

Sprint and Sip

The Grapes of Half Marathon offers a run through wine country BY AMY SCHNEIDER

Regionians have many loves — the outdoors, beer, having someone pump their gas for them — but high on that list of favorites are wine and running. In 2013, the minds at Pink Buffalo Racing devised an event that combined the two in glorious perfection: the Grapes of Half Marathon.

“That always gets a laugh from literature buffs,” says Piper Ruiz of Pink Buffalo Racing, a local race management company that puts on the annual half marathon that meanders through Eugene’s wine country, starting at Noble Estate Vineyard, passing by Silvan Ridge Winery and ending at Sweet Cheeks Winery.

This year’s run takes place May 22.

The idea started with wine aficionados at Pink Buffalo, but the three participating wineries were happy to get involved.

“As luck would have it, it’s a perfect half marathon” from Noble Estate to Sweet Cheeks, Ruiz says — an even 13.1 miles.

The race starts downhill and then gives runners a flat stretch early on along Gimpl Hill, Pine Grove, Erickson and Crow roads. A challenging 2-mile uphill jaunt starts at Doane Road, then levels out past Silvan Ridge with a final uphill push to Sweet Cheeks.

“You have an end goal of wine waiting for you at the finish line,” says Jessica Ramp, general manager at Sweet Cheeks. Ramp ran the Grapes of Half Marathon in 2013, and she says the race is “really peaceful, with lots of agriculture.”

The route takes runners by fields with horses and goats, and while it can be an idyllic gambol alongside pastoral scenery, sometimes the animals get up close and personal.

“Last year, people saw a 3-foot-long bull snake, and two of the three years we have produced this event a hog has gotten out on the course and run with participants,” Ruiz laughs. “The second time it happened, a woman took a picture, which was hysterical.”

People line the road as runners pass by, sitting in lawn chairs to cheer along half-marathoners. Aid stations also fill out the course, as well as certified flaggers at road junctions so that runners don’t have to worry about the flow of traffic.

At the end of the race, participants are greeted by their reward: an event wine glass with three wine tickets, one for each of the participating wineries. At Sweet Cheeks, runners also get to make up for all those expended calories

by sampling post-race refreshments, including sandwiches, hummus, cheese and chips.

A party bus is on hand to shuttle runners back to Silvan Ridge for their second glass of wine.

“It really is a party — run, have fun, eat and enjoy,” Ruiz says.

“A glass of wine will never taste as good as the one you have post-race,” Ramp adds, “because you worked really, really hard for it.” ❖

The Grapes of Half Marathon starts at 8 am Sunday, May 22, at Noble Estate Vineyard, 29210 Gimpl Hill Road. An alternative to the half marathon is a 5K (\$25-\$30), which starts at 9 am at Silvan Ridge Winery, 27012 Briggs Hill Road. Registration for the half marathon is \$75 through May 21, and \$80 on the day of the race. Register at pinkbuffaloracing.com.

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