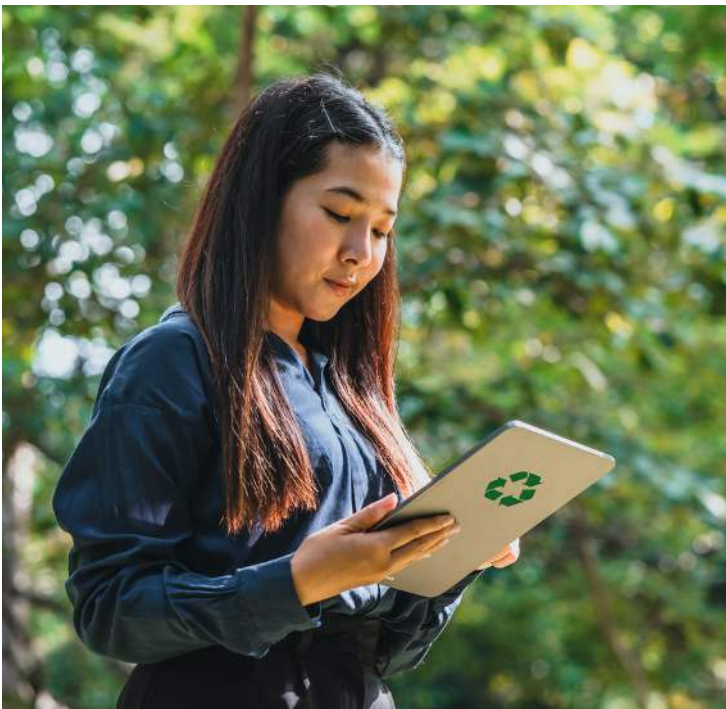




Trail Talk

Oak Ridges Trail Association

SUMMER 2026 EDITION



ORTA News Briefing

The summer has started off well with ORTA volunteers supporting the Adventure Relay Event in large numbers. Hikes continue through the summer with new hike leaders enriching our weekly offerings. Why not try out a new hike with a new hike leader?

Looking to get involved in shaping our organization? Why not try out one of our new committees. These groups will be providing input into the direction of the new ORTA Board - you are welcome and encouraged to contribute to YOUR club!

PRESIDENT WELCOME

Adventure Relay Success!

Introduction of the new ORTA President and Congratulations to Adventure Relay Volunteers

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Tribute to Garry Neice for significant contributions to our club

Garry played many roles in the organization, making it a better club for all!

ADVENTURE RELAY

Special Feature

The Adventure Relay is back in full force again with more teams and competitors for the 2026 event

President's Message

Oak Ridges Trail Association



Neil Runnalls - ORTA President

Member Engagement

The ORTA Board has now organized new committees to support the work of the board and draw in wider input from members. I encourage you to jump in and contribute to one of the new committees:

- Member Engagement
- Governance
- Finance
- Trail Development

ORTA Celebrating the Success in Community Building

Dear ORTA Club Members,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to the membership as your new president. I have been a proud member of ORTA for over 3 years now and have had the opportunity to hike the entire trail with a small group of dedicated hikers.

The Oak Ridges Moraine provides so many wonderful opportunities for recreation. We are blessed as residents of the Greater Toronto Area to have such a beautiful geographical feature so close by to enjoy. As hikers, ORTA provides the opportunity to connect with green spaces, pursue our passion for hiking, and to be a part of a larger community of outdoor enthusiasts.

Our recent **Adventure Relay Event** demonstrated the depth of passion of our members. Over 100 volunteers came out to support the event, cheer on participants, and connect with other ORTA club members at the various checkpoints. We hosted a tremendous event for hikers, bikers, runners, paddlers, and most of all, people who appreciate and love the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Best regards,

Neil Runnalls

Out in Our Community...

Promoting Our Trail and Club



Uxbridge Trail Discovery Day

ORTA Making It's Presence Known in Uxbridge



Promoting ORTA in Uxbridge

June was a busy month for our fabulous ORTA volunteers. In addition to the Relay on the 13th, many of us attended the Uxbridge Trail Discovery Day on June 6th as well as the Uxbridge Service Groups Information Fair on June 10th. Both events were excellent opportunities to promote the trail, talk about the benefits of ORTA membership, and encourage local residents to come out and hike with us!



