlaz and her synagogue's rabbi, Ben Kean, each donated a kidney.

Marissa, who is president of her synagogue's board of trustees, donated to a stranger, while the rabbi donated to a 7-year-old boy. The synagogue is in Albany on Whitehall Rd.

Now both are preparing to run the Troy Turkey Trot alongside kidney donor athletes as a comeback event following their surgeries.

They hope to show that kidney donation does not have to negatively affect a person's health or ability to remain physically active.

Contact: Marissa Barlaz. Phone: 267-629-1264. Email: marissa.barlaz@gmail.com. Availability: Generally, weekdays before 3 p.m., depending on work schedule.

3. A 50-Year Family Tradition Brings Troy Native Home After 41 Years

After leaving Troy in 1985, Mark Klein is returning for Thanksgiving and the Turkey Trot for the first time in 41 years.

The race has been part of his family's history for more than 50 years. The tradition began in 1974 when his oldest brother, Jim, won the high school division. Mark added his own chapter in 1980, finishing second. This year, more than 10 family members will participate.

The homecoming is about much more than the race. For the first time since their mother's passing two years ago, all eight siblings — four brothers and four sisters — will be together again for Thanksgiving.

What began with their parents and eight children has grown into a family of more than 50.

Mark also has a personal comeback story. Following two total knee replacement surgeries in 2024, he decided to take control of his health.

Beginning April 12, he committed to walking, exercising and losing weight. He has since lost nearly 50 pounds without relying on medications or other weight-loss enhancements. His efforts have included walking more

than 100 miles along Spain's Camino de Santiago, working out and doing hundreds of squats behind home plate while umpiring youth baseball.

Now living in Fort Myers, Florida, Mark has recently moved his belongings into storage in Denver and purchased a travel trailer to pursue a new adventure. His plans include visiting all 31 Major League Baseball ballparks, exploring national parks and umpiring youth baseball tournaments across the country.

He may not be returning with the same running legs he had in 1980, but he's bringing a renewed appreciation for his health, family and a tradition that has spanned generations.

He arrives in Albany on Wednesday 11/25 at 4:20pm.

Contact: Mark Klein. Phone: 404-783-9581. Email: markk0803@gmail.com.

4. Living With Epilepsy, Finding Strength Through Running
Skylar Swatt, 30, of Johnstown has lived with the effects of a stroke at birth and epilepsy. She experienced 13 seizures on the day she was born, and the stroke permanently affected the right side of her body.

After five days in the NICU, she was able to go home. Doctors initially believed her seizures had stopped after she was weaned off anti-seizure medication. She spent years in occupational and physical therapy to improve her motor skills.

In sixth grade, Skylar began experiencing episodes of jaw twitching and involuntary head movements, often while eating. The episodes continued through 10th grade. She kept them largely to herself because she was embarrassed and had been made fun of. Sometimes, she would run to the bathroom when an episode occurred.

In 2011, while on her way to a concert with friends, one episode progressed into a grand mal seizure and she lost consciousness. After working with several doctors, she found a neurologist who identified the earlier jaw spasms as focal seizures.

Today, Skylar lives with the physical and mental effects of her condition, as well as medication side effects that include chronic fatigue, depression and anxiety. Running and regular physical activity play an important role in managing those challenges. She has been running since she was young and grew up participating in 5Ks with her family. She continues to run because it provides physical and mental relief and helps her manage her condition and maintain her quality of life.

Contact: Skylar Swatt. Phone: 518-844-3373. Email: srswatt@gmail.com.

5. From Medical School to the Starting Line: Running Through Life's Biggest Challenges
Sananda Pai is a fourth-year medical student and MD candidate in the Class of 2027 at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. As she prepares to graduate and begin her career as a physician, she's navigating the residency application process — an exciting but stressful period filled with uncertainty and major life decisions.

Running has become an important outlet for managing stress, clearing her mind and maintaining balance amid the demands of medical training.

Sananda wasn't a runner before medical school. Over time, it became much more than a way to stay physically active. It has taught her about resilience, consistency and the importance of prioritizing her own physical and mental well-being while preparing for a profession centered on caring for others. She has also seen her relationship with running positively influence people around her.

