

# The Wharf To Wharf— And Everything In Between

By Sheila Daniels

**L**ow-overcast days in Santa Cruz don't usually merit spectators, especially those sitting outdoors in beach chairs at 7:30am. But, onlookers came Sunday, July 28, not to admire the drizzly coastal morning, but to appreciate the heated competition of the 19th annual Wharf To Wharf Race.

Appreciative of the cool weather, however, were 12,000 runners sardined near the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf where the race started.

While cardio-funk dancers pepped up the crowd with tunes squealing apropos lyrics like "work that body," runners limbered up for the six-mile race to Capitola Wharf.

"Every race has a little different niche, that's part of the mystic of road racing. But six miles is a good distance which caters to a lot of casual runners," said Wharf To Wharf

Director Kirby Nicol. It enables runners to gauge their speed more easily.

As soon as the starting shot rang out, it became clear the leaders of the pack were not casual runners.

Brian Abshire, 27, led the mass from start to finish, winning the WTW Race in a course record time of 27 minutes, 30 seconds. While runner-up Ivan Huff (28:02) momentarily took the lead twice, it was obvious, 3 1/2 miles into the race, that Sacramento's Abshire would take the title.

Mountain View's Danny Gonzalez, following closely at Abshire and Huff's heels in the beginning of the race, finished third (28:09), while Matt Clayton from San Diego came in fourth (28:15), and defending champion Carmelo Rios, from Hayward, placed fifth (28:23).

"He (Abshire) sets out to

push the pace," says Rios. "He's a good front runner."

Rios, who won last year's 6.2 miles WTW Race in 29:48 (the .2 is 2/10 of a mile longer, about one minute running, and was added because of damage to the Riverside Bridge) says of Abshire, "one of these days I'll beat him."

Abshire was shining, though, despite a scheduled liver biopsy and having suffered from hepatitis and mononucleosis due to a tattoo he got a year and a half ago. Not only did he seem to fly to the finish, but he surpassed his prior record of 27:45, set in 1989 WTW Race.

"Road races are fun," says Abshire, who plans to move to Santa Cruz and get a track program going with Nicol. "Running does a lot (for me), and it's a great way to make a living."

Living well is what open and local first-prize winners,

of the men and women's division, will do with a free trip for two to Hawaii.

Nancy Ditz, 37, from Woodside was the women's first place winner at 31:47. WTW champion in 1987 and '88, Ditz made a strong comeback after taking maternity leave in '89 and once again was this year's victor with her personal best time.

"I feel as if I'm from here, and more importantly, during the two best years of my career I came here and won this race," says Ditz. "To win it again and better my times tells me I'm back."

Kathy Bowman, 30, from San Dimas placed second (31:48), and San Jose's 19-year-old Dina Farage, not listed among the elite women runners, came in third (32:48) after passing Rosa Gutierrez with less than a mile to go. Gutierrez, 27, from San Jose finished fourth.



Winner Brian Abshire is given the first-place award by Capitola Mayor Stephanie Harlan.



As for our local runners, Jose Aispuro, 29, from Aptos finished 11th overall (28:54) in the men's division, and Barb Myers-Acosta, 33, defending WTW champion, of Santa Cruz, came in 10th overall (34:25) for the women's division.

Unknown to most, the third fastest local female runner was 14-year-old Nicole Silva. Placing 56th overall, Silva will be a freshman at Aptos High School next year.

"At her age, she has no business running in that fast of company," says Nicol. "She has great potential."

With the victory of another WTW Race well done, came the agony of defeat for others.

After the race, around 8:00 p.m., Rios was arrested for gashing the doorman of the Edgewater in Capitola Village with a broken beer bottle.

The doorman, who received stitches for the cut near his right elbow, but otherwise unhurt, told Rios and his intoxicated cohorts to leave the nightclub because of obnoxious behavior.

"Rios worked himself into a tizzy and attacked the doorman," says Capitola Police Sgt. Vince Riccabona. "He said he did something stupid and he was sorry for it."

There will always be people who abuse substances, especially when there are 15,000 to 20,000 people roaming a village with bars, says Captain Tom Hanna of the Capitola P.D. It just so happened that one of these people was a running celebrity.

"We thought he was just another drunk patron of the Edgewater which is a common event," says Hanna.

To handle the WTW crowd in Capitola Village, neighborhood parking is not enforced, a shuttle bus runs throughout the day to take people back downtown and safety measures are reinforced.

"We beef up our staffing in all aspects," says Hanna.

Much to the dismay of Nicol, another elite runner, famed Kenyan Henry Rono, 39, was also arrested Saturday, July 27, for being drunk in public. Although released prior to the race, he never showed up.

Rono, who has a drinking problem, came from a rural, primitive environment into a big city, 20th-century life style and became a running celebrity all within 30 days, Nicol says. That's a pretty traumatic thing for anyone going from rags to riches in that short period.



*A future runner at this year's Wharf to Wharf Race.*

"He ran into some Kenyan compatriots and fell off the wagon," Nicol said. "It's a real tragic story because he was such a great talent."

Unfortunately, talent can be a curse for some people, and oddly enough, apparent curses can be a blessing to others.

Running with the aid of a partner, Mike Jones, 42, of Aptos, had a 10-minute head start for the first time since he started running WTW Races;

so he wouldn't have to fuss with maneuvering through the crowd.

"One of the advantages of being blind is you get a head start," says Jones, who finished in 40:25.

With just enough hills to make the run interesting and a little bit more challenging, Jones said the atmosphere was very festive, especially with some 30-odd bands playing along the route.

"Every time we reached one of these bands my running partner would speed up," Jones said. "Every year the quality gets better and better. We have very talented musicians in the County."

With people on both sides of the streets cheering and yelling as the runners pass, says Jones, "you feel like you're in the Olympics."

Handing out Mayor's Cups at the awards ceremony were Stephanie Harlan from Capitola and Jane Yokayama from Santa Cruz. Harlan presented Abshire the championship while Yokayama honored Ditz as number one in the women's division.

"The race was lots of fun, I'm glad the weather was cool for the runners," Harlan later commented. "Everyone had a good time, the crowd dispersed quickly, and things went smoothly."

As the afternoon sun moved relentlessly toward the west, the aftermath of a colorful day lingered in Capitola Village. The enveloping fog lifted enough to let the sunshine penetrate the revelers who packed Capitola Beach, and by late afternoon, runners were probably planning their strategy for next year's Wharf To Wharf Race. □