

It's hard to believe that the origin of the Iowa Speed Track Club occurred around one Iowa City family's kitchen table more than a dozen years ago.

"Our family decided we needed to start this club," said Heather Woody, who co-founded the organization with her husband Joey. "We sat around the kitchen table 11 years ago and decided to do it because we love track and field and we love positive attitudes, experiences and environments for athletes, kids and coaches. So, we felt the need to step up, do our part and create this opportunity.

"We also have children and wanted to add value to their lives through something fun. Joey and I originally started this on our own, but now we have amazing coaches, parent volunteers and others that give of themselves to make this happen. It has been awesome, with tons of hard work and long hours, but it's amazing!"

With a driving passion for not only the sport — both were successful Division I collegiate athletes at the University of Northern Iowa before Joey went on to race the Professional Track and Field Circuit for 11 years — but also for developing young athletes in their own community and state.

So, the Woody team devotes their energy and enthusiasm, along with their expertise to the sport, while building a positive, motivating environment for all athletes

Needless to say, the Woodys, and Iowa City, have never looked back, growing the club from their initial 20 athletes to more than 300 members.

With a core focus on developing each individual athlete, teaching the fundamentals of track and field, deepening understanding around proper mechanics and technique and allowing each individual to learn in a fun, motivating and challenging environment, the club has quickly evolved..

Over the years, they've added such unique programs as the Mental Edge Academy and the One Mile of Good Challenge.

Recognizing the importance of an athlete's mental aspect and its critical related life skills, the club seeks to inspire excellence and teach athletes how to manage themselves and their emotions, as well as how to support team members. Their hope is that this will serve them well through out the course of their educational and athletic lives, and careers.

In the One Mile of Good Challenge program, club athletes and coaches embark upon a journey to complete 5,280 Acts of Kindness throughout each season, or one act of kindness for each of the 5,280 feet in a mile.

While USATF Iowa supports many such running clubs throughout the state, Heather can't put her finger on any one thing that makes Iowa Speed different.

"I'm not sure what sets us apart. While I think every club is unique and awesome, I can only speak to ours," said Heather. "We are all about teaching, positivity, fun, confidence building, and challenging ourselves and our athletes. That is our mission. We believe in the Finish Strong mentality. We want every kid to have the opportunity.

"The benefits our athletes and families talk about are that they feel welcome, positive and loved, and that they learn a ton of awesome stuff with us. They love the energy and enthusiasm we all bring and they feel their athletes get better as people and as athletes," she said.

Joey and Heather Woody serve as head coaches for the club. Joey is also Director/Head Coach of Men's and Women's Track and Field at the University of Iowa; a former University of Northern Iowa runner specializing in the 400m hurdles, 800m and relays; and the 2003 World Champion in the 4x400m relay and the 400m hurdles Silver Medalist in the World Championships at Paris, France.

The biggest thing Joey brings to the table, said Heather, is his excellence in training and technique..

"He is excellent at calibrating workouts to the age/abilities of our athletes. He has a passion for working with these good, young people and wants to see them improve for their own good," she said.

Heather serves as chief of Motivation and Coach for Iowa Speed Track & Field. A 2017 National Youth Sports Coach of the Year and an indoor and outdoor All-American in the 4x400m for Simpson College and the University of Northern Iowa, she also held the role of Team Captain, earning MVC Honors in the 400m, 600m and relays.

Iowa Speed offers both a youth program (kindergarten through 6th grade, fall 2023) and a junior high and high school program. The club works with each athlete in sprints, distance, and jumps, and will also work with throwers (if there is interest in the throwing events). High School athletes must live within 50 miles or less of

the University of Iowa in order to participate. No athletes living outside the 50 mile radius will be allowed to participate due to NCAA rules.

Iowa Speed Track & Field has been represented by numerous athletes at both the USA Track and Field and AAU Junior Olympic National Meets. National champions have included Gabbie Schroeder (2014), 10U Turbo Javelin; Isabelle Woody (2014) Isabelle Woody, 10U High Jump; and Maddie Fischer (2017), Discus.

From simple beginnings at the Woody kitchen table, to an environment of more than 300 athletes, the Iowa Speed Track and Field Club has come a long way in its 12 years of existence.

And it's all thanks to the passion, commitment and enthusiasm of an Iowa City athletic couple.

"It's been awesome. It's also been tons of hard work and long hours, but really, it's been totally amazing!" she added.