

2017 Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend Underway

More than 100,000 runners and spectators from across the nation and around the world will hit the streets of Walt Disney World Resort during Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend presented by Cigna, making it one of the largest events in Central Florida.

This year, the Walt Disney World Half Marathon celebrates its 20th year. Since the first half marathon was held in 1998, more than 320,000 runners have lined up for this signature *runDisney* race.

Storylines include:

Adam Gorlitsky (Charleston, SC), paralyzed 10 years ago in a car accident, will participate in four races at the Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend presented by Cigna (Jan. 5-8). Gorlitsky, with the aid of a robotic suit that gives him back mobility, will walk in a portion of the 5K, 10K, half marathon and marathon races. Since April 2016, he has walked in a few races, challenging what it means to be paraplegic.

Chryss LaRoche (Sanbornton, N.H.), who suffered a life-threatening brain aneurysm and pulmonary embolism in 2011, is participating in the 5K race with her son on behalf of Cigna. Six years ago, LaRoche was rushed to the hospital where she underwent emergency surgery to drain a brain aneurysm. A week later, her condition worsened and her body showed signs of a stroke, requiring another surgery. Hours after being discharged from the hospital, LaRoche was rushed back when she experienced a pulmonary embolism. After months of rehabilitation, LaRoche's participation in the Walt Disney World 5K marks a new milestone in her health journey.

Whitney Hamilton (Indianapolis, Ind.) is running in the Walt Disney World 5K with his grandson after overcoming addiction and securing housing with the help of the national non-profit organization Back on My Feet. Last year the organization, which combats homelessness through running and community support, received a Cigna and Cigna Foundation grant for \$100,000. Whitney joined in August 2014 and got his life back on track, obtaining a job, a car and a place to live while also losing 22 pounds. He now gives back to the community that supported him by mentoring other members of the program.

Brendan Malanga (Boston, Mass.), a teacher who is running the 20th Anniversary Walt Disney World Half Marathon, is trying to save the life of a former student by donating a kidney. To be a viable donor to his former student Isis Rivera – who was diagnosed at age 12 with End Stage Renal Disease – Malanga lost 60 pounds in 10 months. Although he is not a match for Rivera, he remains determined to help her by donating his kidney in an effort to encourage another donor to provide a kidney for Rivera. Through his weight loss efforts aimed at helping Rivera, he developed a love for running and is tackling the Walt Disney World Half Marathon, his first attempt at a 13.1-mile race.

Brian and Elaina Mahlan (Lakeland, Fla.) are celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary with their 18 children and grandchildren during the Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend.

Brian and Elaina currently reside in Florida with one of their daughters and three sons;; however, the remainder of the family is located across the country. Despite best efforts, the family has not been together as a full group since 2010. This weekend they will celebrate their long-anticipated reunion by participating in various races from the runDisney Kids Races to the Dopey Challenge.

Below is *runDisney* expo and Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend race information:

runDisney Health & Fitness Expo Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend

Wednesday, Noon – 8 p.m.	Walt Disney World 5K • Epcot Thursday, 6 a.m. start
Thursday, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.	Walt Disney World 10K • Epcot Friday, 5:30 a.m. start
Friday, 10 am – 7 p.m.	20th Anniversary Walt Disney World Half Marathon • Epcot Saturday, 5:30 a.m. start
Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.	Walt Disney World Marathon • Epcot Sunday, 5:30 a.m. start

All races start and finish at Epcot at Walt Disney World Resort. The *runDisney* Health & Fitness Expo is located at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

Media interested in covering the weekend events must contact Disney Sports Content Relations a day in advance to arrange for credentials. Media must arrive at Epcot by 3:15 am for live coverage of the start and finish lines of the half and full marathon on Saturday and Sunday.

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