

Marathon raises interest in training

Classes to help runners improve strength, flexibility

By Shane Frederick

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MANKATO — After Joy Leafblad finished teaching the YMCA's first 5-kilometer race class for rookie runners, her students were ready for more.

"They wanted to continue," Leafblad said. "They said, 'Next year, let's do a 10K.'" But since the announcement of the first Mankato Marathon, some of those runners said they want to go even farther. "It's just escalated," Leafblad said, "and that's a really cool thing."

The Mankato Marathon, presented by Hy-Vee, will take place Oct. 23. The event also will feature a half marathon, a 10K and a kids run.

In other words: something for everyone.

The YMCA is planning for the event by offering classes to runners of all levels. Starting April 5, it will again have a "From Zero to 5K" class as well as a "10K Training" class. The classes each run eight weeks.

Come summer, not long after the 5K and 10K classes come to an end, the Y will offer 15-week training classes specifically leading up to the Mankato Marathon.

There will be classes for both the full, 26.2-mile race and the half marathon.

"(The marathon is) a huge commitment for people who decided to do it," said Leafblad, who is also part of the race's planning committee.

Leafblad said she has never run a full marathon but has done the 13.1-mile half. The YMCA has staff members who have done both kinds of races who will be assisting with the training.

The classes will not just help runners prepare for the long distances, but they will also work on improving participants' strength and flexibility to help decrease injuries.

Race officials hope to get at least 1,000 participants and are capping the field to 2,000.

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"Interest from the community has blown me away," said Anna Thill, president of the Greater Mankato Convention & Visitors Bureau. "People have been waiting for this opportunity in their own backyard."

Many of those, Leafblad suspects, will be runners who have never done a marathon before, and she hopes the YMCA classes will bring many of those rookies together so they can support each other as they prepare for the big race.

Leafblad expects to have morning, afternoon and evening marathon classes.

On the days when the calendar calls for a long run, she predicts bringing all three classes together.

" There are people who have always wanted to do (a marathon)," she said.

"It's right here, it's local and it's the first one. ... It will have a hometown feel."

Registration for the Mankato Marathon began last month. The YMCA announces its race-training classes in its spring brochure.

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