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Brett Gotcher, former Aptos High and future Stanford track star, hopes to improve on last year's 11th-place finish in the annual Wharf-to-Wharf race from Santa Cruz to Capitola.

Wharf-to-Wharf turns 30

Wharf to Wharf RP 7-27-02

Kenyans Rutto and Momanyi back to defend titles

By CEDRIC SYNNESEVEDT
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This Sunday will be the fourth Sunday in July, which means about 14,000 runners, partiers and fun-hogs alike are swarming to Santa Cruz this weekend to partake in the annual six-mile Wharf to Wharf race, starting at the Santa Cruz Wharf and ending at Capitola-by-the-sea.

The race, winding through beach town neighborhoods with many beautiful cliff-side views, attracts a wide variety of athletes from 42 states and half a dozen countries around the world.

This year will mark Wharf to

Wharf's 30th anniversary. For many, it is a time to look back and reflect on past race days. Race Director Kirby Nicol recalled the very first Wharf to Wharf in 1973, which was comparably low-key, but at a mere 273 participants was considered a terrific success.

The size and recognition of the race continued to grow dramatically during the running boom of the 1970s, but little has changed about the race from an administrative standpoint, according to Nicol. "The formula has been so successful that we're concerned about making any changes," he said.

Evans Rutto and Grace Moma-

nyi, both natives of Kenya, return to defend their 2001 titles, along with top local finishers Rachel Cook of La Selva Beach and Aptos High track star Brett Gotcher, who placed 11th overall last year.

A young Kenyan based out of Albuquerque, N.M., Momanyi is back to defend her women's title, which she took in a time of 31:23. Rutto, 24, clocked a winning time of 27:16 last year. The second- and third-place finishers, John Gwako and Mbarak Hussein, also of Kenya, return as well.

Santa Cruz native Bonnie DellaMora Reumann said this will be her 15th time running the Wharf to

Wharf. Looking at an old Wharf to Wharf T-shirt with the neck cut off, Reumann recalled what it was like to run it for the first time.

"There were about six of us in a group," Reumann said. "We'd stayed up the night before making T-shirts, and we were all pretty nervous. None of us had run a full six miles before."

Reumann, 47, has been the manager at Zoccoli's Pasta House in Santa Cruz for six years. She said this weekend is always the biggest weekend of the summer for local restaurants. The entire Zoccoli's

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staff dresses up and serves food in its running gear the night before the event.

"A lot of people make it a weekend in Santa Cruz," Reumann said, commenting on how many people from the Bay Area and farther come back to Zoccoli's each year to load up on carbo-rich pasta.

"One year," Reumann recalled. "The top runners from Kenya came in to carb-up before the race. I couldn't believe it, but the winner ate Chicken Carbonara, which is one of the fattiest meals on the menu."

Reumann said her favorite part about the Wharf to Wharf is seeing so many people having such a good time. "The bands and the spectators are so wonderful," she said. "People really give a lot of their time."

Santa Cruz and Capitola residents, particularly restaurant and hotel owners, are gearing up for the impact. It is estimated that the race, with all the thousands of athletes and spectators who flood the town, generates roughly \$1 million in revenue.

Adrian Birch, manager at Zeldada's, a beachfront restaurant in Capitola, said race day calls for major preparation — opening the coffee bar earlier than usual, bringing in extra staff, etc.

"The night before we do a car-

bo special for all the runners in town," Birch said. "We have to make sure we have plenty of bottled water on ice and extra coffee and muffins for all the people waiting around at the finish line."

Besides bringing a day of health-promoting fun to the community, Nicol said the race itself generates roughly \$200,000, which goes to various local youth groups, sports teams and school facilities in Santa Cruz County.

"Our purpose is to spread the gospel of health and fitness to the youth of Santa Cruz County," Nicol said.

Since the race is so big — big enough to be nationally recognized — the planning of the annual event is a year-round operation.

"We're already starting on next year's event," Nicol said. "This one is already over for me." He added that his only concern now is that everyone has a good time and no one gets hurt.

The Wharf to Wharf begins at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday. The race will be getting full media attention and a full race special will be broadcast on television (Santa Cruz Channel 4) at 7:00 p.m. Sunday.