Culture of Fitness

Learn how Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon is improving lifestyles and how you can join in the fun.

These days while driving around the streets of Champaign-Urbana, day or night, you would be hard pressed not to find a single runner or walker in your path. In fact, you’ll probably see several. That hasn’t always been the case in our area. But thanks to a few pioneers and forward thinking leaders, in addition to being a university, football, and basketball town, C-U has become a running town.

In 2007, the idea of holding a marathon in Champaign-Urbana came to Mark Knutson after enjoying the success his company had staging the Scheels Fargo Marathon in North Dakota. Knutson contacted Jan Seeley, co-owner and publisher of the locally based marathoners’ magazine Marathon & Beyond. With Seeley’s help, Knutson formed a focus group of local runners, including Mike Lindemann, co-owner of Body n’ Sole, to further investigate this unique opportunity. With the help of the focus group, the blessing of the Champaign and Urbana mayors, and a commitment from the University of Illinois’s Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, the group had the incentive to push on. In early 2008, Knutson incorporated the marathon events, with the inaugural running set for April 2009.

Lindemann, current race co-director, was immediately on board to bring this event to C-U.

“Champaign County is centrally located in the state and in the middle of the Midwest; the race could potentially attract runners from cities such as Minneapolis, Chicago, Indy, and St. Louis. The flat terrain (perfect for running), plus the attraction of the University of Illinois made this the ideal location,” Lindemann said.

Seeley, the race’s other director, enthusiastically pointed out that our community has warm-hearted Midwest values.

“The success of the race weekend is totally dependent on the tight-knit support of the community and its volunteers,” Seeley said. “The strong local economy, coupled with the incredibly friendly residents of the area increased my enthusiasm for this project.”

Christie Clinic Comes on Board

In May 2008, Christie Clinic’s Board of Directors voted yes to becoming the title sponsor of the marathon, providing the economic boost the race needed, and Christie Clinic CEO Alan Gleghorn took the leap of faith to enter into the agreement.

“First of all, already being a runner personally, with Christie having conducted the Run for the Health of It 5K/10K for 25 years, and Mark (Knutson) and I having very good chemistry, it never really even felt like a ‘leap.’ It felt more like a natural next step on a journey that Christie Clinic was already on. Plus, our Board of Directors strongly supported it from the first time they were presented with the opportunity,” Gleghorn said.

Working with a 15-person race committee, Knutson and company promoted the event on a national, regional, and local level. The core team was successful in capturing the spirit and energy of the community by recruiting more than 2,000 volunteers for the inaugural running. These volunteers were critical to the success and safety of the race.
Planning for Success at the 2012 Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon Weekend

Are you thinking of joining the fun for 2012? Follow these basic steps:

- **Get cleared to exercise.** If you are not already active, talk to your doctor to make sure there is nothing that would prevent you from becoming more active.

- **Set a realistic goal.** If you are currently inactive, aim to walk the 5K. If you already walk regularly, consider running the 5K. If you run regularly, consider the 10K or the marathon relay. If you run 5ks and 10ks, consider the half marathon or the mini I-Challenge. And if you have run a half marathon recently, you could train for the marathon. Setting a realistic goal raises the odds of success.

- **Find the right training program.** There are a lot of training programs that can take you from where you are to where you want to be at the end of April. There are Couch to 5K programs for those just getting started, half marathon and marathon programs for those ready for the longer races, and everything in between. Search the web or check the Training page of www.illinoismarathon.com. Also, some of the fitness clubs in town offer training programs.

- **Find a training buddy.** Having somebody to run or walk with on a regular basis helps you keep your training schedule. A partner (or a group) makes the time pass more quickly, and knowing somebody is waiting for you can get you out the door when you might otherwise let your training slide.

- **Exercise in the right gear.** Training for a spring race means training in the winter. The right clothes will keep you warm without getting soaked in sweat. No matter what the season, the right shoes can make the difference between successful training and injury. Visit a running specialty shop, such as Body n’ Sole Sports, to learn more about shoes and clothing.

- **Eat right.** You may be hungrier than usual as your activity level increases. If you eat more, make sure you eat well. An active body needs more lean protein, and more fruits and vegetables are always good.

- **Adjust your program as needed.** Training programs are not straightjackets. If the program says to run on Tuesday, but Tuesdays are especially busy for you, adjust. If you do shift days, don’t eliminate easy days between hard training days. If you get sick, take off some days and don’t try to make up for missed days.

- **Enjoy race weekend.** Listen to the guest speakers at the expo and go to the pasta feed with your fellow athletes. Drink in all the excitement of the event. Enjoy your run.
or walk. After the race, be sure to wear your race shirt and medal proudly.

It’s not too early to put on your list of things to do “participate in the 2012 Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon.” Race weekend is Friday through Saturday, April 27 and 28. Events offered include the Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K, 5K, Relay, and Youth Run, plus three I-Challenge events (5K on Friday night plus either the Marathon, Half Marathon, or 10K on Saturday). Postrace event, 27th Mile, is hosted by the Champaign Convention and Visitors Bureau. For more information, including registration prices, and deadlines, visit www.illinoismarathon.com.

Getting on the Marathon Map
The inaugural running of the Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon on April 11, 2009, was a huge success. The race earned accolades for being one of the best new events in the nation. The marathon, half marathon, marathon relay, 5K, and youth run featured more than 9,700 runners from 48 states and five countries; more than 80 percent of the participants in Year 1 hailed from the state of Illinois. Based on a report done by the Champaign Sports Commission, the estimated economic impact from race weekend totaled nearly $4.4 million.