2026 Adventure Relay

Race Director: Jacquelin Heichart



**The Oak Ridges Trail Association's
Annual Fundraiser
Saturday June 13, 2026**

On Saturday, June 13, we celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay with an incredible day out on the trail - and what a day it was! This year marked a major milestone for the event. We saw tremendous growth, nearly doubling our teams, volunteers, and sponsorships, and building even stronger community awareness and engagement across the Moraine.

In total, 20 teams and 183 racers took on the challenge, bringing energy, grit, determination, and outstanding sportsmanship to every kilometre of the course. So how long does it take to race across the Oak Ridges Moraine? Check out our final results:

2026 Adventure Relay Continued...2

Half Relay Highlights: Teams of up to seven racers tackled a dynamic 90km course of biking and running from Bewdley (Checkpoint 2) to Trail Hub (Checkpoint 9). It was an incredibly close finish:

- 🥇 White Water Warriors – 7:49:41
- 🥈 RVA Trailblazers – 7:50:29
- 🥉 Snack Cartels – 8:12:34

Followed by:
Run Like the Winded |
WHERE THE HECK ARE WE TRIBE

Full Relay Highlights: The full relay saw teams of up to 15 racers paddle, bike, and run from Gore's Landing to Aurora, covering a spectacular 160km cross-section of the Moraine.

- Elite Division:
- 🥇 Jefferson Crew – 10:26:47
 - 🥈 Fast Fred's – 11:19:21
 - 🥉 New Chimpanas – 12:20:46

- Recreational Division:
- 🥇 CLOCAnuts – 10:56:28
 - 🥈 Stouffvillains – 11:55:25
 - 🥉 Hellbent on Nature – 12:34:00

Followed by strong performances from 9 recreational teams across the board, showcasing the true spirit of adventure and teamwork.

Volunteers

A huge thank you to our 16 checkpoint teams and over 125 volunteers, nearly half of whom were new this year! Every racer we spoke with shared how welcoming, enthusiastic, and supportive our volunteers were and how they made race day an unforgettable experience.

This event is no small undertaking, and it is only possible because of volunteers' time, energy, and dedication. Thank you to all our volunteers for everything they contributed, both leading up to race day and on the day itself. And a big thank you to the Adventure Relay Steering Committee team of Jeremy Reesor, Anna Sunn, and Karen Graham.



The Oak Ridges Trail Association's
Annual Fundraiser
Saturday June 13, 2026

2026 Adventure Relay Continued...3

Photos & Highlights

Over the coming weeks, we'll be sharing race-day highlights across our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) channels—featuring each checkpoint and capturing the incredible moments from the day. You can also visit our [Facebook Group](#) now to view photos already shared by volunteers and racers—with more to come!

Sponsor Recognition

This year, we were proud to welcome 15 sponsors and supporters who helped bring the relay to life through financial and in-kind support. We are deeply grateful for their contributions to making this event possible and enhancing the experience for racers and volunteers alike.

Special thanks to:

- [The Greenbelt Foundation](#), supporting the relay through the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy Implementation Project
- [Rouge River Farms](#), sponsor of racer bibs and volunteer t-shirts
- [Electrolit](#), our official in-kind hydration sponsor
- [Trail Hub](#), our Mid-Race Hub and community partner
- [Aurora Chamber of Commerce](#), our communications sponsor

As well, thank you to our onsite Community Checkpoint Sponsors:

- [The Second Wedge Brewing Co.](#), for supporting Checkpoint #8 (Uxbridge)
- [Bentscape](#) for supporting Checkpoint #2 (Bewdley).
- [Turf Care Products Canada](#) for supporting Checkpoint #14 (Aurora).



