

## Some Like It Fast

**For Harvard students and staff, it's 26 miles to Copley and no turning back.**

**By James Kwok**

**Issue Date: 4/14/2006    Section: News**

Tradition has it that before a Harvard student graduates, he or she must perform three acts involving the Widener stacks, the John Harvard statue, and the paved area around the Yard. However, for a small and dedicated group of Harvard students, there is an entry on their to-do list at Harvard that is more taxing, tiring, and daunting than the three mentioned above: running the Boston Marathon.

The 26.2-mile marathon will begin at noon on April 17. The starting line is in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and the finishing line is at Copley Square, in Boston. This year, a sizable number of Harvard students and staff are choosing to run as a way to aid social causes both at Harvard and across the country.

One charity, the Harvard College Marathon Challenge (HCMC), allows Harvard runners to participate in the Marathon without first having recorded a qualifying time. Typically, runners must finish another time-based event in under a certain time to be able to participate in the Boston Marathon; similar events such as the Marine Corps Marathon or the New York City Marathon are typically used for qualifying times. The HCMC has provided some 67 students and staff members — selected by lottery at the beginning of this school year — the opportunity to run without previous marathon experience.

The proceeds raised by the HCMC runners will be donated to the Philips Brooks House Association (PBHA) and Project HEALTH. PBHA is an umbrella organization on campus that is responsible for a multitude of social programs like the Small Claims Advisory Service and the Chinatown Afterschool program. Project HEALTH is a volunteer organization dedicated to helping lower-income families through its social programs.

Gene Corbin, Class of '55 Executive Director of the PBHA, and HCMC runner, told the *Independent*

recently that while “the organization has numerous fundraising events” such as the Fall Bike Sale and the Spring Auction for the Summer Urban Program, “PBHA’s involvement in the Harvard Marathon Challenge...is the first time the organization will benefit from the proceeds of the Boston Marathon or a race.” According to Corbin, the Marathon provides a great opportunity for PBHA because “unrestricted support is difficult to obtain and funds often don’t exist to cover needs” such as vans, salaries and supplies that are necessary for the programs the PBHA provides.

Not all Harvard students preparing to run the Marathon will do so under the HCMC program. Kay Negishi, for example, is running to raise funds for the Reach Out and Read National Center (ROR). The ROR is dedicated to encouraging literacy in youth, particularly by providing books that pediatricians will give to their young patients during checkups. Negishi told the *Independent* recently, “I’m really proud to be able to represent [the ROR] in the marathon.” She added that another motivation for securing a spot on the ROR Boston Marathon team was that the charity was “offering a spot to run for charity, so I can be an official runner.” Without such a status, she explains, it would have been difficult to attain a qualifying time at a previous marathon. She will be running with five other runners supported by the ROR.

Other charities that are fielding runners in the Marathon include Goodwill, the Greater Boston Food Bank, and Boston Medical Center.

It is clear why charities are supporting runners, but why do the runners want to undertake the grueling race? After all, as Negishi observed, “The guy who did it first in Greece DIED after running it. And then someone just said, ‘Hey, why don’t we make an event out of it?’ And let’s commemorate by running the distance that that dude just died from. And here we are.” When asked why the runners would undertake such a challenge, their general motives do not seem to be a preference for punishment. HCMC entrant Andrew Sellergren ’08, who already has one marathon under his belt, told the *Independent*, “I’m running the marathon for the challenge of it. There’s no better way of knowing what you are capable of than testing yourself over 26 miles.” On the other hand, he feels that raising funds for PBHA and Project HEALTH gives “my running a purpose beyond myself.”

Others see the marathon as a surefire way of getting into shape. Paul Hegarty, Leverett Building Manager, said that he had set as one of his goals to be in top physical shape by the time he turned 40 last October. “Until I decided to run the marathon, I was failing miserably in attaining that goal,” said Hegarty. The marathon acted as a suitable inducement to get fit. “Once I told people I was going to run it, I figured I had to step up and start training,” Hegarty added. “It is the challenge for me. I guess I am running to prove to myself I can do it.”

Aside from the idea of pursuing such a challenging activity for its own sake, the benefits of the proceeds made it all the more worthwhile. Corbin calls the choice of whether to run for the HCMC a “no-brainer” in that it is “a great way to support vital public-service efforts that benefit our community while making new friends at Harvard.” Sameer Doshi, a student at the Law School and a self-described lifelong runner, said that during spring break he was “able to focus on the reason why we are running: to support people who could use help.”

Differing reasons aside, Justin Schoolmaster ’04 understands the challenge of running the marathon and

takes it with a suitably light-hearted perspective: “The team aspect of running with HCMC made it appealing,” said Schoolmaster. “With a group of others, you can get through thirteen miles and not know it because you’ve been gabbing with each other the whole time,” he explained. When asked whether he was nervous about the marathon, Schoolmaster joked, “If I’m not in the top ten by the midpoint, I’m stealing one of those wheelchairs that some people use. That will seal my victory.”

*Available At: <http://www.HarvardIndependent.com/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleID=9869>*

*Copyright 2005 Harvard Independent. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.*