The Champaign-Urbana community scored high marks.

“This race was so excellent that I don’t have words. It’s like everything was thought of—very well stocked aid stations, great finish line, great start line, porta-potties everywhere. Flat course, enthusiastic spectators—the community has already embraced this race,” noted one participant from Georgia.

“It was great to be back on campus after nearly 25 years; running onto the football field and finishing at the 50 yard line was spectacular,” commented a runner and alumn from Ohio.

The first running in 2009 was the beginning of a movement that shows no signs of slowing down.

Years 2 and 3 Bring Changes
“A race is only as good as its previous edition and all bets are off for continued success,” Knutson said. After the 2009 event, he hired Lindemann and Seeley as his co-directors, certain that under their leadership, “the race would move to a new level.”

Key improvements in Year 2 included a tweaked course, additional sponsors, more volunteers, and a much larger race committee to handle key aspects of the event in coordination with the co-directors.

On an unexpectedly hot and humid last Saturday in April 2010, 14,700 runners participated in the second annual events. The weather stressed the medical plan to the breaking point, as 25 runners were taken to area hospitals. As a result, race medical director Dr. Nathan Walker worked with the other medical care professionals involved with the race to radically revamp the medical plan, which is now cutting edge in the marathon industry.

The biggest change that took place after the
second year was the sale of the event by Knutson to a local group.

“The decision to sell was not something I intended to do when this event was launched in 2009,” Knutson said. “However, I was pleased to find local, supportive buyers, who have been a part of this event since its inception. I’m confident that this race will continue to grow and expand, based on my past experience working with them all.”

The seven local buyers are race co-directors Seeley and Lindemann, Tom Coleman, Jedd Swisher, Greg Reynolds, Blaise Aguirre, and Christie Clinic.

“As the title sponsor of the marathon and half-marathon, we’ve seen firsthand the impact this event has on the Champaign-Urbana community,” Gлежhorn said. “Mark was approached by a buyer from Texas who wanted to purchase the event. The last thing we wanted to see was this race run and operated outside of the Champaign-Urbana community. It was an easy decision for us to become part owners of this fantastic community event.”

Sticking with the last weekend of April schedule as with the previous year, the third annual events went off without nearly a hitch. Almost 19,000 runners signed up, and 3,200 volunteers showcased what an amazing community Champaign-Urbana is.

“I am so proud of our community,” Lindemann said.

A popular change for 2011 was moving the Provena Covenant Medical Center 5K to Friday night, adding a 10K to Saturday’s offerings, and offering the I-Challenge events, for which runners who did the 5K on Friday plus either the full or half-marathon on Saturday received a coveted I-Challenge medal in addition to their 5K and full or half medals.

“I originally signed up to run the Christie Clinic Illinois Half Marathon to provide personal motivation for a healthier lifestyle,” said first-time half marathoner Quinn Huber. “As it turned out, I found the training and the race a positive experience, which has resulted in new friendships and a great feeling of accomplishment.”

**Exerting an Impact Champaign-Urbana, Now and Forever**

In its first three years the marathon has become bigger than just a race event. The Developmental Services Center, Larkin’s Place at the YMCA, the Eastern Illinois Food Bank, CU Schools Foundation, and many other local charities have benefited from the generous donations from race proceeds. Churches, schools, Boys and Girls Scout troops, old and young have come together to work on the common goal of making the marathon weekend a success for the runners. The runners consistently report back on the hospitality shown them during the weekend.

Gлежhorn said Christie Clinic’s mission is to provide Medicine for Your Life.

“I really see the marathon as a manifestation of what our responsibility is to our community as a major healthcare provider,” he said. “Much

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Sophomore Myers Leonard will hold down the fort at the center position. Over the summer, Leonard played for the USA Under 19 squad that participated in the FIBA Under 19 Championship. Leonard said the experience should help him throughout Big Ten Play.

“Playing against that level of competition, I had to bring it every night,” Leonard said. “I think everything I learned with (USA basketball) will help me this season.”

Egyu also will see significant playing time, and Djimde will be rotated in. These three have been charged with providing a presence in the paint, something that will be vital for the Illini to succeed this season.

With all of the fresh talent the Illini has, the team believes many around the country will be surprised by the high level of play they will display on the court.

“We aren’t ranked preseason but that doesn’t mean anything,” Richardson said. “UCONN came out of nowhere last season, so we can surprise the country this year.”

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of the focus of the healthcare system is around a ‘sickness’-based model. The marathon is a way for Christie to help provide a catalyst for change in our community. To help create a ‘wellness’-based culture, to get first-time runners out there and leave their sedentary lifestyles behind.”

Co-directors Seeley and Lindemann couldn’t agree more.

“The event has created a ‘culture of fitness’ in our community that is visible every day,” Seeley said. “The number of folks you see out exercising has exploded. Champaign-Urbana is definitely a running town now.”

Jan Seeley is the co-director of the Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon and the co-owner of Marathon & Beyond magazine, a 15-year-old, bimonthly magazine for distance runners.

Marsha Osterbur is the administrative assistant to the Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon owners and has worked at Christie Clinic for 11 years as the executive administrative assistant to the Chief Financial Officer.

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