

Naperville marathon raises funds for charities



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1 / 5

By Alex Keown,
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A crisp and chilly morning did not dampen the spirits of more than 6,000 runners taking part in the second annual Edward Hospital Naperville Marathon and Half Marathon Sunday.

With cheers, skips and fist pumping, runners took off at 7 a.m. from the starting line at Knoch, across from Naperville Central High School, to pound their way across a winding course through downtown Naperville and 26 area neighborhoods.

"This is something I really wanted to try," said Jason Case of Cambridge Springs, Penn., who drove eight hours to take part in the race.

Case, 40, said he wanted to compete in a marathon and thought the Naperville race was appealing, particularly because of the flat terrain.

"I have a lot of friends in Chicago and this looked like it would be a good first attempt at a marathon," Case said.

Being his first marathon Case said he wasn't concerned about a good race time, he just hoped he would be able to complete the 26.2 mile course.

Case wasn't the only first-time runner in Sunday's race. Naperville resident Cherie Pereja and Brian Moroney of

Downers Grove were also first-time races, each competing in the half marathon. Both Pereja, 35, and Moroney, 18, said they looked forward to the challenge of completing the 13-mile course.

It took approximately 10 minutes for the runners to cross the starting line and only slightly more than an hour before the first male runner, Jeff Purdom of New Lenox, completed the half-marathon with a time of 1:13:59. He was followed shortly by the first female, Amber White of Naperville, with a time of 1:18:24.

Yonni Mascote of Naperville was the winner of the full marathon with a time of 2:33:53. Marisa Hird, also of Naperville, was the first female to finish the marathon with a time of 2:50:57.

Craig Bixler, the race director, said he was really pleased with the way things went Sunday morning. After reviewing the first year's starting format, Bixler said they let runners leave all at once this year, rather than at staggered times, which worked well considering the number of runners more than doubled from 2013's 2,500 participants. Such a smooth beginning to the race would mean roads blocked off for the runners would be opened to traffic sooner than anticipated, Bixler said.

Naperville Mayor George Pradel said he's very pleased with the way the marathon has taken shape over the past two years. Calling Naperville a "running town," he said the community has embraced this race, as well as others such as the Turkey Trot, which draws about 7,000 runners annually. Pradel said residents have been quick to volunteer to help the marathon and other races be successful.

"This is the fastest growing marathon in the country," he said. "We doubled the number of runners from the first year, and everything is going great. We're already looking forward to next year's race."

The Naperville marathon serves as a qualifier for the Boston Marathon, which has allowed it to draw runners from across the United States as well as multiple countries.

Pradel said the marathon not only allows Naperville to be shown off to the runners who traveled from elsewhere to compete, but also serves as an economic boost to the city.

Some of the runners were running for more than fun or their own health, they were raising funds for local charities, including the Edward Foundation and two dozen others. Charity runners pay the registration fee, which is \$130 for the marathon and \$100 for the half marathon, and then pledge to raise funds ranging from \$150 to \$500 for a designated nonprofit. Last year the race raised \$293,000 for 26 local charities and this year organizers hope to top that.



triblocaltips@tribune.com

Twitter: @TribLocal

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