

Runners, walkers race for a cause

BY NICK PIZZINO
The Express-Times

The clouds finally parted, and the week of rain came to an end Sunday to provide the Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon with sunshine.

More than 2,600 runners and walkers took part in the event that stretched from the Lehigh Valley Hospital in Allentown to Easton's Centre Square. The scenic run benefited Via of the Lehigh Valley's programs for children and adults with disabilities.

As runners crossed the finish line in Centre Square, they were greeted by smiles and cheers of the families and friends who adorned the festive

| PLEASE SEE MARATHON, A2



EXPRESS-TIMES PHOTO | JOE GILL

Easton Area High School cheerleaders shout encouragement as a runner in the half-marathon approaches the finish line Sunday during the Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via. See a photo gallery at lehighvalleylive.com/photos.

lehighvalleylive.com

The Express-Times

Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via draws 2,600

Monday, September 14, 2009

By **nick pizzino**

The Express-Times

The clouds finally parted, and the week of rain came to an end Sunday to provide the Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon with sunshine.

More than 2,600 runners and walkers took part in the event that stretched from the Lehigh Valley Hospital in Allentown to Easton's Centre Square. The scenic run benefited Via of the Lehigh Valley's programs for children and adults with disabilities.

As runners crossed the finish line in Centre Square, they were greeted by smiles and cheers of the families and friends who adorned the festive Downtown area in support of the marathon's participants.

Also welcoming them was the voice of Bart Yasso, chief running officer of Runner's World magazine, member of the Running USA Hall of Champions and organizer of the day's events.

Adding a personal touch to the race, Yasso announced each runner by name.

"The start was great this morning because as we were looking east there was just a beautiful sunrise," Yasso said. "But at the finish line, when these runners come in, there is a lot of excitement."

Yasso founded the race more than 20 years ago, when it was associated with the American Red Cross. Three years ago, however, Via took control.

"They've taken it to a whole new level," Yasso said of Via. "They put on the marathon distance, the five-person relay, the half-marathon and they also did a walk today."

"There is an event for everybody, which is what I love about it."

Among runners and walkers who took to the streets were participants who hope to qualify for the Boston Marathon, old high school friends getting together for a worthy cause and those who are just looking to stay in shape.

"I'm really happy that I could take part in this because you're with all your friends and you get to run a marathon together," said Matt Rusnak, 25, of Bethlehem. "It's a little bit easier when you only have to run one leg, but it's a lot more rewarding and fulfilling."

Some first-timers appreciated the group effort.

"I'm glad I was able to do this with my friends for the first time," said Matt Veleber, a 25-year-old from Bethlehem. "Some of the other guys who have done races before kept me moving."

Despite the varied reasons for participating, all of the runners and walkers were happy to take part for the cause.

"It's definitely a motivation to know that a lot of the proceeds are going to a good cause," said Todd Rapel, who was cheered on by his wife and three young children. "It's motivating not just to run but to do it for something so worthy as well."

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the day for the avid runner Yasso was being a part of the contribution to the local charity.

"It truly is a great cause and the money stays in the Valley," Yasso said.

©2009 The Express-Times

© 2009 lehighvalleylive.com All Rights Reserved.