This will be her second Troy Turkey Trot, and returning to her hometown makes the experience especially meaningful. Crossing the finish line represents both her personal growth and the next chapter of her professional journey.

Contact: Sananda Pai. Phone: 518-334-2503. Email: sanandapai9@gmail.com. Availability: She resides in NYC but will be back in the Capital Region from 11/25/2026-12/04/2026. She's originally from the Capital Region. Generally, 4–5 p.m. and weekends, depending on her schedule best time to reach her.

6. Running in Memory of an Uncle Who Inspired His First Race
At age 7, Stephen Guba of Latham ran his first-ever race, the 2014 Troy Turkey Trot 5K, alongside his Uncle Ken. In 2015, his uncle was diagnosed with glioblastoma and passed away in November 2017.

Now 19 and a sophomore at SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music, where he's pursuing a degree in music education, Stephen is returning to the Turkey Trot to run the 10K in his uncle's memory.

Stephen says his uncle would have loved to run alongside him again, and he knows his uncle will be right next to him every stride, cheering him on to the finish line.

He's also dedicating the race to his family, who mean the world to him. Now in the best shape of his life, Stephen sees the race as an opportunity to honor his uncle, celebrate his family and experience the meaning of crossing the finish line.

Contact: Stephen Guba. Phone: Not provided. Email: gubastephen19@gmail.com.

7. From England to Troy: A First American Thanksgiving Fueled by a Love of Running
Nicola Robinson is traveling from Southampton, England, to spend her first-ever Thanksgiving in the United States with a friend and her family. The highlight of her week will be participating in the Pioneer Troy Turkey Trot.

An avid runner, Nicola has completed both the New York City and Chicago marathons. She says the enthusiasm and support of American running crowds are unlike anything else, and she's looking forward to experiencing another American running tradition.

But running also carries a deeply personal meaning for Nicola. She lost her mother to breast cancer in 2022. Her mother was also a runner, and Nicola now dedicates every run to her memory as a way of keeping her close. She wears a butterfly as a reminder of the wings her mother gave her to fly.

Nicola says she feels her mother running alongside her with every stride. Her trip to Troy offers an opportunity to celebrate her love of running, honor her mother's memory and experience her first Thanksgiving in the country.

Contact: Nicola Robinson. Phone: +44 7910 329804. Email: jmbbs@hotmail.com. She arrives on Nov. 21 and will be staying at Shear Court, Waterford.

VIRTUAL/PRINT INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES
1. A Thanksgiving Comeback After Two Major Knee Injuries
After moving to California, Brian Hayes hasn't participated in the Troy Turkey Trot since 2019.

This Thanksgiving, he's making his return to a family tradition, but his road back has been anything but easy.

On February 5, he suffered a torn ACL, meniscus and MCL — his second major knee injury in four years. He underwent surgery on June 1, including a procedure to repair the other knee because of a flaw in an earlier surgery. Months of rehabilitation followed, with physical therapy focused on regaining the ability to bend his legs and walk normally. It wasn't until October that he received clearance to begin light running, leaving just weeks to prepare for Thanksgiving.

There's also a family rivalry waiting for him. Growing up, Brian and his older sister competed fiercely in the Turkey Trot. Now his sister has entered her "slow era," but her husband has taken her place.

A former Division I track athlete who coaches running at Bryant University, his brother-in-law is training for a Disney half marathon in January.

Brian, who has a background in college basketball, will be returning with surgically repaired knees and very little running preparation, but plenty of motivation.

Contact: Brian Hayes. Phone: 518-727-1164. Email: brih600@gmail.com. Availability: Virtual interview. Based in California and won't arrive in Albany until late November.

2. A New Runner Finds His Stride

Daniel Oyanedel is in the midst of a breakthrough year as a runner. After deciding to take the sport more seriously, the Scotia Glenville resident has completed four half marathons this year and is looking forward to adding another milestone to his running journey: participating in his first Troy Turkey Trot.

The Chile native's experience offers a chance to explore what sparked his interest in running, how the sport has become part of his life and what motivated him to take on the challenge of longer distances.

Contact: Daniel Oyanedel. Phone: Not provided. Email: danieloyanedel1@gmail.com.