

VIA MARATHON: RAISING MONEY TO HELP PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



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MARATHON FOR VIA



PHOTOS BY HARRY FISHER/THE MORNING CALL

Runners sprint from the starting point of the 2012 Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via in Salisbury Township on Sunday. The event is the biggest fundraiser of the year for Via of the Lehigh Valley, which helps the disabled.

Taking steps to help a good cause

Runners take part in annual Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via, which helps children and adults with disabilities.

BY IRENE KRAFT
Of The Morning Call

Before the morning fog had completely lifted from the fields surrounding Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest on Sunday, hundreds of runners were up and ready to hit the roadways, parkways and trails of Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton.

Some were there to complete personal goals; others were part of a relay team. All had one mission in common — running the 26.2 miles required to complete the 2012 Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via. The annual event is the biggest fundraiser of the year for Via of the Lehigh Valley, which provides programs for children and adults with disabilities.

“It’s perfect today for running. There’s a little nip in the air,” said Michele Mitchell,



A former Allentown resident, Ian Hilliard of Media, Delaware County, gets a hug from his mother, Jean Andes of Allentown, after finishing first in Sunday’s marathon.

39, of Limerick Township, Montgomery County, glad for the sunshine and slightly cooler temperatures. She was about to embark on her fifth marathon, accompanied by her sister, Cindy Yeagle, 35, of Lansdale, Montgomery County, who was running her third. Yeagle already had earned the right to run in the Boston Marathon next April, but Mitchell hoped

to qualify for it with a good running time.

Others in the crowd were there to support a runner. Robert Galea of Lower Macungie Township came with his daughters, Ashlee, 10, and Breanne, 7, to send off his wife, Yvonne, who ran a leg of the race as part of a “Moms on the Run”

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MARATHON

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relay team.

Ashlee Galea had another important job. The little girl with a big voice kicked off the opening ceremonies with a spine-tingling version of the “Star Spangled Banner.”

Twenty minutes later, a seemingly endless mob of runners crossed the starting line and headed out on a course known for its scenic beauty. Designed by Runner’s World’s Bart Yasso, it took runners through Lehigh Parkway, along the Lehigh River and through Bethlehem’s Historic Quarter ending at Easton’s Centre Square.

Only 2 hours and 42 minutes later, Allentown native Ian Hilliard, now of Media, Delaware County, was the first of 681 full marathon runners to cross the finish line. A strong leader, he finished 8 minutes ahead of Tyler Welsh of Wellsboro, Tioga County, who placed second.

“I was shooting for a little faster, but I’ll take it,” said Hilliard, 22, thrilled with his win. The Salisbury High graduate entered the race because he wanted to run a marathon but didn’t want to drive to Boston. “I know the course. I love the area. It was a good decision,” he said.

Taking the women’s title was Sara Morrison, 29, of Boston.

Not everyone was as fortunate as Hilliard. Marathon runner Lauren Estilow, 52, of Cheltenham, Montgomery County, hoped her time would qualify her to compete in the Boston Marathon, but she

MULTIMEDIA

Photo gallery and video from the Lehigh Valley Health Network Marathon for Via.



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MORE INSIDE

■ Complete results from the marathon can be found in **SPORTS**.

fell short by 6 minutes.

The mother of three knows first-hand about programs provided by organizations like Via. Her youngest daughter, Emily, 18, was diagnosed at age 3 with autism, developmental delays and anxiety disorders.

Most difficult to contend with are Emily’s sensory issues and outbursts, she said. At times during her childhood, it seemed she “screamed every waking moment” Therapeutic programs “have helped Emily tremendously,” she said. “But she’ll never be able to live on her own.”

“Running has been my sanity through this. Having a special-needs child is not easy,” said Estilow, who, although disappointed, still “was happy to be supporting Via.”

Race winner Hilliard agreed: “The race goes to a good cause. Via is a super organization to be involved in.”

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