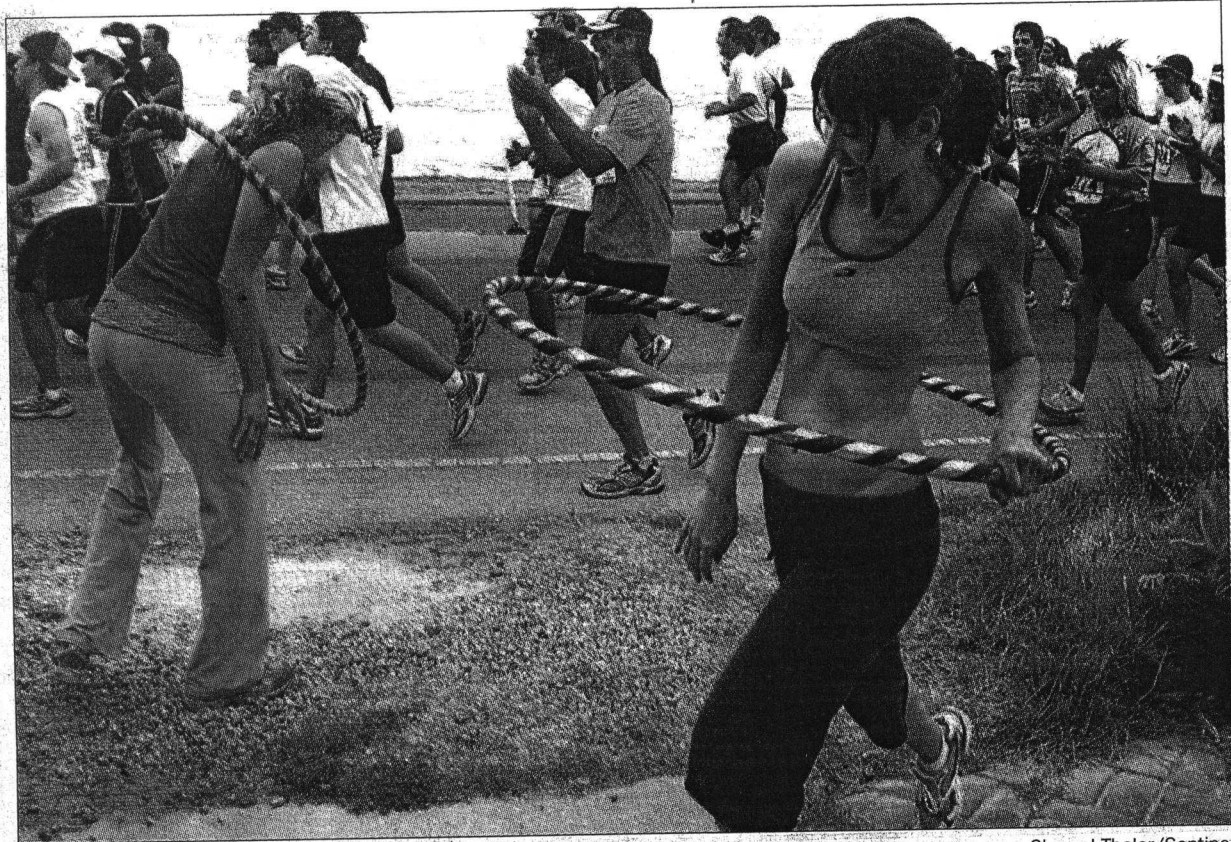


RUNNERS GIVE IT A WHIRL



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Heather Troy, left, and Claudia Graziano entertain Wharf to Wharf runners with their hula-hoop prowess on East Cliff Drive in Pleasure Point on Sunday. An estimated 15,000 runners took part in the race.

15,000 competitors, thousands of watchers turn out for annual footrace along coast

By KEENAN WEATHERFORD

Sentinel correspondent

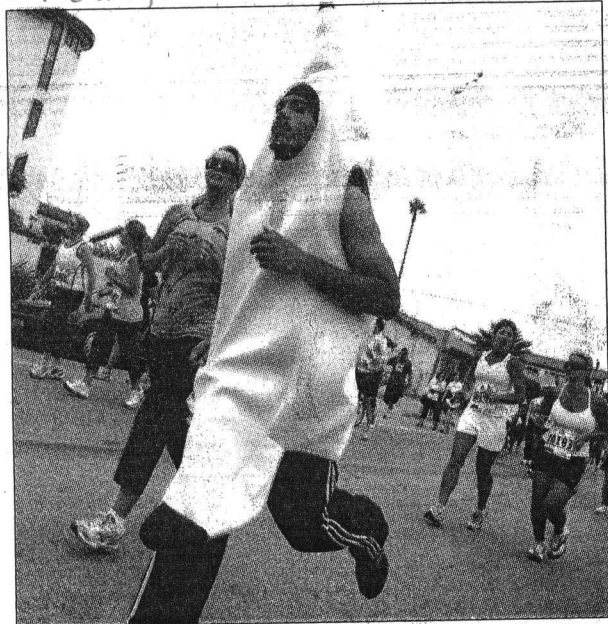
Six runners took home prize money at Sunday's 36th annual Wharf to Wharf, but about 15,000 runners cashed in on a great day for a footrace.

