

THE BRIDGE RUN IS BACK



Participants cross the Astoria Bridge during the Great Columbia Crossing 10K in 2019.

Everything you need to know about the return of the Great Columbia Crossing 10K

By **NIKKI DAVIDSON**
COAST WEEKEND

Thousands of runners and walkers will make their way across the Astoria Bridge Sunday morning for the return of the in-person Great Columbia Crossing 10K.

For organizers, the excitement is palpable. This will be one of the first major in-person events to be held in Astoria since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

“For myself, it feels like a ray of sunshine coming out of the clouds,” Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce Event Coordinator Bayly Lay said. “It’s going to be crazy, like always, but it’s for all of us. For the good of all of us.”

In 2020 the Great Columbia Crossing 10K was held virtually, which meant runners and walkers missed out on the chance to cross the iconic bridge. While the popular event is returning this year, it will look much different than the 37 previous crossings.

Coronavirus safety measures

Organizers needed to find a solution to the more challenging aspects of putting together an event of this nature. Packet pickups, starting lines and shuttles are notorious for being crowded, tight spaces. Hopeful to avoid any potential risk of spreading the virus, the chamber of commerce opted to make critical changes.

They started by cutting the amount of people who would be allowed to participate by nearly half, from 3,500 down to 2,000. The stunted race filled up in record time, just two weeks after registration opened.

“We closed it and waited, and waited to see if we could reopen registration and include more runners, but in the end we decided not to,” said Lay.

Buses shuttling participants to the starting line in Washington will only be filled to half capacity to allow for social distancing. Rain or shine, windows on the busses will remain open to maximize air flow. Shuttles will be wiped down and sanitized for each new load of passengers.

To avoid crowds at packet pickup, organizers offered participants the option to pay an additional fee to have their packets mailed to them. Lay said nearly a third of runners and walkers took advantage of the shipping option.

Participants will only be permitted to remove their masks when they pass the starting line. When they cross the finish line, they must put their mask back on. Organizers are offering a virtual option for those who do not wish to race in person.

“We know some people won’t be able to come as expected, but they have the option to run the virtual race, and less people for an in-person event isn’t such a bad thing because of COVID,” Lay said.

Astoria Bridge will close down

Coronavirus exposure isn’t the only safety aspect on the minds of organizers. The endurance event is one of the oldest in the area, and began 39 years ago with a crowd of just 1,000 participants crossing the iconic bridge in high winds and downpour.

For decades organizers closed just one lane of traffic for the event, but in 2018 moved to shut the entire bridge down to ensure safety. Despite the lower number of participants, the Oregon Department of Transportation will continue to close the bridge to all traffic during the event.

“It’s much safer not mixing pedestrians



Runners reach the steep incline of the Astoria Bridge during the event in 2010.

and cars,” said Lou Torres, ODOT public information officer. “We also don’t allow vehicles to line up to cross the bridge on the Oregon or Washington side, so it gives participants plenty of room.”

ODOT has jurisdiction over the Astoria bridge and works with the Washington State Department of Transportation and local law enforcement agencies to make the event run smoothly. The bridge will be closed to all vehicles from 8:30 to 11 a.m., with an exception for emergency vehicles.

It’s an endeavor, but Torres said the return of the event will be a welcome sight.

“Everybody is really eager to get back to in-person events,” he said. “I think it’s another sign of normalcy perhaps, I try to be optimistic about things.”

Involving the local community

Race participants will receive five Clam Bucks to spend in the community. More than 30 restaurants, stores and attractions in the Astoria and Warrenton area are participating in the program.

“It guarantees that all of the people who come into our town aren’t just going to come, run the race and leave,” said Lay. “The businesses benefit too, (the chamber of commerce) gives them 50 cents on every clam dollar spent.”

Lay said a third of the 2021 race participants are from the Astoria area. In the past, participants have traveled from across the country for the chance to run or walk across North America’s longest continuous truss bridge.

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