

Marathon: Twice as popular

Organizers expect at least 4,000 runners for Oct. 22 race

By Tim Krohn

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MANKATO — Last year, they came, they ran, they apparently liked.

This month's Mankato Marathon will feature double the runners from last year's inaugural event.

"They're coming in hot and fast," said Greater Mankato Area Convention & Visitor Bureau President Anna Thill of registrations for the Oct. 22 race.

"We're getting 150 to 200 a day."

With 3,000 already registered she feels confident they'll reach a total of 4,000 runners this year in the marathon, half marathon, 10K, 5k and KidsK. The 10K field is already filled and there are just

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File photo

Last year's inaugural Mankato Marathon drew 2,000 runners, a number that is expected to be doubled this year. The marathon is Oct. 22.

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500 spots left in the halfmarathon.

While last year's event drew praise, Thill admits she can't account for the rapid increase in interest.

"Maybe there are a lot of people in the area who've been waiting for a big event like this," she said.

"Running is really a growing sport all over the country.

More people are picking it up as a way to stay fit and stay active."

Hotels in the city center area are already booked full and filling fast in other areas of town. "If people aren't booked by now they may have a tough time finding a room in town. I think we're starting to have an effect (on hotel bookings) in St. Peter and Waseca and New Ulm."

Preston Lougheed, manager of the AmericInn near MSU, said they have a room or two left for the weekend.

"It's a very good weekend for hotels in Mankato" he said.

"It's exciting to watch the marathon grow and to have people who return. I talked to someone from Colorado who's staying here and running in it, so it brings them from all over."

He said the marathon isn't the only thing going on that weekend. " There's also the Women & Spirituality Conference (at MSU) and there's several sporting events at MSU and Bethany."

There are a few changes to this year's event, including parts of the route.

Last year, runners finished the race by coming through an alley and turning in front of the Verizon Wireless Center. This year runners will come from Sibley Park and onto south Riverfront Drive, finishing near the Hilton Garden Inn and Depot.

"It offers a much better finishing chute, Thill said.

The marathon starting point is at Minnesota State University on Stadium Road.

There are also changes to the route along County Road 90 south of town.

Runners last year were kept on the paved bike path next to the road. This year they can take the path or run on the edge of the road. The road will stay open to traffic but cones will be put up to separate traffic and runners. "It expands the width of the course along County 90."

Race organizers are also designating "cheer zones" along the route where onlookers will be encouraged to gather. Thill said it's a way to get people to areas where runners could use some encouragement.

" We'll put cheer zones in the country and by hills where it may be more physically or mentally challenging for runners."

There will also be a JumboTron screen near the finish line so runners can watch themselves as they finish.

The 5K race, held Friday evening, is also new. "A lot of distance runners will have a warm-up run the day before and they'll use the 5K as their warm-up," Thill said.

The 5K run will start in Sibley Park and end in Riverfront Park, following the bike trail inside the flood walls.

Thill said organizers hope to incorporate the new Riverfront Park into the marathon festivities next year. While the park can't be incorporated into the running course because of train traffic, they may use the park next year for after-race festivities, including music and wine tastings.

Thill said the CVB will survey runners this year to find out what economic impact the marathon has on the local economy. " We'll ask them how many people they brought along, how long they stayed, how much money they spent, so we can get a handle on the impact."

The marathon, which is a qualifier for the Boston Marathon, is operated by the CVB and Final Stretch Inc., with primary sponsorship from Mayo Clinic Health System.

The 2012 Mankato Marathon will be Oct. 27.

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