Anyone cheeky enough to call the River City Runners’ symbol a pace bunny risks a good thumping. It’s a snowshoe hare with hind legs build for speed. They’re fast year-round, they thrive year-round (even through the harsh Edmontonian winter), and they gather at 6 a.m., six days a week.

“There’s usually a marathon group that is training for sub-three hours and another training for around 3:10,” says Nick Keyko, who along with Kacey Keyko (Nick and Kacey are married) and Kendall Barber, founded the crew in late 2014.

With around a dozen runners committed to the crew, casual joiners are also welcome for speed work or other training. Members are earnest about their big goals, and the hard work required to chase them. In over a year running together, the positives are measurable.

“My marathon time has improved by over 14 minutes from a 3:16 to a 3:02, and my half-marathon fell from over 1:13 to 1:25,” says Barber, who met Kacey Keyko after the two connected on social media. The crew has a sophisticated online presence, but face-to-face interactions are the real draw for the friendships they foster. “Fun, big-hearted people who love to run, train and race,” says Barber when asked to name the best part of the RCR crew.

“I’ve learned so much and have had so much fun,” adds Josh Bergman, one of the crew’s newest members. “From peak marathon training to the Vancouver Half-Marathon to Sinister 7 to the culmination of my first marathon with them all waiting at the finish line for me.”

They also explore Edmonton’s more than 150K club scene.
of multi-use trails. As the largest urban park in North America, it’s 22 times larger than Manhattan’s Central Park. The crew’s year-round favourite is the Bird House Trail. With a canopy of trees overhead and a river alongside, it’s impressive in any season. Other top routes include River Valley Road for intervals and Hawrelak Park for race pace. “These places are associated with that good pain that comes with hard work-outs,” says Kacey Keyko. “There’s a quiet reassurance that you’re in it together.”

Of equal import to runs at dawn and a need for speed is the crew’s community service.

Over two years, an annual 24-hour treadmill initiative has raised over $60,000 for Kids in Action, an after-school running program for 200 kids at seven local schools. Participating elementary-aged kids train through the school year for a spring 5k, where training includes coaching, a healthy meal (often the children’s most nutritious and fulfilling meal of the day) and new shoes.

The #RCR24H initiative was born after a Kids in Action race in 2014, when one crew member ran with a young girl who suffered the entire 5k in ill-fitting, non-running shoes. Many other kids that May race day were seen running in snow boots and Crocs.

“So we decided to run for 24 hours to raise enough money to buy the all of the kids new running shoes,” says Nick, who explains that funds are raised by treadmill and spinning spots sold for a 24-hour group run and cycling event.

“That huge engagement from yogis, runners, personal trainers and others has carried through to this year and it’s great to see,” says Nick.

Other RCR events include Darkest Night YEG, an 8k on the winter solstice, and Run Collective every Wednesday.

“Being active in the broader Edmonton run community has made my heart swell,” says Kacey.

Tania Haas is a regular contributor to Canadian Running.