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Pittsburgh's Great Race

By Daniel Casciato

For our community, the Richard S. Caligiuri City of Pittsburgh Great Race is more than just an athletic competition, it is a civic celebration.

“This is an event that people have come to expect at the end of September,” says Mike Radley, Great Race coordinator. “It has become an annual tradition and it’s a great way to showcase the city. It is also an enjoyable time for families to come down and spend the day.”

This year’s Great Race takes place Sunday, Sept. 25. The Great Race annually attracts nearly 10,000 athletes from 35 states and 30 different countries. What makes the race even more special is that approximately 89% of the participants are from the region.

Avid runners, like Wayne Jacobs of Shaler, always look forward to it. Jacobs is considered a ‘Perfect Great Racer’ because he’s been with the Race since its inception. “I enjoy this Race the most,” says Jacobs who will run in his 28th Great Race. “This has always been



the signature race of the city. It’s a nice way for people – both runners and spectators - to have a good time and enjoy the city.”

Eileen Petrone agrees. Petrone, who moved from McCandless to Baltimore, MD, a year and a half ago, runs with a group of runners from North Park every year. “This is a nice, social, healthy event that just pulls people together,” says Petrone. “It’s a nice outpouring of the city population.”

Petrone has the longest female participation streak at 26 years and is an honorary ‘Perfect Great Racer.’ “I don’t want to break that streak now,” she says with a laugh. “I’ve only missed the first one.”

That does not include the 2003 Great Race, which was cancelled. Runners were dismayed after budget concerns prompted city officials to cancel that year’s Great Race.

Sponsors have now helped keep the Race going the past two years. This year’s sponsors include presenting sponsor Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Dollar Bank, Del Monte Foods, Allegheny General Hospital, Essential 2 Pittsburgh, Dick’s Sporting Goods, Comcast, Allegheny Regional Asset District, WPXI, WLTJ and WRRK.

“We couldn’t do it without them,” says Radley. “They’ve been the key in keeping this event together. We just want to continue the tradition that was started so many years ago.”

“I’m glad it’s back on again,” says Jacobs. “It’s good to see the city, organizers and sponsors come together like they have to preserve this tradition.”

Jacobs and Petrone advise any first-time runners to simply enjoy the race. “Take your time and don’t worry about how you will finish,” says Petrone. Jacobs adds, “Enjoy the sights along the course and have a good time.”

The Great Race will continue to support the Amyloidosis Foundation. In 1993, the Race's name officially changed to the "Richard S. Caligiuri City of Pittsburgh Great Race" in memory of the former mayor, who died of amyloidosis in 1988.

One dollar from every runner is donated to the Amyloidosis Foundation, adding to the more than \$100,000 raised to date by the runners of The Great Race to combat and ultimately develop a cure for amyloidosis. According to USA Track & Field (USATF), the Great Race is the 9th largest 10K race in the United States. It is also rated one of the Top 100 Road Races by Runner's World Magazine.

The various competitions in the Great Race include a 10K Run, 5K Run, 5K Walk, Team Competition, Heavyweight Competition, Wheelchair and Junior Great Race. The Great Race is the culmination of the series of Citiparks community races held around the city each year. Other races include the Brookline Breeze, Greater Hazelwood 5K, Greenfield Glide, Riverview Park 5K and Run Around the Square (Regent Square).

"These footraces are assets to our communities," says Radley. "It brings people together." Among the highlights of this year's Race are marching bands, local musical talents and other entertainers along the course to the finish line at Point State Park. Once the competitors reach Point State Park, there is a Post-Race Party, including the presentation of awards.

This year's Race also features "On Your Mark with Highmark Youth Challenge." Highmark partnered with Citiparks to encourage children to participate in community footraces by either running or walking the 5K distance. Children, age 16 or younger, who complete two or more Citiparks community footraces receive a free entry to The Great Race. After completing The Great Race in either the 5K or 10K division, each child receives a personalized certificate recognizing the achievement and is eligible to win prizes in a special raffle.

"It's going to be a wonderful time for everyone," Radley says. "We're looking forward to another successful race."

To register or for more information on the Richard S. Caligiuri City of Pittsburgh Great Race, please call the Race Hotline at 412-255-2493 or visit www.rungreatrace.com.