

Employee Spotlight: Erica Larson Baron

May 31, 2016



Fleet feet

If you're a runner at a mountain trail race in New Mexico or even beyond, chances are you'll see Erica Larson Baron twice: once as she drops you in the first couple of miles and once at the finish line, cooling off as everyone else trickles in.

She's that fast. And she's fast over long distances. The 2012 USA Track & Field 50K trail champion, Erica is a top distance runner with the résumé to prove it. Besides winning the Pikes Peak Marathon a record-setting five times, not just surviving but conquering its 7,815 feet of elevation gain and 14,114-foot summit, Erica also regularly crushes the Jemez Mountain trail races at various distances, including taking third place overall and first among women in the 15-mile race in May 2016. She was just 1 minute 32 seconds behind the second place finisher. (See sidebar.)

In the 2013 Pajarito Trailfest 10K, Erica beat 57 other runners—men and women—and finished nearly four minutes ahead of the runner-up. Then in the 2015 Valles Caldera 10K, she beat 142 other runners to take overall first place.

No wonder even experienced, highly competitive runners around here call her the best.

Better without the basketball

Photo

by Jim Stein.

Erica has been a runner since junior high, when she figured out she was better at running up and down the basketball court without getting tired than she was with the basketball. Encouraged by her high school coaches, she ran for Marquette University in Milwaukee, then tried marathons and the Pikes Peak ascent—uphill only, with middling results. So when Erica moved to Los Alamos to join the Laboratory as a chemist in 1998, she had her eye on Pikes Peak and found her new home's high altitude and steep trails made the perfect training ground. "I was excited to have all the trails and mountain running," she says. Baron trains on the network of trails weaving through the mountains around Los Alamos, running five days a week on breaks from her job on a team of database developers and system administrators in the Information Systems and Modeling (A-1) group. On weekends, she pushes herself on long, sometimes four-hour jaunts deeper into the mountains west of town or among the peaks of the nearby Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

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"I really like the outdoors and being on the trails," Erica says. "Exercise in general is really good for stress relief and general health. I feel much better when I run." Her weekday runs often deliver a workaday payback: "When I'm stuck on a problem, it really helps to go for a run. More often than not I've figured out the answer by the time I get back."

"Competition on my heels"

Photo

by Jim Stein.

Erica claims to have slowed down in recent years as she entered her 40s, but she remains a top runner and admits to being highly competitive, which her calm demeanor belies.

"Sometimes certain people will also sign up for a race I'm in, and I see them as a challenge that will push me," she says. But often as not, she's the one with the target on her back. "The longer I do this, there are more and more young people who are getting older and stronger, and I wonder.... I know there are definitely competitors on my heels that weren't before."

For now, most of those would-be challengers are likely to see nothing but Erica's heels crossing the finish line.

Racing highlights

- First place, Jemez Mountain Trail Run, 15-mile run (2016)
- Two-time winner of the Jemez 50K (2008 and 2015)
- Overall winner (among men and women) of the Valles Caldera 10K (2015)
- Fastest woman, La Luz Trail Run (2003, 2010, 2012, and 2015)
- Three-time winner of the Jemez Mountain 15-mile race (2011, 2013, and 2014)
- Member of the bronze-medal-winning U.S. Mountain Running Team, world championships, Italy (2004)
- Overall winner among (men and women) of the Pajarito Trail Fest 10K (2013)
- USA Track & Field trail champion, Flagline 50K, Oregon (2012)
- Five-time winner of the Pikes Peak Marathon (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2004)
- Winner of the Leadville (Colorado) Marathon (2004)
- Placed thirty-fourth in Olympic Marathon Trials (2004)
- Current member of the U.S. national snowshoe racing team.

Erica Larson Baron works as a database developer and system administrator in the Information Systems and Modeling (A-1).

Resources

- Read Erica's own account of her 2012 USATF trail [championship win](#) in Oregon.
- Review her race record at the race-management website [UltraSignup](#).
- A local running blogger who compiled a [Tough Guy List](#) calls Erica "an incredible runner" in a discussion of the top 14 trail runners in New Mexico since the 1960s. A local running blogger who compiled a [Tough Guy List](#) calls Erica "an incredible runner" in a discussion of the top 14 trail runners in New Mexico since the 1960s.
- Race photos by Jim Stein. Portrait by Brian Clayton.

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