

Inspiring Local Human-Interest Stories Help Awaken the Force during Inaugural Star Wars Half Marathon – The Dark Side at Walt Disney World Resort

More than 19,500 registered for the 13.1-mile half marathon; Popular Star Wars characters to appear during the first-ever Star Wars-themed runDisney race at Walt Disney World Resort

Approximately 19,000 runners from Florida are expected to among the more than 43,000 runners participating in a weekend of races that are part of the inaugural **Star Wars Half Marathon – The Dark Side, making it the largest-ever runDisney half marathon weekend.** It's the first new runDisney race to debut at Walt Disney World Resort since 2009. *Star Wars* Half Marathon – The Dark Side events begin Friday, April 15 and conclude Sunday, April 17 with the half marathon. All races start at Epcot, with the 10K and half marathon finishing at ESPN Wide World of Sports for the first time in runDisney history.

With more than 40,000 runners participating in the weekend's activities, numerous human interest story opportunities will be available, including Alexis Buford, 30 and her husband, Justin, 32, who have spent the past year fighting for her husband's life. He suffers from congestive heart failure and End Stage Renal Failure. He's currently on dialysis and in need of a kidney transplant. Originally from Orlando, the couple moved to North Carolina to be closer to his doctors. When her husband was first diagnosed, she herself weighed 300 pounds, which made her ineligible to be tested to donate a kidney. Alex has used the half marathon as motivation to lose weight to be tested. She has lost 102 pounds to date and is now eligible to be tested as a donor. Less than two weeks after running the *Star Wars* Half Marathon – The Dark Side, Alex will be tested.

Additionally, Gerald Reznick, an Orlando resident and former news reporter, saw his life change dramatically 10 years ago when he became legally blind after a two-year struggle with Stargardt Disease (an inherited degenerative eye condition). His blindness ended his 15-year news career, as well as took away his ability to read printed material, drive and see the faces of his loved ones. For most of the last 10 years, he was homebound due to the difficulty of navigating life without sight. In January 2015, a cousin introduced Gerald to the Walt Disney World Half Marathon. He signed up for the 2016 Walt Disney World Half Marathon, and two minutes into the race, he lost the friends he was running with who were acting as guides. He finished the race anyway in two and a half hours! Now running the *Star Wars* Dark Side Challenge, Gerald says participating in runDisney races has given him the courage to step outside his front door on his own.

Race day information is below:

Star Wars -The Dark Side 5K, Friday, 6 a.m. (Start and finish at Epcot)

Star Wars -The Dark Side 10K, Saturday, 5:30 a.m. (Start-Epcot, finish-ESPN Wide World of Sports)

Star Wars Half Marathon-The Dark Side, Sunday, 5 a.m. (Start-Epcot, finish-ESPN Wide World of Sports)

Media interested in covering the weekend events must contact Disney

Sports PR in advance to arrange for credentials and arrive by 3:30 a.m. Sunday for onsite coverage of the start line of the half marathon. For the finish line at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, media should arrive by 4 a.m.