



Inaugural race gets friendly with nature

By Mike DeDoncker

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

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ROCKFORD — Running a race certainly affects an individual's health, but one local runner wants people to understand that it also affects the health of the environment.

Former Rockford Auburn track and cross country standout Stephanie Baliga, now an economics and geography major with a minor in an environmental fellows program at the University of Illinois, is the race director for the Hall Creek Scamper, scheduled for July 21.

She believes it is Rockford's first "Green Race."

"A lot of people don't realize how much garbage and waste is produced by a race and how much of an environmental impact it has," said Baliga, who also has been a successful road racer in the Rockford area. "We're taking steps to make sure our race does as little environmental damage as possible."



Stephanie Baliga

That means such things as organic cotton T-shirts to participants, biodegradable paper products used for race support, minimizing food waste by buying from local organic sources, and low-impact course markings that can be collected after the race and reused.

It also means Baliga has purchased 12 tons of carbon offsets, approximately equal she said to the emissions produced by two cars in one year, to make up for the environmental footprint the race is expected to make.

"You can buy carbon offsets, which are verified emissions reductions, in which there is a commitment to buy a certain amount of renewable energy such as methane, wind energy or solar energy in place of, for instance, energy that would be produced by a nonrenewable source," Baliga said.

"It was kind of hard to determine what our net carbon footprint would be, but I settled on the equivalent of two cars based on what I thought the impact of supplies being delivered to the race, my travel to and from the race site for planning and of people driving to and from the race would be."

Another element of keeping the environmental effect low is that the race will take place on trails at the Severson Dells Nature Center, 8786 Montague Road.

The race is divided into a 5-kilometer open race and 5-kilometer youth race. Both include competition for individuals and for teams. In the team competition, the times of the top four runners for each team will be scored.

"I've always felt that there was a gap in high school cross country preparation," Baliga said, "in that there never was a cross country-type race during the summer. This race could fill that gap."

Baliga said youth teams should make sure that team names do not involve the name of a particular school or school coach. The open race is scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. and the youth race is set for 8:45 a.m.

Environmentally friendly awards will be made to the overall male and female winners and masters male and female winners in the open race, and to the top two male and female finishers in each of 12 age groups.

Awards will go to the top male and female finishers in the youth race and to the top three male and female runners in each of six age groups. The top teams also will receive awards.

The event also will include a one-mile run/walk and a scavenger hunt.

Entry fees are \$20 for the open race, \$15 for the youth race, \$10 for the run/walk and scavenger hunt or \$50 for a family package by July 18 to Severson Dells Nature Center, 8786 Montague Road, Rockford, IL 61102. The entry fee is \$22 for all events after July 18.

Call the nature center at 815-335-2915 or e-mail dellsgreenrun@gmail.com for more information.

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