

## Lewis & Clark marathon finishes what it started



Sports Columnist Kathleen Nelson

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Runners like to finish what they start, so no one should be surprised that the 2009 Lewis & Clark Marathon and Half-Marathon last weekend were rousing successes.

With the temperature at the start hovering near 60, race conditions were nearly ideal, especially for a September marathon in the lower Midwest.

"We had such a great day," said Kristen Murphy, event manager for Fleet Feet St. Louis, which organizes the race. "You waited for a shoe to drop, and it never did."

Well, actually, more than 10,000 shoes hit the pavement Sunday along the route, which stretched from Verizon Wireless Amphitheater to Frontier Park in St. Charles. The turnout was a record and a welcome relief, especially when one harkens back a year ago.

Last year's race was one of the casualties of Hurricane Ike. Runners gathered at the amphitheater and were left standing ankle-deep in water, pounded by wind and a sideways rain. Flash floods were imminent, and fallen tree limbs blocked part of the course on the Katy Trail. For the safety of the runners, who sometimes can't see the forest for the trees and the limbs, Fleet Feet shortened the marathon and half-marathon to 10 miles.

Some runners were upset; if you train four months for a marathon in heat and humidity and are in good shape, the last thing you want to do is run only 10 miles. But Fleet Feet did its best to ease their disappointment, arranging for reduced admission to other marathons.

Thus, the folks at Fleet Feet weren't quite sure whether runners would return this year. They hoped for a rebound similar to the Chicago Marathon in 2007, when heat and humidity forced organizers to close the course early, much to the dismay of many of the 40,000 who entered. Despite one death and a lot of public outrage, the event sold out again in 2008.

"When registration opened, we were trying to figure out what to expect," Murphy said. "We thought about the disaster of Chicago and how well they did. We knew we weren't Chicago, but I think that runners are very Type A and we don't like to be told what we can't do."

Fleet Feet followed the pattern of Chicago with a record number of registrations, which put on pressure to deliver a good race experience. Good weather helps, too.

"I joked that if another hurricane was coming through, you'd find me at the airport, on my way out of town," Murphy said.

Instead, the organizers were rewarded with sunny skies and a record number of finishers: 5,173, almost 4,500 of whom competed in the half-marathon. The total represents an increase close to 20 percent over 2007, with 4,092 finishers.

Crossing the line first in the men's marathon was James Cheruiyot of Searcy, Ark., in 2 hours, 33 minutes, 2 seconds. The women's winner was Erin Schaub of Brownstown, Ill., in 3:21:35. The half-marathon winners were Kipruto Rotich of Columbia, Mo., in 1:11:38, and Jackie Pirtle-Hall of St. Charles, in 1:21:44.

"It was absolutely the most wonderful thing ever," Murphy said. "It was almost like you got closure for the 2008 event, which almost didn't happen."

The race organizers deserved this. More important, the runners deserved it. They needed to finish what they started.