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Annual running race benefits those needing health care, draws thousands

Lawrence, Ks – Now in its 11th year, the Kansas Half Marathon and 5K has a new host organization, but the mission remains the same. Heartland Community Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center serving Douglas and surrounding counties since 1999, will host the annual race, which raises funds to provide access to health care for all in the region, regardless of income or insurance status. Previously, the race had been hosted by Health Care Access, which merged with Heartland Community Health Center earlier this year.

Part of the 2018 Harvest Half Series of races, the Kansas Half Marathon and 5K presented by Edmonds Duncan Registered Investment Advisors will take place on Sunday, November 4, at Watson Park. The half marathon begins at 7:30 a.m., with the 5k starting at 7:45 a.m.

The race is appropriate for all fitness levels, offering both a half marathon and 5K run/walk option. All runners that are registered receive a t-shirt and finishers receive a sunflower medal. This year, top finishers will also receive cash prizes, shoes, gift cards, and more. The race is on a certified course and offers chip timing. For more information or to register for the race, the public can visit www.kansashalfmarathon.com.

Jennifer Stucker, director of special events at Heartland, has organized the race for the last 3 years. “We’re thrilled that the legacy of the race will carry on through Heartland and continue to benefit the community in a critical and meaningful way by supporting health care for all,” said Stucker. “The race not only supports our mission to serve, but also brings an influx of commerce to local businesses and provides a healthy activity for families and individuals. We encourage all to join the fun and help with our biggest fundraising event.”

Community non-profit leader and participant, Chip Blaser, illustrates the fitness value for all. “The race day feels like a reward for participating in school marathon clubs, fitness goals or any level of training throughout the year.”

Taking a year to plan, the race requires coordinating with the City of Lawrence, local businesses, a race crew and hundreds of volunteers. Past races have seen over 1700 registered runners, with even more people coming out to watch the event and support participants. The race typically sees runners from both the local region, as well as from states across the U.S., and draws groups with inspiring stories.

Running group “Sarah is our Superhero” started as a way for running friends to support a group member’s daughter, Sarah, diagnosed with a brain tumor at the age of 5. Sarah is now in high school, still battling her diagnoses. She remains the group’s “superhero.”

“This will be our team’s 4th year to run the Kansas Half Marathon,” said Lisa Leroux-Smith, member of the ‘Sarah is our Superhero’ running group.” We’re not just running friends, we’re like family. After the Kansas Half this year, we are headed to Memphis for a repeat performance at the St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital Marathon weekend, the hospital where Sarah seeks treatment. Look for us in our bright orange shirts and blue capes running for Sarah again this year!”

The half marathon route will take runners through downtown Lawrence, then east before heading over the Kansas River Bridge and exploring North Lawrence. Both the half and 5k routes finish on 7th Street, between Tennessee and Kentucky Streets.

“I love running the Kansas Half because the route best sums up Kansas as a whole - a beautiful sunrise, the bridge over the Kansas River, a Midwestern main street, the changing seasons, and the temperature is usually great,” said Brittani LeMay, runner now residing outside of Kansas. “I keep coming back to Lawrence for the Kansas Half because it reminds me of home, but also the ladies I used to run with still live in Kansas and they’re my biggest supporters. We all run at different paces but we love running!”

The 2018 Kansas Half Marathon and 5K is presented by Edmonds Duncan Advisors and sponsored by Garry Gribble Running Sports, Great Plains Media (92.9FM The Bull, 105.9 KISS FM, KLWN AM1320/FM101.7), HyVee, Black Hills Energy, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas, Haase + Long, Westar Energy, M Cubed Technologies, Lynn Electric, F.I.T. Muscle and Joint Clinic, 23rd Street Brewery, SPIN Neapolitan Pizza and Merchants Pub and Plate.

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Heartland Community Health Center is a Federally Qualified Health Center welcoming and serving all people in and around Douglas County with quality, affordable, and integrated health care, regardless of income or insurance status. Heartland offers primary care, mental and behavioral health care, dental care, and physical therapy, along with a variety of wrap-around programs. For more information, please visit www.heartlandhealth.org.