

AN AWESOME 10TH ANNIVERSARY FOR THE VA 24 HOUR RUN FOR CANCER

The 10th edition of the Virginia 24 Hour Run for Cancer was another resounding success. The race was held, as always, on a 3.75 mile series of wide, flat dirt trails in Sandy Bottom Nature Park in Hampton, VA, on the weekend of 20-21 April, 2013. Although no new course mileage records were set, the total attendance (208) and total number of people who covered 50 or more miles (108) were huge records. In addition, with more money still coming in, it looks like a new record (\$15,000) could be set for donations to the American Cancer Society Relay for Life.

Unlike the last two years, the weather (for the most part) cooperated. There was heavy rain the night before the race, but it ended before the 7:00 am start. For the rest of the race it remained cloudy and cool, good for running. The only impact was a very muddy quarter mile section of trail that ensured everyone had an additional obstacle to overcome. The course was officially USATF certified this year for the first time, providing extra motivation for serious runners to go for records.

The men's winner was Keith Straw from Malvern, PA who covered 120 miles, tying the second most miles ever run on the course. The women's winner was local ultrarunner Cheryl Lager, who covered 93.75 miles, becoming the only 3-time winner of the race. The Team winner was Team Run 4 Life who amassed 788.75 miles, the 3rd highest team mileage ever accumulated.

The main story of the race was the huge surge in Team participation and competition. A record total of 14 teams participated, almost all having 11-12 members. Many were returning Teams determined to outdo their previous efforts. Most members pushed hard to earn at least a 50-mile plaque and raise their team mileage totals. Ten teams accumulated over 400 miles. Even a team of Sandy Bottom Park Rangers joined in the fun for the first time!

In this race, the "tortoise" almost always beats the "hare." Both the men's and women's winners did not lead until the last few hours of the race. For most of the day, Steve Speirs held a steady lead over the men, with Keith Straw and Claude Hicks Jr no more than one lap behind. However, with about 2.5 hours to go, Steve abruptly stopped with 112.5 miles, unable to continue. In the meantime, Claude had fallen further back, opening the door for Keith. He looked strong throughout and never looked back after taking the lead.

Christie Sumner led the women's field for most of the day and night, closely followed by several women only 1-2 laps behind. But Christie too abruptly stopped with about 4 hours left, opening the door for the veteran Cheryl Lager and race first-timers Ellen Womeldorf and Joyce Ong to charge through. Cheryl soon took over the lead with Ellen and Joyce quietly but steadily following close behind.

Each year I present a “Best First Ultra” award to the runner/walker who goes farthest beyond what they have ever done before. This year I gave it to 13 year old Ashley Pettigrew who had never run or walked more than a 5K in her life. She covered 52.5 miles, even beating her parents, who both stopped with 50 miles! In addition, this year for the first time I gave out 500-mile jackets at the finish to the first two runners to accumulate 500 or more miles on the course over the past ten years. The recipients were Jim Harrison with 562.5 miles and Chris Basford with 500 miles. Next year I expect to award three more.

As always, the support provided by the Sandy Bottom Nature Park staff was superb! Every need we had was quickly and efficiently taken care of. It was another flawless effort. The fact that a Team of Park Rangers participated made it even better! The volunteer lap counters from the local Peninsula Track Club, American Cancer Society office, and local Boy Scout Troop 45 (from Fort Eustis) were once again essential to success. Two dedicated volunteers even drove down three hours from northern Virginia to help! The record number of participants made accurate lap counting particularly challenging this year, but it was carried out smoothly and efficiently! And a big thank you goes to our new race sponsor, Green Life Adventure Sports, who provided the great subs for lunch and pizza for dinner.