

Road Race a family affair

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Runners hurried to the starting line a couple minutes after 1 p.m. on Sunday, as the 30th running of the Darien Road Race inched closer. Moments later, an air horn sounded as 329 pairs of legs kicked into high gear.

A few minutes after the mass of runners began the 10-kilometer road race, the participants of the day's second race -- a 1.5-mile fun run -- lined up at their starting line. The 181 runners who took part in the fun run came in all shapes and sizes. There were parents pushing strollers, octogenarians and young children walking hand-in-hand with family members moving steadily toward the finish line.

Bettina Reynertson completed the race with her entire family: her husband, Soren, daughters Madison, 9, and Peyton, 6, and Tilly, her 10-month-old golden retriever. The family took about 20 minutes to complete the race. "We did a mix of walking and running," Bettina Reynertson said, "and we all finished together."

Tilly was resting on the ground, her fur wet after a quick swim in the water near the finish line. "All she wants is a hot dog," Reynertson said. There were no dogs running in the 10-kilometer race, but there were several families taking part in the challenge. Alex Ostberg, 12, of Darien, finished sixth overall in the race, with a time of 36:48, crossing the line four minutes and 25 seconds after first-place winner Chase Pizzonia, 23, of Darien.

"I started to run seriously this year with my dad, who's been training for a marathon," Ostberg said a few minutes after his finish as he cheered for his father, who was nearing the end of the race. Ostberg, who is a student at Middlesex Middle School, said this is his first real race. "It felt really good coming into the finish," he said. "The middle of the race was the hardest part."

The course began with runners heading south on Pear Tree Point Road toward Long Neck Point Road, before turning onto Ring's End Road and continuing in a 6.2-mile loop to the finish line.

"It was a great course, and there was a lot of shade," said Kate Lyons, 45, of Darien, who earned the trophy for fastest female runner with a time of 39:53. "It was very well done, and this is as good a race as you're going to find anywhere."

This was Lyons' first year running in the race, though she cited her familiarity with the route as her secret to success. "I actually live on Pear Tree Point Road," she said. "The gal who came in second was actually leading for the entire race, but in the last mile, I had the advantage of knowing the road." Seeing her family root for her as she ran by her home also helped her time, she said.

While the race was the day's main event, there was more going on than running shoes pounding against pavement. "We raised \$34,190 so far today," Founder and Chairperson Mary Green said. "And I'm going to guess that there will be a couple more thousand."

The money raised will benefit the Bennett Cancer Center, Whittingham Cancer Center and the Community Fund of Darien. Volunteers presented prizes to the top fundraisers, including the grand prize BMW bicycle, which was donated by BMW of Darien.

Joan Hewson, a longtime race volunteer and breast-cancer survivor announced the winner of the top prize. "This year, the prize goes to none other than our beloved Mary Green," she said. "We've been handing out prizes for years, and Mary's never gotten one."

Hewson presented Green with a race shirt, signed by all the sponsors and a special medal.

"I really don't feel totally entitled to win all this and all this recognition," said Green, who raised \$1,435. "One of our volunteers, Oscar Garcia, was not able to help this year, because he's fighting a personal battle with cancer. Because of his friendship with the race, I would like this bike to go to Oscar Garcia to help provide him with hope and motivation."

The race, Green had said earlier in the day, is all about giving. "From the birthday cake, to the tent the boat club provided for us, to the time from the volunteers, and runners like 11-year-old Emily Conn, who raised \$680," she said. "That's what this is all about."