We are grateful to our prize sponsors for helping create meaningful and exciting rewards for our racers, including:

[SAIL](#), [Patagonia Toronto](#), [Trail Hub](#), [Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham Aurora](#), [Lakeridge Resort](#), [Brimacombe](#), [The Second Wedge Brewing Co.](#), [Aurora Chamber of Commerce](#), [Kawartha Dairy](#), [Pine Farms Orchard](#), and the [The Canadian Canoe Museum](#)

Taking on the role of Race Director for the first time was both exciting and a little daunting, but I couldn't be happier with how everything came together. What stood out most was the incredible sense of community—our volunteers, teams, and supporters made this event something truly special. I'm so grateful for everyone who played a part in making it a success!

Let's build on this momentum and save the date of Saturday June 12, 2027 for next year's Adventure Relay!

Sincerely,

Jacquelin
Race Director - [2026 Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay - June 13, 2026](#)

Thank You for Your Service to ORTA Garry!

Shortly after our recent AGM, Garry Niece submitted his resignation from the Board of Directors for ORTA. He had joined ORTA in 2002 joining the Board in 2010 after serving as Scugog Chapter Chair since 2004.

To say that Garry played a key role in ORTA's progress would be a tremendous understatement. These words were taken from the 2024 Volunteer Recognition segment:

"Garry was honoured with the prestigious Lifetime Award having been an ORTA Board member for two decades. He has served as Trail Director and VP for much of that time. He has supervised trail maintenance across the Moraine and is often seen behind an ORTA self-propelled mower.

He has kept us in touch with landowners and conservation authorities and has been our representative with Hike Ontario in recent years. Garry was also an active organizer in the Adventure Relay for 9 years and was also a regular participant."

Garry served in almost every capacity that ORTA needed including Discovery Night Coordinator for 7 years. His value to ORTA extends to being a Hike Leader certified in First Aid and Wilderness Aid, he was also pivotal with many hours dedicated to recent upgrades to the Guidebook.

It would be beyond fair to say that Garry's retirement gig with ORTA consumed a tremendous amount of time and energy! To all these tasks, he brought a kindness, calmness and witty sense of humour that made it seem like he enjoyed every minute of it!



Garry pictured on right as a competitor in the Adventure Relay event.

Thank you Garry for your commitment and dedication which has been truly appreciated. You certainly have earned a break and we hope that you enjoy your quieter time with family across the country.

Happy Trails with much gratitude!

Lissa Dwyer
ORTA Board Member

News from the Greenbelt Foundation

Upcoming Engagement on the Trail's Preferred Route, Experience, and Amenities

We are excited to let you know about an upcoming engagement process to help shape the future of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail.

The Trail's Optimum Route was developed by ORTA staff and volunteers in 2003 through discussions with municipalities and conservation authorities. At the time, a key objective was to move the trail from private lands onto publicly owned lands wherever possible.

More than two decades later, much has changed. Growth and development pressures, evolving community needs, changing recreation trends, and the recent release of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy have created an opportunity to revisit the route and consider a broader range of perspectives and priorities.

This September, we will host three open houses with the Greenbelt Foundation, marking the first public engagement opportunity in more than two decades. We will invite trail users, landowners, community members, partners, and anyone with an interest in the Oak Ridges Moraine to share their ideas.

Together, we'll explore important questions such as where there are opportunities to improve trail network connections, safety, and the overall route; what places, landscapes, and experiences the trail can help people access and



discover; and what features, amenities, and experiences people would like to see along the trail.

These sessions are about building excitement, gathering diverse perspectives, and creating a shared vision for the Trail. For those unable to attend in person, an online survey will also be available to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate.

Stay tuned for upcoming announcements about open house dates, locations, and ways to get involved. In the meantime, you can sign up for project updates or share your comments and questions through our online form [here](#).

Article Submitted by:

Samantha Bennett
Program Coordinator,
Greenbelt Foundation

For more information about the Greenbelt visit:

www.greenbelt.ca

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor

The Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay returned for its second consecutive year on June 13, 2026, and if the energy on course was any indication, this race is firmly back on its feet. The field this year wasn't the biggest the relay has ever seen, but it was a meaningful jump from 2025: fifteen full relay teams and five half relay teams (up from eleven and one in 2025, respectively) and a total of 183 racers took on the 14-stage course across the heart of the moraine, from the shores of Rice Lake all the way to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex. It was once again a beautiful weather day- clear skies and sunny all day across the moraine- which no doubt helped stoke the attitudes across the race course.



