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## Coach, 78, still having fun

By [Lindsay Jones](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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WEST PALM BEACH — This time, Roy Chernock's retirement did not even last the summer.

After quitting his job as track and cross-country coach at Seminole Ridge High last spring, Chernock, 78, was finally ready to relax.

Roy Chernock

Age: 78

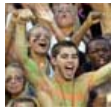
Family: Married to wife Ethel for 56 years. Two children; two grandchildren.

Current job: Cross-country and track coach at Palm Beach Central.

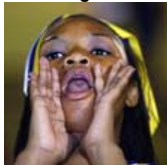
Previous local coaching jobs: John I. Leonard, twice; Suncoast, Wellington.

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For the first time since he graduated from college in 1950, Chernock was not going to be a coach.

It was a firm statement, even for Chernock, who had retired from coaching three times.

He intended to spend his days golfing. Maybe he would return to the track in the spring as an official. But coaching? No way.

"I decided this was it," Chernock said. "I even sent out an e-mail to all the track coaches saying that I'm finally hanging up my stopwatch."

But not even a full month into this retirement, a chance encounter with a parent at a movie theater and a phone call from Palm Beach Central Athletic Director Jeff Schwartz brought Chernock back to school. This season, Chernock coaches both the boys and girls cross-country teams at Central, and in the spring he will be in charge of the boys track team. Central is his third stop in three years, and his 12<sup>th</sup> head coaching job in 56 years.

"I knew he'd find another one," Chernock's wife, Ethel, said. "He's not the type to be puttering around the house."

The first retirement came in 1990, when Chernock stepped down after 12 years as the men's coach at the College of William &amp; Mary in Virginia.

He and Ethel moved to West Palm Beach, where Chernock quickly found a job as the girls cross-country coach at John I. Leonard High. He also has coached at Suncoast and Wellington, and he went back to John I. Leonard before retiring again after the 2004 track season. Then came a phone call from a former colleague asking if Chernock would be interested in starting cross-country and track programs at Seminole Ridge.

Chernock thought it sounded fun and accepted. By April, he decided it was not so enjoyable, and that's when he quit.

"I do this for fun, and if it ever becomes an aggravation, I move on," Chernock said.

Chernock was just beginning to enjoy retirement when a parent of a Palm Beach Central runner approached Chernock when he was at a movie theater with Ethel.

"Are you a track coach?" the parent asked.

"I was a track coach," Chernock replied.

The parent explained there was an opening at Central and asked if he could give Chernock's name to the athletic director. Chernock was hired in July.

Not surprising, the Broncos are having their best season. The girls team, led by junior Juliana Tabares, won its first major meet Friday at the John I. Leonard Invitational. At that meet, six runners - four boys and two girls - each ran personal best times.

"The athletes have been responding very well to him," Schwartz said.

That Chernock is still successful as a coach comes as no surprise to John Ghee, a Port St. Lucie accountant, who graduated from Chernock's track team at Oceanside High on Long Island in 1962.

Ghee is one of countless former runners from Chernock's past - from four colleges and two high schools before coming to Florida - who still consider Chernock a friend and mentor. Ghee said he never would have gone to college had it not been for Chernock's insistence and recommendation to the track coach at Virginia Tech. Ghee said he had no money and hitchhiked from Long Island to Blacksburg, Va. - more than a 500-mile trip. Ghee ended up with a track scholarship and a college degree.

"He was that one teacher that everyone remembers," Ghee said. "He's that one who makes a big difference in your life."

Jake Lawson, a 2004 John I. Leonard graduate, wanted to give Chernock something special at graduation so he ripped out the rubber finish line from the old Leonard stadium and had it framed for Chernock. That memento is now a centerpiece in Chernock's "museum." The suburban West Palm Beach house he shares with Ethel is a veritable museum, its walls covered with team photos and plaques and other mementos from his coaching career. In the closet are stacks of scrapbooks, filled with news clipping about his athletes.

Chernock was a talented athlete, but to find evidence of his career, you'll have to look deeper into the guest room closet and dig through the brown scrapbook with the big red F - his varsity letter from Flushing High in New York.

Inside there is a black-and-white photo from the front page of *The New York Times* sports section from the 1940s, showing Chernock as a sophomore in the lead during the first turn of an 800-meter race - his first competitive race.

"I think I dropped to dead last, but the picture still made the front page," Chernock said.

There are also the newspaper stories that documented his college career at New York University, where in 1949 he leapt 22 feet, 8 inches to win the long jump at the New York City Metropolitan League championships, helping his team win the title. He was inducted into the NYU athletic hall of fame in 1999.

Chernock can't keep up with his teen runners like he used to - not since having his hip replaced in 2001 - but as long as he's still having fun at Palm Beach Central he can't imagine retiring again.

"I still enjoy the kids and I think they still enjoy me," Chernock said. "So I guess I'll keep doing it, as long as my health is still decent."

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Other coaching jobs: Head coach at the College of William and Mary; Baruch (N.Y.) College; CW Post (N.Y.) College; assistant coach at Princeton University. Head coach at Oceanside (N.Y.) High and Jamaica (N.Y.) High.

Alma mater: Graduated from New York University in 1950. Inducted into NYU athletic Hall of Fame in 1999.

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