

# Fleet Feet takes steps towards healthy Carrboro community

By Ben Coley  
Sports Editor  
The Carrboro Commons

With over 150 locations in 37 states, Fleet Feet Inc. is the largest franchisor of running specialty stores in the United States.

But the headquarters isn't located in the sunny city of San Francisco, the bustling market of Baltimore or the humongous metropolis of Houston. The brains of the operation are comfortably nestled above the Fleet Feet store located on East Main Street in Carrboro – a community that comprises just fewer than 21,000 residents.

"If you look at where main running businesses are located, I'd categorize it this way: Boston, Portland, Seattle, Boulder to some extent and Carrboro, North Carolina," said George Linney, the marketing and outreach coordinator for the Carrboro and Durham franchises.

Fleet Feet is a store intended for runners. Their shelves are stocked with running shoes, nutritional bars, foam rollers and heart rate monitors.

The company was founded in 1976 in Sacramento, California. Tom Raynor, who had previously worked with Nike and Brooks Sports, purchased the company in 1993.

Raynor, originally from the East Coast, wanted to open a corporate office closer to his home. He decided to hire Chris Bevin, the original founder of Carrboro's Fleet Feet, to run the new corporate office. The headquarters officially moved to Carrboro in 2003.

Fleet Feet has grown tremendously since 2003. In eight of the past nine years, Inc. Magazine has placed Fleet Feet on its list of 5,000 fastest growing private companies in the U.S.

Linney listed several benefits to having Carrboro as a headquarters: It's where some of the key people live, it's close to an airport, and it's a convenient location for operation – partly due to Carrboro's fitness demand.

"I definitely think Carrboro is health-conscious type of town," Linney said. "We'd like to think that we're contributing to that healthy lifestyle."



**Sales associate Nicole Mogensen checks the jacket sizes at Fleet Feet. Carrboro's Fleet Feet – the company's headquarter—sells running apparel and offers training programs for the community. (Staff photo by Ben Coley)**

One of these contributions includes the Pub Run – a weekly running group that is held every Monday and Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. Runners gather in front of Carrboro's Fleet Feet and run a route that eventually ends at YesterYears Brewery. Runners can choose between routes of three, four and five miles.

Nicole Mogensen, a sales associate at Carrboro's Fleet Feet, said the best part of her job is customer interaction.

*"I want customers to be empowered. I want them to have the right equipment and knowledge to start running and being active." - Mogensen*

Carrboro's Fleet Feet, along with the Durham franchise, offer more than 10 different training programs and serve approximately 1,000 clients.

Christen Campbell, who is a French teacher at Chapel Hill High School, has participated in the Pub Run an

Fleet Feet's Beat the Heat 5K with the Summer Speed Series.

"The community of runners in our group really helps you stay motivated regardless of the weather or the workout," Campbell said. "It's fun to work out with a diverse group of athletes while being coached by the best."

Linney would like each customer to share Campbell's feelings. He wants them to know about training programs, the store's relationship with Habitat for Humanity, or about the free yoga classes.

Linney hopes Fleet Feet gives customers an experience they didn't expect to have, one that cannot be matched by larger athletic outlets bas.

"(Customers) are thinking about those offers the next time they visit us," Linney said. "In their mind when they walked in, they say, 'I'm going to get a pair of shoes and come back a year later.' And quite frankly, that is pretty boring."

"It's more than just selling them a number of items. We're trying to leverage a relationship."