Canoists off to the races on a beautiful day for paddling!
Photo by Carolyn Reesor.

From the starting shoreline...

A little after 7:00AM, full relay teams began to gather at Gore's Landing on Rice Lake for the canoe start, with checkpoint captain Carolyn Reesor and the rest of her team welcoming, registering, and mustering canoes and paddlers. Kim Aagaard oversaw the proceedings- including the procession of paddlers to the water led by bagpiper Lance Dutchak- and offered participants both a glimpse into ORTA's purpose and values, as well as a scouting report on what they were in for on the water. Then the boats were floated, aligned off the end of our hosts' dock, and at 8:08AM paddles were in the water and the race was underway!

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor

Less than an hour later, Kim was back giving some education and instruction to the half relay participants for the start of their race in Bewdley (CP2), where Debi Van Herrewegen and her crew were in position to receive the full relay canoe finishers and send the half relay teams on their way.

Stage 1: Canoe (Gore's Landing to Bewdley, 8 km)

New Chimpanas were first out of the water, completing the Rice Lake paddle in 59:42 to lead the field off the opening stage. It's a rare race where we don't end up with at least a couple soggy participants, and this year was no exception- Val Dodge and the rest of the safety boat crew (generously provided by our Checkpoint 1 hosts!) fished one set of tipped canoists out of the drink part-way to Bewdley, and helped another dealing with a broken paddle.

...into the Ganny...

Stage 2: Bike (Bewdley to Ganaraska Forest Centre, 18km)

Stage 3: Run (GFC to Ganaraska P2 parking, 11km)

From Bewdley, the relay moved into the Ganaraska, with cyclists covering all manner of trail surfaces over 18km from the Bewdley waterfront to the Ganaraska Forest Centre. CLOCanuts won Stage 2 for the second year in a row in a time of 47:07, putting down an early marker.

Nancy Mungall and her CP3 crew at the Ganaraska Forest Centre kept the checkpoint running smoothly as teams rolled through, and volunteer Andrea Robertson deserves recognition for literally loaning the shoes off her feet to a racing team member who showed up in sandals (originally planning to only paddle, this racer stepped into the Ganaraska run at the last minute due to a cancellation by one of her team members!).

Durham Hot Pot took the top time on Stage 3, the 11 km run to Ganaraska P2 (0:53:38), with co-captains Wendy Morihovitis, Tanya Lindsay, and Jane Beakbane holding down CP4-IN at the Ganaraska P2 Parking Lot.

A special thank-you from this author and Stage 3 racer to Bill Morrison for hiking halfway into this section of the course to provide a friendly face and reassuring mid-stage cheering-and-directional aide.

A special mention is also warranted here for Bob Comfort- Bob was on the course all day as a safety sweep for lost racers, and (perhaps as to be expected) this stage of the Ganaraska caused the most stress. A few racers added some extra km to their day due to missed turns on this stage, but with Bob's help everyone made it out eventually.

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor



The Checkpoint 4-OUT team. Photo courtesy of Tessa Shelvey.

...along the highways and byways of Clarington...

Stage 4: Run (Beaucage Road to Darlington/Clarke Townline, 8km)

Stage 5: Run (Darlington/Clarke Townline to Long Sault, 11km)

Just as ORTA's trail currently has a gap around Highway 35/115, so does our race. As inbound runners finished stage 3 at Ganaraska P2, the Checkpoint 4-IN team called over to Tessa Shelvey and John McCuaig (captaining Checkpoint 4-OUT on the west side of 35/115) to send the outbound runners off on their ramble over to Olivia Petrie's well-oiled machine at Checkpoint 5. CLOCAnuts added their second stage win of the day on this Stage 4 with a time of 0:36:39. There were a couple of temporarily misplaced racers on this section of the course as well, which Bob and the checkpoint captains managed expertly. The racers and organizers are additionally grateful to Tessa, John, Libby Hodgson, and Mike Baker for flagging some poison ivy overgrowth on this stage on race-day eve and quickly arranging a re-route.

