

## Marathon Brings Together Diverse Events

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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It's the business of the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau to package, and in its first year running the Quad Cities Marathon, that's exactly what it's doing. The bureau, in organizing the third edition of the marathon, worked with arts and business organizations to build the race into a community-wide event that stretches for four days. Davenport One moved its fall pub crawl a few weeks earlier, and the marathon also teamed up with MidCoast's Gallery Hop and the Riverssance festival.

The Quad Cities Sports Commission (QCSC) organized the marathon for its first two years (before a merger with the Convention and Visitors Bureau) and focused on logistics and establishing the event itself. "It takes five years" before a marathon will draw an international array of elite runners, said Jared Smith, director of the QCSC. "You have to work hard to differentiate." Joe Taylor, president and CEO of the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau, said his group is building on that effort. "The marathon committee has begun to look beyond itself," he said.

The marathon has had at least 3,000 runners each of its first two years, and while organizers would like to see that number increase, "we want to build activities that will attract nonrunners," Taylor said.

That has meant bringing together "groups that normally don't have anything in common," Taylor said.

"Teaming up only came up about three or four months ago," said Donna Lee, special-event coordinator for MidCoast Fine Arts, which is running the Friday night Gallery Hop from 5 to 10 p.m. in The District in Rock Island. The summer Gallery Hop drew about 800 people, and Lee said she expects about 1,000 this time around.

The key is cross-promotion. Because the involved organizations are promoting the entire weekend of events in their marketing materials, word of the marathon-themed happenings is reaching more people. "The more people we touch, the more we expect," Lee said.

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MidCoast has added more family-friendly events on both ends of the age spectrum. For seniors, there's the Creative Moments Reception from 5 to 7 p.m., in which residents of Fort Armstrong Senior Residence Center are displaying their artwork. For children, there's the preview of the soon-to-be-released children's book *Tinker and Atticus to the Rescue* by illustrator Josh Wright and author Xochi Pannell. Tying the Hop to the race, children will also be invited to create a marathon mural on the Great River Plaza.

"There is something going on in every one of the Quad Cities," said Kristy Adams, director of downtown events and promotions for Davenport One. That organization and the Mississippi Valley Blues Society are running the pub crawl from 4 to 11 p.m. on Thursday, featuring 10 bands at 11 Davenport bars. Adams said she expects a boost from the marathon tie-in; for the first time, Davenport One produced 2,500 advance-sale buttons, up 500 from the spring Pub Crawl.

Bill Hannan, director of the Riverssance festival in the Village of East Davenport's Lindsay Park, said the extra promotional help should make the marathon weekend a "destination event" for people outside of the Quad Cities, thanks to the marketing muscle of the Convention and Visitors Bureau. "That's more bang for the buck than we could do alone," he said.

The Saturday and Sunday event will feature 125 artists this year, and has even added something to reinforce the purpose of the festival: shopping bags. "Maybe they'll get the idea what the show's about," he said.

This convergence of all these events could be short-lived, though. Riverssance has traditionally been held on the last full weekend of September, while the marathon will likely take place on roughly the same date each year; under that scenario, Hannan said, the marathon would precede Riverssance by a week next year.

But if things go well, would Hannan consider changing the date? "You'd better believe I would," he said.

*For a complete lineup of events related to the Quad Cities Marathon, see the "Events and Festivals" section of the River Cities'Reader calendar. The marathon itself begins at 7:30 a.m. on Sunday. Other events include the marathon kick-off party on Friday at Finney's, the Smooth Jazz festival on Saturday and Sunday, and Party in Motion, which features more than 50 bands along the race course during the marathon.*