

NEWS

# Howard County Striders marks Columbia's 2,000th Bagel Run



By **VALERIE BONK** | WTOP News

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No matter whether it's sweltering, sleeting or "snowmageddon," you can count on at least one athlete to show up to the Columbia Swim Center parking lot each Saturday at 7 a.m. to continue a running tradition that's been going strong since 1979.

Known as the Bagel Run for its customary end point at the Bagel Bin, the weekend event has become the lifeblood of the Howard County Striders running club, according to its vice president, Cecilia Murach, 39, of Catonsville.

And on July 29, the club was due to mark its 2,000th Bagel Run.



The Bagel Run ends at the Bagel Bin on Twin Rivers Road, where runners gather to socialize over breakfast.

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The tradition started much as it exists today, with a group of runners who'd get the weekend started by meeting at a local bagel shop after their workout.

Over the years, it became a way to bring together runners of all skill levels, from those who are new to the sport to athletes who are training for marathons, Murach says.

“The club is very focused on community and ... it's really kind of where everybody sees each other and we catch up on the week,” she says. “I've made some of my best friends running the Bagel Run on Saturdays.”

Greg Lepore, 46, of Columbia, the unofficial archivist for the Howard County Striders and a coach with the group, agrees.

“It's a social thing. If you come to the Bagel Run with your iPhone strapped to your arm, you're not getting the point,” he says.

While the Howard County Striders organize the run, it is free and open to anyone who wants to join in.

“The first one I did was really awkward because I didn’t know anyone there,” says Hafiz Shaikh, 38, of Columbia, who has been going to bagel runs since 2009. “Eventually you find someone who’s your pace that you can tag along with, and it becomes an amazing place to find friendships in a common run that brings everyone together.”

The courses are laid out on the Columbia’s path system and residential streets in distances ranging from 8 to 20 miles. Lepore serves as the race announcer.

He says that the parking lot at the Columbia Swim Center, where the runs begin, is completely empty until around 6:50 a.m., when runners make their way to the starting line.

“If you’re new and you show up 15 minutes early, you will think that you’re in the wrong place,” Lepore says. “But once you get like seven to 10 minutes away from start time, it’s crowded, especially during the summer.”

After the clock strikes 7 a.m., there is not a runner to be seen.

During marathon training months and in warmer weather, organizers say that between 100 and 150 runners show up to take on the streets of Columbia. In the winter the crowd is much smaller, but part of the tradition is that there is always at least one runner who shows up to keep up the streak. Even during the “snowmageddon” blizzard of 2010, there were two runners who walked to the Wilde Lake Village Center to get started.

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“The streak is very important, and we’re very proud of it,” Lepore says.

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