



Ray Collins goes

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ONE

with John Korff

## JOHN KORFF

**J**ohn Korff may be the most famous new resident of Sarasota who not everyone has heard of . . . yet. He's a Harvard Business School graduate, founded the New York City Triathlon, raised millions of dollars for charity, run more than 140 marathons and **Tennis Magazine** named him one of the sport's 50 most influential people. Korff's extensive event resume includes organizing this summer's 33rd annual Quick Chek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning. Perhaps his most impressive accomplishment (and certainly the one he is most proud of), is that the 63-year old has three children under ten with his wife Leslie.



Nine years into it I realized this was my job and I enjoyed it. Organizing a big tennis tournament is like throwing a party for 50,000 guests I didn't know. I did this for almost 25 years.

### What sort of tennis player are you?

I'm a fan, but I prefer running or lifting weights.

### How did you discover Sarasota?

I'm married with three little kids. After selling my business (2013), which included the New York City Triathlon, we wanted to move. I entered the criteria we were looking for in a Google search (schools, weather, cost of living, values) and up popped Sarasota.



Ray Collins and John Korff

Along with partners Tony Driscoll and Molly Jackson, Korff started the highly successful Sarasota Music Half Marathon ([sarasotahalf.com](http://sarasotahalf.com)). The inaugural race sold out with 2,000 runners and walkers making it the largest first year running event in Sarasota. The 2016 race is on pace to sell out with 3,000 entrants. It goes without saying that Sarasota has been a good fit.

### Why did you start the Sarasota Music Half Marathon?

Molly Jackson, Tony Driscoll and I started the Sarasota Music Half Marathon because we felt there was no 'must-do' running event in Sarasota. We wanted music, an iconic course and a great after party. I'd been involved in the New York City Marathon where we had about 100 bands and it was electric. The first year's race sold out with 2,000 runners and we're over halfway towards our goal of a second year sellout with 3,000 runners. Personally, I wanted to produce a race Sarasota had never seen. I think we were successful since nearly 1,500 people registered on race day for the following year. Best yet, 22 community organizations made over \$25,000 from the race.



**Sarasota Music  
Half Marathon**

### Where were you born and what was your childhood like?

I was born in Chicago and lived in a suburb north of the city. I was a normal kid, normal childhood – Boy Scout, school sports, three sisters, student council; nothing out of the ordinary.

### What first got you interested in running?

I got into running in high school to lose weight for wrestling. A few years later I realized I was a better runner than a wrestler, but I loved wrestling. I was zero for seven years as a wrestler. I finally won a match my senior year in college. But I loved wrestling workouts, especially running and running the stairs.

### What made you a better runner than so many others?

I was a relatively fast marathon runner (2:36), but I didn't like the pressure of running sub 6 minute miles. I started running 50 mile races but found the pressure to run fast too much. I could do 50 miles in about six hours, which is two 3 hour marathons – give or take. I hit my stride running 100 mile trail runs where the goal was to finish under 24 hours. Quite simply, I was a good runner because my feet moved fast. I did modest speed work. Everyone has their internal cadence and mine happened to be a fast cadence. Running is also very time efficient.

### When and how did you realize you could make a living out of your passion?

I always enjoyed organizing large events. After grad school I started a women's professional tennis tournament in suburban New Jersey. It was the US Open tune-up and all the top players entered.

### Are you still working full-time?

I decided to take some time off and that lasted until 11 am on Day 2. I have no interest in retiring or working part time. I can only spend so much time at the gym or running, so work it is.

### How much of the year do you plan to spend here?

We live in Sarasota full time.

### Do you have a mantra or philosophy to which you aspire?

I like owning my own business but that's not for everyone. I want to have fun and set a good example through work for my kids. I still own the 33rd annual Quick Chek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and my kids love it. I don't have a mantra but I love the events I organize. I like throwing big parties like the Sarasota Music Half Marathon.

### What goals do you have left?

I have an "Act Three" in my future. Act one was the tennis tournament. Act two was the NYC Triathlon. Act three is what's next. I've produced other events along the way (balloon festivals, golf tournaments, concerts). I'm excited about my future. I'm excited about Sarasota.

**Ray Collins is a TV newscaster on ABC 7 and a media consultant. More details at [www.RayCollinsMedia.com](http://www.RayCollinsMedia.com)**