



Sideline Support

You don't have to be a runner to participate in our city's annual marathon. In fact, those who go the distance are counting on...

Marathoners run down Bryant Street in Highland Park during last year's event.

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Spectators gather along Highland Avenue to cheer on runners.

A

26.2-mile party happens every year in Pittsburgh, and there is an open invitation for all to attend.

The venue is anywhere and everywhere along the streets of the 14 neighborhoods that dot the course of the DICK'S Sporting Goods Pittsburgh Marathon, held this year on May 4.

While some 30,000 runners push themselves to the limit to achieve personal goals and cross the finish line, an equal number of spectators show up on sidewalks and front yards to help the race participants realize their dreams. These spectators foster a sense of community and camaraderie on this day of citywide celebration. Be they solo or in groups, locals or visitors, adults or children, their energy is palpable.

Take Marty Eichner of Squirrel Hill, who usually heads to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Beechwood Boulevard in Point Breeze to watch the race with his wife, Elyse, and dog, Sophie.

"We want to support Pittsburgh and the runners and we're rooting for all our friends," Eichner says. "We cheer them on, wave, clap, and a lot of times, if they're not too tired, they wave back."

Across the East End, you'll find some of the most fervent marathon spectators, all watching the drama, effort, emotion, and fun of the race play out across our neighborhoods. Whether the partying springs up spontaneously on race morning or results from weeks of careful planning, these spectators make the most of the opportunity to cheerlead and have a swell time.

BY MARY GILBERT

Deb Walrath of Point Breeze says she "goes crazy" to get the attention of runners she knows. "It seems to perk them up and give them a lift, a kick in their step," she says.

Indeed, spectators are much more than mere bystanders, according to race director Patrice Matamoros of Indiana Township, who says they're integral to the overall success of the marathon—which she calls Pittsburgh's "fourth sport." "Honestly, it's like watching a game and cheering for the home team and wanting them to score," Matamoros says. "Spectators all want our runners to score."

The marathon distance is long and challenging, regardless of fitness level or training. Runners log hundreds of miles throughout the dark winter months to train for the big day. At some point during the race, they will inevitably question if they can finish—and a rally cry of "You can do it!" or "Just a few more miles!" can provide that needed morale boost.

In Oakland, spectators are instrumental in motivating runners to make it up the tough hill from the Birmingham Bridge, says Squirrel Hill resident Sheila Solomon, who plans to run her second Pittsburgh Marathon this year.

"It's the most mentally challenging part of the entire race," she says. "Knowing my family and friends—and the fantastic crowds—will be there at the top of the hill in Oakland helps me to focus and push through the pain."

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At North Negley Avenue and Baum Boulevard, 2013 runners approaching what was dubbed the Friendship Inspiration Station were urged on by colorful characters.

display that range from heartfelt to funny. Point Breeze is known for its "cheer card" station, and spectators of all ages enjoy holding aloft the messaged cards with words of encouragement for the runners—support that is much appreciated by the hardworking athletes.

"We conduct surveys of the runners, and spectators are one of the top three criteria regarding the marathoners' satisfaction," Matamoros says. "If runners know a race will have people cheering to help them get through the tough miles, they'll sign up for that race over one without crowd support."

To attract runners with a Pittsburgh connection and their supporters this year, the marathon launched a national Run Home to

Pittsburgh campaign, inviting people who were born, have lived, attended school, or have friends and family in the city to come back for the event.

Pittsburgh Pirate Andrew McCutcheon—certainly no slouch when it comes to running to home (base, that is)—appears on a marathon website video, urging viewers to return, while other videos and pages on the website let runners know what to anticipate as they pass through each neighborhood. New this year are official spectator zones, with coffee, doughnuts, cowbells, and pompoms at select sites to help spectators get in the spirit.

In Shadyside, people can enjoy breakfast goodies distributed by the Shadyside Chamber of Commerce. Last year, chamber member and

Gayle Rogers and his friends like to stand next to Tazza d'Oro Café and Espresso Bar in Highland Park, which is party central for the neighborhood. The coffee shop is near the 20-mile mark—the dreaded point where runners can "hit the wall" when their reserves are depleted.

A runner himself, Rogers not only calls out the marathoners' names from their bibs, but when he sees people struggling, he runs beside them for a moment. He exhorts them with, "You can do this," and "They're counting you out, but you'll prove everybody wrong."

"The runners usually laugh," Rogers says. "It's meant to be a distraction and break up the pattern a little for them."

Chief among the distractions along the marathon course are the signs and posters on



Clever and inspirational signs are displayed all along the route, including here on Walnut Street in Shadyside.

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Muffins ready for consumption, handed out by the Shadyside Chamber of Commerce.

restaurateur Gregg Caliguri fed free muffins from Prant's Bakery and coffee from Coffee Tree Roasters to the crowd that gathered in front of his Up Modern Italian on Walnut Street—and handed out noisemakers, for extra motivation. But look for another chamber member to be handling that duty this year. "I'm running the relay," explains Caliguri.

