

## **A HISTORY OF THE GEORGE E. WAHLEN VETERANS TRIBUTE RUN and CHILI COOK-OFF**

(written September 2019)

As the date for the 12<sup>th</sup> annual George E. Wahlen Veterans Tribute Run and Chili Cook-off approaches, the history of this event and how it came to be needs to be documented. After more than a century of ministry in the downtown area of Ogden, the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) congregation made the decision to relocate to a more open and spacious property within the town of Marriott-Slaterville. The first service of the relocated First United Methodist Church was held In April 2008, with dedication ceremonies in May.

As the congregation reflected on the significance of this move, there were challenges to be met, one of which was to determine how best to become a major partner in the life of Marriott-Slaterville and the greater Ogden area. One such decision was to plan and host a 5K run and one-mile walk which would begin and finish in the parking area of the church. This event was promoted as the “Harvest Run and Chili Cook-off.” It was held the last Saturday of October, 2008, with proceeds supporting the church and a few area charitable organizations. The events held in 2008 and 2009 had very low participation.

For the upcoming 2010 event, the FUMC committee decided to seek a more permanent relationship with a single charitable organization. At this same time, the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home had finished construction and was accepting residents. The new veterans’ home was “just around the corner” from the First United Methodist Church. The FUMC committee reached out to the new veterans’ home activities director with the 5K run and chili cook-off proposal. The activities director indicated there were limited funds available in the residents’ activity fund from either federal or state sources. The FUMC committee proposal to donate funds to the veterans’ home was accepted by the state officer assigned to the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home (Kim Wixon). The condition of acceptance included that donations would directly benefit the residents of the home, and not be used for other financial uses (e.g. buy furniture, facility maintenance, overhead financial requirements). Mr. Wixon explained a financial account existed that would separate all donations of this type for “only” the benefit of the residents. As a result of this agreement, both the First United Methodist Church and the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home became co-sponsors for this event.

From the 2010 event through the 2013 event, the veterans’ run and chili cook-off continued to grow in participation and monetary support of the activities fund for the veterans’ home. The event was retitled the “Veterans Fun run and Chili Cook-Off.” For these years, donations to the activities fund averaged approximately \$3000 to \$3500 per year.

Beginning with year 2014 and through 2018, there were several significant changes to the event. The name was changed to the “George E. Wahlen Veterans Tribute Run and Chili Cook-off.” This name change better represented the event and informed the community that donations from registration fees from the run and walk and the chili cook-off would be used to benefit the residents of the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home. For year 2017, a 10K race was added. With this addition, it attracted many dedicated distance runners to our event, which ultimately led to a significant increase in participants. Two other additions also had a significant positive influence. The American Red Cross brought a bloodmobile for

those who wanted to donate blood. Also, a member of the FUMC congregation was involved with the 501<sup>st</sup> Legion. The 501<sup>st</sup> Legion is an all-volunteer organization which promotes interest in Star Wars through wearing of costumes and contributes to the local community through charity and volunteer work. This was an immediate hit with everyone in attendance, regardless of age. Also beginning in year 2017, “Des ta Te” the bald eagle from the Ogden Nature Center, has been on display. The eagle’s appearance added greatly to our family activities for those attending the post-run/walk and chili cook-off activities. With these family oriented additions--along with the races, the walk, and the chili cookers--there was a significant increase in race and walk registrations and attendance at post-race activities. As a result of these changes, donations to the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home activity fund increased dramatically. Approximately \$47,000 has been donated over the last five years.

During the past eleven years, community support has been greatly appreciated. The Marriott-Slaterville City staff has been especially helpful. When approached for donations, the greater Ogden business community sponsors—too numerous to name—responded with donations, both goods and cash, that had a value of at least \$6,000 for many of these years. These donations were used as prizes for our many race/walker participants. Many sponsors have contributed for multiple years.

The veterans run committee believes the “George E. Wahlen Veterans Tribute Run and Chili Cook-off” has become a recognized community event with its support for our veterans. Presentation of the donations to the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home typically occurs around Veterans Day recognition in November. A highlight of the donation presentation for the 2017 event was the presenting of the check by a 95-year old WWII veteran member of the First United Methodist Church to a veteran resident of the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home.

For the past several years, the George E. Wahlen Tribute Run and Chili Cook-off event has been highlighted by the participation of many members of the George E. Wahlen family, both in the running /walking events and at post-event activities. Mrs. Melba Wahlen, widow of George E. Wahlen, has attended both the post-race activities and the donation+ presentation. It has been a privilege to have Mrs. Wahlen attend these events and recognize her presence.

It is our hope to continue the George E. Wahlen Veterans Tribute Run and Chili Cook-off well into the future to recognize the contributions by our veterans and say thanks for their service and sacrifice to our nation.