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## Thousands of runners and dollars

### Event drew more than 4,000 runners, raised money for charities

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---- — MANKATO — A massive crowd of tired, sweaty and ultimately proud runners filled the grounds of the Verizon Wireless Center on Sunday for the third annual Mankato Marathon. The event drew more than 4,500 runners this year, double the 2,200 runners that participated in the first year of the event.

In addition to the growing number of participants in the event, this year's Mankato Marathon added toddler age races on Saturday, added three new sponsored charity groups and increased the number of cheer squad sites from 12 teams to 17.

Although it was rainy and overcast early Sunday, the conditions on the marathon route held together long enough to satisfy most runners. Marathon winner Eric Thies, of Arlington, even set a new event record at 2 minutes and 34.55 seconds.

The feelings of the finishing runners was best summarized by Appleton, Wis., runner Steve Sieck.

“It was a gorgeous day. The (Mankato) Marathon is great and fun,” said Sieck between panting breathes at the finish line, “Now, I'm going to cool down and eat a bunch of food.”

### Running for a good cause

A new facet to this year's marathon was the introduction of three charity groups to the official program, which resulted in a combined total of \$16,991 being raised for local causes. The charity groups each hosted three runners who participated in the marathon or half marathon.

The Mankato Marathon provided incentives at different fundraising levels, such as covering the group's entry costs or providing designer jackets, for the totals each group pulled in for their organization prior to the race. Additionally, the Mankato Marathon modified its sign up sheets to include options to donate to one or all of the causes.

“We felt we had established ourselves as an event. So, we wanted to branch out into giving back to the community,” said Anna Thill, president of Visit Mankato.

The three groups this year were the local chapters of YWCA's Girls on the Run, the Back Pack Food Program and Project for Teens. Girls on the Run drew \$2,065 with \$418 from registrations, Back Pack Food Program raised \$10,023 with \$810 from registrations and Project for Teens raised \$4,903 with roughly \$1,900 from registrations.

Sheri Sander-Silva, council director for Girls on the Run, said her organization seeks to teach young girls ways to boost their self esteem through several programs. She said the Mankato Marathon was an excellent opportunity for staff to set a good example for the girls.

“It's a fabulous way for the girls to see community members achieving their goals. It will help encourage them to reach their own goals,” said Sander-Silva.

She said marathons have always been great tools for teaching people to set and reach goals they set for themselves in life. She said Girls on the Run itself concludes its program with a non-competitive 5K event for the girls.

Dr. Scott Stevens, who works with the Back Pack Food Program, said the Mankato Marathon is fantastic fundraising opportunity for the group and a chance to raise public awareness about the programs. He said fundraising is much more effective around unique events like a marathon because people have the runners as a specific area to focus on and root for with their donations.

“We love providing such a great program. (The Mankato Marathon) is just another great opportunity to get information out about what we can do to help the community,” said Stevens.

### **Screaming for support**

Another addition to this year's event was the expansion of the number of cheer teams. The 17 fun and funky groups spent the race shouting encouragement for runners in outfits ranging from an '80s theme to three gorilla suits with a person in a banana suit.

Jenny Wagner, a YWCA intern who cheered with the Girls on the Run squad, said they were shouting to support the runners and help motivate them to finish the race.

"You could see how excited and happy our runners got when they saw us," said Wagner.

She said the cheer squads were a great way to watch the race. She said she plans to do a cheer squad again next year.