

'Great Race' thrives on volunteerism

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The Dole Great Race of Agoura might not be so great if it weren't for the hundreds of volunteers who plot, plan and organize every detail of the six races and after-bash that rivals the race itself on the family fun meter.

Most of the volunteers hail from Oak Park, said Alicia Boretz, president of Oak Park High School's Athletic Booster Club. Boretz has organized the volunteer effort for the past two years and convinced Leigh Ann Dehmohseni, an Oak Park resident, to help with this year's volunteer force that so far has swelled to 220 students, parents, business people, community members and others.

"There's a lot of preparation," Boretz said. "It's huge . . . huge to get so many people to do this."

Saturday, March 31 will mark the 22nd year for the Great Race of Agoura. The volunteers have been working to get ready for the big day since the beginning of the year.

By midFebruary, team leaders were assigned to handle everything from registration and sponsorships to crowd control, signage along routes and serving food at the everpopular postrace party.

Boretz said there are an additional 40 volunteers this year. Another new element to the volunteer corps is a nonprofit group called "[EXTRA Cans for the Needy](#)" which will collect drained water bottles for recycling after the race. The deposit money raised from the recycling supports the homeless in Los Angeles.

Proceeds from the Great Race of Agoura support the six elementary schools in Oak Park and Agoura Hills and the sports teams at Oak Park High School and Agoura High School. Last year the race raised more than \$45,000 for the schools, and organizers believe this year's event will raise even more.

Boretz said the momentum for volunteerism grows every year. "The wheel isn't broken; let it roll," she said.

Also joining the effort this year are the "Explorers," a group of students who volunteer at the new fire station on Canwood Street in Agoura Hills.

Oxnard College cadets studying to become firefighters are also participating, Dehmohseni said.

Besides students, other groups contributing to the race operations is an Amgen team, "Moms in Motion" and the Rotary Club of Simi Valley.

Oak Hills Elementary School in Oak Park opted for their culminating class to offer community service hours to the race rather than buy a traditional legacy gift for the school, Dehmohseni said.

Sponsors for the race include Dole, NordicTrak.com, Camp Keystone, the city of Agoura Hills, Neftin Westlake Car Co. and scores of other businesses and individuals.

"It really, truly is a community effort, and it's a wonderful family event that benefits our kids," Dehmohseni said.

The race consists of the Chesebro Half-Marathon, which already has a maximum field, the Deena Kastor 5K, the Old Agoura 10K, the Kids 1 Mile for children ages 6 to 12 and the Family Fun Run/Walk 1 Mile for all ages.

Runner's World magazine names The Great Race 10K as one of the top six 10Ks in the United States.

A variety of prizes will be presented to first-, second- and third- place winners in each race.

This year's venue has moved from the Agoura High School stadium to nearby Chumash Park.

The park will be the site of race-day registration, the finish line, the sports and fitness expo and all the post-race festivities.

The starting line for the HalfMarathon, 5K and 10K remain on Carell Avenue near the high school.

Registration opens at 6 a.m. and the half marathon starts at 7 a.m. For other information, visit www.thegreatraceofagoura.com