Stage 5 runners headed north out of Olivia's checkpoint, eventually turning west to enter Long Sault and wind their way into Teri Tworzyanski's Checkpoint 6 after 11 hard km. TRCA Underdogs topped the field on this section with a time of 49:36.

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor



The Oak Ridges Trail Association's
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...sailing through Scugog...

Stage 6: Bike (Long Sault to Purple Woods, 19 km)

Stage 7: Bike (Purple Woods to Durham Forest/Houston Road, 17.5 km)

Racing teams switched over to their bikes for the next two stages of the race; first, a sandy shot from Checkpoint 6 over to Julie Nettleton at Checkpoint 7- Durham Hot Pot won this Stage 6, with a time of 44:26. Julie's team had company at their checkpoint from representatives of Electrolit, our race's hydration sponsor.

Eventual elite division champs Jefferson Crew announced their intentions on Stage 7, winning the road-and-trail ride from Purple Woods over to Durham Forest bike in 41:43- the first of three stage wins for their team. Nancy Hogue and her team welcomed finishers of this stage with an expertly-run Checkpoint 8 at Concession 7 and Houston Road, and were joined by representatives from checkpoint sponsor Second Wedge.

...climbing the ski hill...

Stage 8: Run (Houston Road to Trail Hub, 5 km)...Half Relay Finish

Jefferson Crew kept the hammer down on Stage 8, a 5km technical trail run from

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor

Houston+7th to Trail Hub, completing it in an impressive 22:12. Stage 8 is also the final stage of the half relay, and CP9 at Trail Hub was buzzing with activity. Neil Runnalls and Ruth Patterson ran the show at CP9, receiving half-relay finishers while also directing full-relay teams back out onto the course.

The half relay was a photo finish, with less than a minute separating the top two teams; White Water Warriors grabbed the top spot with a total Bewdley-to-Trail Hub time of 7:49:41, and RVA Trailblazers was right behind them with a time of 7:50:21.

...navigating a chain of Uxbridge forests...

Stage 9: Bike (Trail Hub to Secord Pond, 15 km)

Stage 10: Run (Secord to 10th line and Bloomington 7.5 km)

The second half of the race is where its length is truly felt. The half relay teams have ended their day, thinning the field. Teams that were competing in a tight pack over the first few checkpoints have seen the distance between them grow- participants might traverse these sections without seeing another racer. And individual racers might be tagging in for their second, or third (or fourth??) stage of the day on tired legs. Despite the drawn-out action and long days, our checkpoint volunteers on the back half of the course do an incredible job of keeping the energy high!



Racers staging for departure from checkpoint 10.

Photo by Joanne Baker.

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor

Racers heading out from Trail Hub are treated to a tough-but-gorgeous mountain bike segment taking them through several Uxbridge area forests on a 15km ride over to Secord Conservation Area. Blaze and Bytes did this leg the fastest, with a time of 42:08. Joanne Baker and her Checkpoint 10 team had a real trek lugging their checkpoint materials in from the parking area almost 1km to a reedy clearing on trail where their checkpoint was set up, but their spirit made for an upbeat arrival for inbound bikers and smooth departure for runners heading out for a mucky Stage 10 run over to Stouffville. Elite team Fast Fred's took their first stage win of the day on this stage in a time of 43:49.

...traversing Stouffville by road and by trail...

Stage 11: Bike (10th/Bloomington to Hollidge Tract, 11.5 km)

Stage 12: Run (Hollidge Tract to McCowan/Jesse Thomson, 8km)

Stage 13: Bike (McCowan/Jesse Thomson to Evans Park/Aurora, 13 km)

Mike Gurski and his enthusiastic crew set up roadside at Checkpoint 11, receiving the muddy Stage 10 racers inbound from Secord, and sending a wave of Stage 11 cyclists north to York Regional Forest, Hollidge Tract. Largely on paved road, this is one of the quickest bike legs in the race; Dracula Shtafengers led the pack by doing this stage in 28:18.

