

New race set to benefit charity and county's tourism efforts

Half marathon might bring hundreds to area

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Hundreds of runners from around the region are expected to participate in the St. Charles Half Marathon that was created to spark economic development and tourism in the county while raising money for a local nonprofit.

The event will be held April 17 and 18.

Lennar home builders, American Community Properties Trust and the Charles County Department of Economic Development and Tourism are presenting the event in which it is hoped \$5,000 will be raised for the United Way of Charles County, said Craig Renner, ACPT spokesman.

Chick-fil-A and the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs are among the sponsors of the event that will kick off at 9 a.m. April 17 with a one-mile fun run along the Indian Head Rail Trail. A runners expo where race packets can be picked up will also be held that day from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Regency Furniture Stadium in St. Charles.

A little more than 300 runners have already registered to participate in the half marathon that is set to begin at 8 a.m. April 18 at the stadium, Renner said. The 13.1-mile route will run from the stadium on St. Linus Drive to Piney Church Road, Route 488, Radio Station Road, Rosewick Road, St. Charles Parkway and into the White Plains Golf Course. Runners will then continue on Billingsley Road to Piney Church Road and head back to the stadium.

Live music, hydration stations, medical support and cheer squads will be set up along the route, Renner said, adding that a local band will perform at the stadium after the half marathon during a post-race party that will also include an awards ceremony and refreshments.

Tech shirts and medals will be presented to half marathon winners, Renner said.

A 5K walk/run will kick off at 8:15 a.m. April 18 at the stadium, Renner said, adding that everyone who participates in the event will receive a T-shirt.

"There's going to be a great turnout," he said. "We really want to make this a successful event. There are great things going on in St. Charles and this weekend series of events will really highlight the county and our community."

The event will hopefully re-energize the slow local economy, said George L. Robertson, director of the county's department of economic development and tourism.

"Our goal is to increase the number of events and visitors to Charles County," he said. "So far, the response has been very good. The 5K run on the rail trail will give us an opportunity to expose people who might not have been there to a beautiful trail. This is going to be fun running weekend."

Dean Reinke, owner of Reinke Sports Group in Florida, said the half marathon is part of a 15-city nationwide series that is sponsored by the U.S. Runners Association. A half marathon held a couple of weeks ago in Arkansas drew 2,700 runners, he said, adding that the St. Charles event could easily draw 500 to 700 participants.

The runners association has signed a contract with ACPT and Lennar to hold the half marathon in St. Charles for three years, Reinke said.

"Our goal is to grow this into an annual event," he said, adding half marathons are becoming just as popular with runners as marathons. "Half marathons are fast-growing events. They're the new marathon."

The event is designed to increase tourism in Charles County by highlighting the stadium and the 13.2-mile rail trail that runs from White Plains to Indian Head, Reinke said.

"Something like this attracts tourists and a major event like this will really make Charles County stand out," he said "A lot of people are coming who have moved away from the area and want to come back for the half marathon. It will be a sort of homecoming event for them."

One such runner, Pennsylvania resident Tracy Sniscak, is coming home to St. Charles to run the half marathon. Her husband, Steve, will participate in the 5K walk/run with her 70-year-old dad, Waldorf resident Larry Archie.

Sniscak said she grew up in the Carrington neighborhood in St. Charles in the 1970s and 1980s. An avid participant in marathons, she said she wouldn't miss the chance to run the half marathon on her home turf.

"I saw an ad about the event and I said, 'Oh my gosh. I want to run that,'" she said. "St. Charles is the place that I lived the longest in my whole life. It's what I consider home."

Sniscak said she started running about four years ago when she moved to Pennsylvania. She has participated in many marathons in the region, including the U.S. Marine Corps Marathon held each year in Washington, D.C.

"I've always been into fitness and when I started running in Pennsylvania, one thing led to another," she said. "I kept pushing myself to go a little farther."

Archie said he used to run a lot in the 1970s and 1980s but a hip problem slowed him down a few years ago.

"I thought that biking and walking were boring but about five years ago on Thanksgiving morning a friend talked me into doing a 'turkey trot', a 5K walk," he said. "I loved it so I started walking on a regular basis and I got addicted to it. Now I walk about three miles three days a week."

Archie said he participates in many 5K walks in the area that benefit local nonprofit organizations.

"They always have food for you; it's nice," he said. "Plus, it helps keep my weight down and it makes me feel better. There are always a lot of people to walk with so I'm never bored."

For Mark MacFarland, ACPT's vice president of land development, the half marathon is a great way to start getting in shape.

"I've never really been a runner and I just hit a milestone, my 40th birthday, so this is a way to get fit," he said. "The half marathon is also positive publicity and it will help get our community a little more fit and active."

Nicole Stewart, an ACPT employee, said she and her husband, Brian, are going to participate in the half marathon even though they are not hardcore runners.

"It's going to be a serious challenge because we've never done it before," she said, adding that they have been training for the event. "We've been hitting the treadmill and running the rail trail with our dog.

"We're not going for a certain time," she added. "We'll do the best we can."

The event will draw attention to some of the county's best recreational features, said Donna Dudley, chief of tourism.

"This is a great way to bring visibility to two of Charles County's best amenities — the stadium and the Indian Head Rail Trail," she said. "It's going to be a good event for the county and St. Charles."

Run for a good cause

The St. Charles Half Marathon will be held April 17 and 18.

A one-mile fun run will kick off the weekend event at 9 a.m. April 17 at the White Plains entrance to the Indian Head Rail Trail.

The half marathon, part of a 15-city national series that is sponsored by the U.S. Running Association, will begin at 8 a.m. April 18 at Regency Furniture Stadium, 11765 St. Linus Drive, Waldorf. The route will wind through St. Charles and end at the stadium.

A 5K run/walk will begin at 8:15 a.m. April 18 at the stadium.

The registration fee for the half marathon is \$60. The 5K registration fee is \$25, and the fee to register for the fun run is \$10.

There will also be a St. Charles Half Marathon Military Team Challenge and a St. Charles 5K Military Team Challenge. The registration fee for each of the races is \$65.

Runners can register up to April 17, but registering as early as possible is recommended.

A portion of the proceeds from the event will benefit the United Way of Charles County.

For information about the marathon, volunteering and to register, go to www.stcharleshm.com.