

Hitting the ground running

The Manzanita Beach Run/Walk celebrates 25 years on Saturday, July 18

Ask a 100 different runners why they enjoy running, and you'll get 100 different answers: Running makes you feel healthy, you get to be outdoors, it makes you feel smarter, it increases happiness, it helps improve sleep. But there is one answer you'll hear from all runners: the people. Runners come from all different walks of life to get together and share their common passion. There is no better place to see that particular camaraderie on display than at the annual Manzanita Beach Run & Walk set this year for Saturday, July 18.

The beach run celebrates 25 years in 2015 and does it in style. Besides the main event, there will be a barbecue, beer and wine tastings, live music, and, of course, prizes. Set against the backdrop of Neahkahnie Mountain and a beautiful 7-mile stretch of beach, it's easy to see why the event entices runners from not only the Pacific Northwest, but from around the U.S.

Jeremy Mulcahy-Hill, assistant director at North County Recreation District, is already running. As organizer of the beach run since 2013, he has witnessed the event's attendance swell considerably. What began in 1990 as an informal gathering of runners has grown into a family-friendly destination event.

"It started with Larry and Janice Zagata, owners of the Ocean Inn in Manzanita," Mulcahy-Hill said. "Larry put it together as a fun run for everybody, and Janice had just started working here at the district as fitness director." In what was a natural fit, the run attached to NCRD and stayed that way after Janice Zagata departed the district.

The first year of the run had about 30 attendees. As word spread, attendance steadily grew to an average of around 140 runners per year. 2013 saw 335 runners hit the Manzanita beach while 2014 peaked at 385.

2015 promises to build on that growth. Mulcahy-Hill noted that preregistrations are already pointing to matching last year's attendance totals. "The last three

weeks (before the run) is when we really start getting more people," he said, adding that runners can register up to and during the day of the event.

As July 18 draws nearer, Mulcahy-Hill and NCRD volunteers fine-tune the event to ensure everything is on track. "We're up about five in the morning the day of the race," he said. "We set up the tents, check the timer, put the preregistration packets out, get the race chute all set up."

The run kicks off at 8:30 a.m. and consists of three stages: a 5K run/walk, a 10K run, and a 25K relay. Due to a new arrival on the beach near Nehalem Bay State Park, the course is slightly different than in years past. "In the past, we've had them all head south, straight towards the jetty, but with the snowy plover restricted area, we're sending runners towards the mountain," Mulcahy-Hill said. From there, the course will loop back around and head south towards the jetty, avoiding the nesting area. Turnaround points for the 5K and the 10K will be marked

along the way.

The run is an all-ages event, and families are encouraged to join in. "We've had runners from 3 years old all the way up to 92," Mulcahy-Hill said. "It's all skill levels. There have been runners who have had their first run here and have gone on to do marathons." He added that dogs are welcome too, though leashes are required.

2015 brings some new additions for after the run, including a barbecue lunch prepared by NCRD volunteers and beer poured by Nehalem Bay Winery. There will also be root beer for kids and bonfires,

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Coastal Life

Story by DAN HAAG



Submitted photo

Runners take off at last year's Manzanita Beach Run/Walk. The 2015 race celebrates 25 years on Saturday, July 18.

s'mores, and live music for runners and cheerers to enjoy. Additionally, the first 350 runners gets an event T-shirt, prizes will be raffled off and families will be given the opportunity to participate in a local treasure hunt.

"The treasure hunt gives families something to do and gets them out to see the area," Mulcahy-Hill said. "It entices them to get into the community. At the end of the day, we'll have a drawing for the gift certificates from the businesses that helped out." Each participant of the treasure hunt gets a tri-fold map with a list of local sponsors and instructions leading them on their quest.

Though the run itself is usually over within two hours, Mulcahy-Hill expects people will linger and enjoy the convivial nature of these additions.

Thinking about running but not sure

Entry fee is \$35 through Friday, July 17, \$40 for day of the race. Proceeds go toward support of NCRD programs. For race details and updates, visit www.facebook.com/BeachWalkRun. You can also email fitness@ncrdneahalem.org or call 503-368-4595.

where to stay? The Ocean Inn is providing incentive for one lucky couple the night before the race: a one-night stay at Ocean Inn, a massage courtesy of Longevity in Manzanita, dinner for two at Terra Cotta Cafe, and two entries in the run.

An avid event runner himself, Mulcahy-Hill is quick to respond when asked what sets the Manzanita beach run apart from similar events. "For me it's the scenery," he said. "The biggest thing with a lot of races, if it's a destination that's gorgeous, people will always run it. What sets this race apart is the location. The town's right here, it's smaller and quieter, it's family and dog-friendly. I think that really draws people to it."