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## **New director, management for LVHN Marathon for Via**

Gary Blockus

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A full-fledged running expo at SteelStacks in Bethlehem for race packet pickup and a bigger, improved set of festivities at the finish line area in downtown Easton are in the works for the 2011 Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via on Sunday, Sept. 11.

Race registration is open for the marathon, marathon relay, half-marathon and 5K races that take place during the popular event.

Last year's race day drew more than 3,150 competitors for a route that runs along some of the most scenic trails in the East.

Over the past two years, the event has added roughly \$1.5 million in economic impact to the Lehigh Valley in a race from Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest, through Allentown's Lehigh Parkway and then alongside the Lehigh River on the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor before finishing up in downtown Easton.

With the stated goal of pushing the impact on the area's economy to \$1 million this year, the LVHN Marathon for Via, run completely by volunteers in the past, will receive professional management this year.

"We've operated this event for four years and because of the hard work of Via's staff, the Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via has grown to the level where we needed to bring in outside professional event

management," said John Crampsie, the committee chairman for the race.

At the suggestion of Bart Yasso, chief running officer for Runner's World magazine, the course designer and now race director emeritus of the event, the committee chose Barb McKeever, owner and operator of Philadelphia Insurance Triathlon, SheROX Triathlon Series and IronMan 70.3 Pocono Mountain as the new race director.

The race management is being taken over by MSG Promotions, an organization that runs corporate hospitality for the U.S. Golf Association open championships, and which operated the 2009 U.S. Open Women's Golf Championship at Saucon Valley Country Club. Most Lehigh Valley residents will recognize the Bethlehem-based company because it is run by former Lehigh University women's basketball coach Mimi Griffin, the first woman ever to serve as color commentator for a men's NCAA tournament game.

"What's really great about it is that it's so wonderful to do something that's so close to home," Griffin said before the media conference to announce the new race director and management team. "The U.S. Open is something we get here once in a decade or so. The LVHN Marathon for Via is something we have every year."

In addition to the race expo and finish line festivity improvements, Griffin and her MSG partner Jeanne Taylor are looking to up the ante with the Lehigh Valley corporate world by drawing on the five-person marathon relay portion of the race.

"We think we can expand the whole corporate end," Griffin said. "We'd like to turn it into a corporate challenge, a Corporate Cup, where corporations compete against each other for bragging rights."

The main mission of the marathon event remains the same, to raise money for Via, which benefits adults and children with disabilities such as autism and Down syndrome. By getting more corporations involved, MSG hopes to expand that mission in a fun way.

Crampsie explained that the event benefits Via and the Lehigh Valley because of the health-related focus of running and walking, and the local economy. The event required 3,300 volunteer-hours to make it happen last September.

"That's a grand slam as far as we're concerned," Griffin said.

In addition, Lehigh Valley Health Network has signed on for two more years as the name sponsor, while WFMZ-TV 69 and Philadelphia's 6ABC are presenting sponsors.

McKeever said she's excited about the marathon portion of the event and will promote it as a good qualifier for the Boston Marathon.

Register for the event at [ViaNet.org](http://ViaNet.org) or call 484-893-5390 for more information.

**LVRR Summer Series 5Ks:** The Lehigh Valley Road Runners Twilight Run Series began Wednesday night in Allentown's Lehigh Parkway from the Road Runner's House.

Additional races will be held the first Wednesday of each month through the summer: June 1, July 6 and Aug. 3.

The no-frills race is free to enter. You can test your mettle instead of competing for medals. Registration begins at 5:15 p.m. with the race going off at 6:30. Racers are required to wear race bibs and sign a waiver, and a timing clock will be used, but times will not be recorded. It is also suggested, in the spirit of camaraderie, that participants bring a covered dish to share at a post-race picnic. Hot dogs are on the club.

**Air Products Developmental Cycling:** It's not too late to register for the oldest and best developmental cycling program in the United States.

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For information, go to the Valley Preferred Cycling Center website at <http://www.thevelodrome.com> and click on "Community Programs," or call 610-395-7000.

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