For the sixth straight year, Shadyside Presbyterian Church is setting up a tent at the corner of Amberson Street and Fifth Avenue and handing out orange slices to runners. The church used to try to hold regular worship services despite the marathon's traffic restrictions, but to no avail. The decision by the Rev. Todd Leach and his two fellow pastors: if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.



Orange slices packaged by members of Shadyside Presbyterian Church for marathoners on Fifth Avenue near the church.



Volunteers in Bloomfield offering water near the 22-mile mark.

"We thought instead of fighting against it we should embrace it," Leach says. "It's a great community event, and we wanted to become part of it."

More than just distributing fruit, the church has used the marathon as a platform to raise thousands of dollars for its Run for Haiti program, which supports relief efforts following the country's earthquake. The marathon provides free passes to groups like the church so they can organize marathon relay teams to raise funds for their cause.

Then there's music. The marathon encourages Pittsburgh musicians to participate in the race a big way, helping the runners rock their way to the finish line by performing along the course; nearly 70 bands participate each year, representing a wide array of musical styles.

Last year, when the marathon fell on Cinco de Mayo, a Mariachi band played in

Shadyside, while over in Point Breeze, young band members representing The Church in Pittsburgh performed in front of their house of worship along Penn Avenue, playing a variety of music—not just hymns—to help jazz up the morning. "We just praise the Lord with our music," says band member Nathan Becinski.

The marathon also enlists anyone and everyone—school bands, churches, nonprofits, hockey teams, cheerleaders, organizations, and more—to register online as official Cheerathoners. They stand at designated spots to attract the runners' attention, spread goodwill, and promote their own causes. Steel City Greyhounds Cheerathon Team, for instance, brings rescue dogs—always a crowd favorite—to mile 18 near North Dallas Avenue in Point Breeze. A bonus for the Cheerathoners is the opportunity to win grant money for being the



When last year's marathon fell on May 5th, Cinco de Mayo, Miguel's Mariachi Fiesta band created an appropriate atmosphere at the corner of Walnut Street and South Aiken Avenue in Shadyside.



Young band members from The Church in Pittsburgh performed last year on Penn Avenue, right in front of the Point Breeze house of worship.



Students from the Community Day School Cheerathon group showed their support last year for Ethiopian marathoners Tesfaye Girma Bekele and Fikadu Lemma, with whom they had become pen pals.

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There's always a lot of activity at the FedEx Ground Pittsburgh Marathon Relay exchange zones, where team members hand off to one another with hand shakes, high fives, and hugs (inset).

course, but that doesn't mean there aren't plenty of tears and hugs to witness within the East End, particularly at the two FedEx Ground Pittsburgh Marathon Relay exchange points within the area—one at Fifth Avenue and Beechwood Boulevard in Shadyside, and the other at Baum Boulevard and South Graham Street in Friendship. Runners finishing their leg of the relay course can often be seen embracing waiting teammates or offering a hearty handshake or high five to send the next relayers on their way, and the sight can pack an emotional punch for onlookers.

Being a marathon spectator is also just plain fun.

In Oakland, a number of civic groups host open houses with food and beverages for spectators. University students in the vicinity make it a point to join the festivities.

In Shadyside, Stacy Marinos, a recent transplant from San Francisco, watched her first Pittsburgh Marathon last year while hosting a charming al fresco brunch of fruit,



Many people who live along the Marathon route enjoy hosting brunches and other gatherings on their front lawns, inviting friends over to watch and cheer the runners.

bagels, juice, and wine on her front lawn for friends. Will she do it again this year? "Definitely. It's great," she says. "But I'll invite more people over."

Some spectators are mobile, getting around from neighborhood to neighborhood by bicycle to follow their loved ones and friends in the race while avoiding road closures.

"At the beginning, you are there for the general excitement, and by mile 20 or 21, when they need extra water or gel, you can be there to support them, and then help them celebrate at the finish line," says Fox Chapel resident Bill Felman, who plans to keep tabs on his wife, Amy, by bike as she attempts to complete her third Pittsburgh Marathon this year.

"The mood is always very upbeat, with bands playing and people having a great time," Felman says. "It gives neighborhoods an opportunity to really come together."

For Amy Felman, running through the East End is the most exciting part of the race. "The streets are just packed with cheering people—four people deep," she says. "It makes a huge difference because it gives you that extra burst of energy you need to make it to the finish."

For full information about the DICK'S Sporting Goods Pittsburgh Marathon, visit www.pittsburghmarathon.com.

A modern bathroom interior. On the left, a white freestanding bathtub sits next to a window with a view of a church building. To the right of the bathtub is a tall, dark wood shelving unit holding folded white towels. The floor is made of dark wood planks. In the bottom left corner, there is a small white stool with a black metal frame and a small pile of white slippers. The word "LUXE" is printed vertically on the right side of the image.

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