Checkpoint 12, set up near the Bill Fisch Centre in the Hollidge Tract, was captained by Scott Heaslip. Scott and his team loudly welcomed the incoming bikers (check out Facebook for some great videos of the arrivals!) and guided runners outbound on Stage 12; an 8km zig-zag through several York Regional Forest tracts to arrive at Valerie and Jim Tettmar's Checkpoint 13. TRCA Underdogs picked up another stage win on this run with a time of 34:59.

Valerie and Jim ran a lean but efficient crew on the side of McCowan and Jesse Thomson road, sending off bikers on the relay's penultimate stage; another largely-paved road stretch (with a quick duck through the Robinson Tract) over to Aurora. Hellbent on Nature took the top time on this Stage 13 ride with 27:19.

...and a sprint to the end!

Stage 14: Run (Evans Park to Aurora Family Leisure Centre, 5 km)

After spending her morning volunteering out east at Checkpoint 3, Anna Sunn spent her afternoon and evening captaining Checkpoint 14. Anna and her team of family and other volunteers safely welcomed 15 bikers in and wished 15 runners well on their "sprint to the finish" run up the Aurora urban trail system. Jefferson Crew wrapped up a dominant day with a Stage 14 win on the 5.5 km urban run to the Aurora Family Leisure Centre finish line, clocking 21:42 to seal the overall title.

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor

The finish line was captained by Lissa Dwyer and staffed by a deep roster of raucous volunteers armed with cowbells, clappers, and hours of enthusiasm to bring home the final finishers with the warmth and celebration the relay deserves.

Results

Jefferson Crew crossed the line first with a total time of 10:26:47 to take the Elite division title – more than 50 minutes clear of second-place Fast Fred's (11:19:21).

Time spent in checkpoints isn't counted in the recreational division; CLOCAnuts were the top group in this division of 12 teams with a time-on-course of 10:56:28. Stouffvillains were the runners up in the rec league, with a time of 11:55:25.

As mentioned, the half relay winners White Water Warriors took the top spot with a time-on-course of 7:49:41, narrowly edging the runner up RVA Trailblazers' 7:59:20 time.

Messages of Appreciation

As is exceedingly obvious given the length of the race-day write-up above: none of this can happen without a deep roster of willing race-day volunteers. Staffing 16



Photo taken at the Goodwood Community Centre during the Volunteer Training Session in advance of the event. ORTA members have embraced the Adventure Relay as a unifying experience and service to the wider community of outdoor enthusiasts on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Volunteering Makes a Difference!

Checkpoint to Checkpoint

Special Moments on the Adventure Relay by Jeremy Reesor

locations on race day takes a staggering number of willing hands to not only cheer on runners and record times, but to scout locations, plan logistics, coordinate materials, mark the route, and anything else that might come up on race day.

Not only do our volunteers build and execute the logistics of race day, but they are also the highlight of the event for so many racers! Your friendly and helpful attitudes, information and advice about the trails, and general companionship while racers wait for an inbound teammate or a ride is loudly valued by our racers in their feedback.

A few folks deserve special mention: **Karen Graham**, **Anna Sunn**, and **Olivia Petrie**. All of these folks were helping steer race day with regular meetings and logistical duties starting back in late 2025, and all of them were also out staffing checkpoints on race day.

A special thank-you as well to Michele **Donnelly** for working behind the scenes to coordinate all the permits and permissions needed for the race!

But if there's one person without whom the 2026 Adventure Relay literally would not have happened, it's our **Race Director Jacquelin Heichert**. With an event like this that's distributed across such a wide geography and with so many individual checkpoints to coordinate, a central brain is needed. Jacquelin's willingness to step forward and provide hers for the cause is what allowed the race to continue in 2026.

Every one of the 120+ volunteers heard from **Jacquelin** at some point via email, at training night, or just reading their Volunteer Guide, and that's to say nothing of the countless sponsorship and other leads she chased down to enhance the race for our participants, beautiful social media posts promoting the race, and other assorted odds and ends associated with getting 183 participants across 160km of trail. She approached all of it with extraordinary detail, organization, and care.

Jacquelin has poured an enormous amount of herself into continuing and growing this event into something the ORTA community can be genuinely proud of. Thank you so much for throwing yourself at this unique challenge!