It was an overcast morning along the coast — not so fun for race watching but perfect for a six-mile stroll from Santa Cruz to Capitola. The race-time high was about 61 degrees.

What is frequently billed as the "Best Little Roadrace in California" is hardly that anymore. In 1973, 276 runners completed the race; this year, 15,000 people signed up. Organizers, however, said "many more" unregistered runners also hit the streets, as entries sold out June 6.

"We think more people came out today than ever before," said race director Kirby Nicol.

As usual, that mean congested roads along the race course in the early



A large banana, or at least a man wearing a fruit costume, slips through Pleasure Point on Sunday.

morning, and generally heavy traffic in the area throughout the day.

The course, from Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf to Capitola Wharf, was lined with bands and spectators looking for a novel way to

start off their Sundays.

"I love the live music," Carol Arriola said as she gestured to the Dumpsters, a band playing in the driveway of her home on Opal Cliff Drive.

Arriola, who was

At a glance

MEN'S WINNING TIME: 27:48

by Gebo Burka of Ethiopia.

WOMEN'S WINNING TIME:

30:46 by Amane Gobena of Ethiopia.

TOP LOCAL TIME: 29:09 by Brett Gotcher (fifth overall).

NUMBER OF RUNNERS IN 1973

WHARF TO WHARF: 273.

SIGNED UP FOR 2008 WHARF TO WHARF: 15,000.

REGISTERED RUNNERS IN

ATTENDANCE: 12,900 (approximate).

RUNNERS TRANSPORTED TO HOSPITAL: 3 (all released).

VOLUNTEERS: 1,700.

cheering on her husband and grandchildren in the race, moved into her Opal Cliffs home in 1971 and has been there for every Wharf to Wharf, beginning with the first race in 1973.

"The first year we were eating pancakes for breakfast and then we were like, 'What's that noise?'" Arriola said.

Christine Hooper, another veteran spectator who has

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The 36th annual Wharf to Wharf race gets under way on Beach Street in Santa Cruz on Sunday morning.

Race

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seen every race, sat in a couch in her Opal Cliffs driveway holding a sign reading "Faster, faster!"

"They're so tired," Hooper said of the runners. "They get a kick out of [the sign]."

Onlookers weren't the only ones enjoying the spectacle. Many businesses along the race course had specials or opened early to accommodate the hordes of runners. Surf Town Deli on Beach Street in Santa Cruz opened at 7 a.m., two hours early, and typically sees about 30 percent more profit than a normal day, said owner Lark Young. Nearby Beach Liquors usually rakes in a "couple hundred dollars" extra before Wharf to Wharf starts, according to manager Greg Press. But it's difficult catering to well-prepared runners first thing in the morning, said J.D. Woosley, manager of Shoreline Surf Shop on Beach Street.

"How much money can you fit in a Speedo?" Woosley said, referring to the aerodynamic outfits worn by some runners standing outside the store.

The race was won by Gebo Burka and Amame Gobena, both from Ethiopia. Both ran away from their competition.

Three runners were transported to Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, said Rayette Andrews, the race's

medical coordinator. All three had been released by 3 p.m. Many more were treated for minor injuries; Andrews said Band-Aids and ice were sought-after by runners at aid stations set up at every mile marker. About 100 volunteers with basic first-aid and CPR knowledge actually ran the race and helped runners who looked to be having trouble. Because of the cool conditions, dehydration was not a big problem, as it has been in previous years.

"We were very lucky with the weather," Andrews said.

All told, about 1,700 volunteers spread across 35 committees put on the race.

"We have an enormous logistics package," Nicol said. "To watch it all come together is really exciting."

The 2007 race raised \$205,465 for athletics programs at schools countywide. The haul from this year's race won't be totaled until next month, Nicol said.

Nicol said that he was "really, really pleased with the results" of the race, noting that the top women's time, 30:46, was only 4 seconds off of the course record for women.

"I talked to a lot of runners, and the overwhelming response was that they were happy with the weather, with their t-shirts, with their gift packs, everything worked well," Nicol said.

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Wharf to Wharf participants run through bubbles along East Cliff Drive on Sunday morning.

Sophie Borazanian/Sentinel