

Cellcom Green Bay Marathon's fund-raising efforts decline

Fundraising doesn't keep pace with last year as economy drags

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Fundraising is down almost 40 percent for the Cellcom Green Bay Marathon from the same period last year, something race officials are attributing to the sagging economy.

People so far have donated about \$8,300 to the marathon, compared with \$13,600 at this time last year, said fundraising director Jeff Poppele. The economy has a lot of strong fundraisers from years past sitting out this year, he said.

"It's hard for them to go back year after year and ask the same people for more money," he said.

The race's Run For A Reason program allows runners to raise money for one specific charity partner, or all three, by creating an online page. If they raise at least \$250, they get one free race entry. Most donations come from family and friends, Poppele said.

The marathon has raised over \$320,000 for local charities since it started in 2000, race director Sean Ryan said.

If trends continue, this would be the first year the marathon did not reach or exceed the previous year's fundraising totals.

The event is trying to recruit runners who participate in the Saturday training runs to raise money, something it has done in past years.

Nearly 6,400 runners have registered for the race events on May 15 and 16, slightly ahead of last year's numbers. The 26.2-mile marathon is 75 percent full and the half marathon is 80 percent full.

The Boys & Girls Club of Green Bay is one of the event's charity partners, along with Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin and Cerebral Palsy Inc. Charity partners are on a three-year rotation in which one charity leaves and a new one comes in each year. The club is in its last year with the marathon and it's a bittersweet ending, said Nicole Hoffman, senior director of development.

The partnership allowed the club to form a program that allowed its members, at no charge, to train twice a week to run the newly created 2.62-mile "mini-marathon" during race weekend.

"It's encouraging our kids to look at running, and possibly adopting it as a lifelong fitness initiative," Hoffman said. "One of the greatest benefits we give back to our community is the

impact we make on our kids. If we can help our members leave the Boys & Girls Club with self-esteem, confidence and a goal for their future, it helps the whole community."

More runners would raise money for charity if they knew about the opportunity, she added.

Last year, 61 runners ran for a reason and earned free entry. The marathon raised over \$70,000 for its three charity partners — nearly \$30,000 of which was from runner fundraising.

So far, 59 people have set up fundraising Web pages, down from 96 people who did so last year.

It's in the charities' best interest to recruit as many fundraisers as possible, Ryan said, though only a small percentage of runners do it because of work, family, and training schedules.

"Asking them to do that is asking a lot," Ryan said.

Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin hopes to receive \$20,000 that will fund a new child advocacy center, where abused children can get medical and police services under one roof.

"It's just a great way for the marathon to support the community and nonprofits," said Brent Roubal, community support director.

Habitat for Humanity received more than \$40,000 as a former charity partner of the marathon. That can buy half the building materials for a home, said construction coordinator Kathi Kampen.

Some runners are choosing to raise money for individual charities.

Kurt Phillion is raising money for Project New Hope, a Minnesota-based nonprofit that provides military family retreats and counseling.

The 27-year-old from Mahanomen, Minn., plans to run the 13.1-mile half marathon with an American flag on his shoulders. A friend died serving in Iraq and Phillion said he wants people to remember fallen soldiers.

The Mary Poppele Award is given each year to the highest fundraiser. She was known for her charity work before she passed away in 2004.

Her husband, Jeff Poppele, said charity partners are required to assist with Saturday training runs and volunteer on race weekend.

"Not only do the runners give to the charities but the charities also give back," he said.

Poppele plans to run in the event and supporting a charity provides extra fuel in late stages of the race, he added.

"Knowing that in the back of your mind, not only are you doing it for yourself, but doing it for people who are less fortunate ... that helps push you."