

Clonakilty Waterfront Marathon - West Cork People editorial piece.

As the evenings darken and the first signs of frost appear, the countryside prepares to hibernate through another Irish winter. As if to challenge the gloom of winter, a strange phenomenon can be seen wearing luminous clothing around the roads of West Cork, bringing light and much needed energy: Runners! Yes, look out your front window on any given evening and you will notice dozens of people, many neighbours and friends, plodding and striding over the pavements and tarmac in your locality. These are ordinary men and women training to participate in an extraordinary event.

The 2011 Clonakilty Waterfront Marathon, Half-Marathon and Mini-Marathon takes place on Saturday December 10th. This is uniquely placed at the end of the road running calendar and will extend the season until two weeks before Christmas. Last year Clonakilty hosted the inaugural event which saw over 1300 entrants participating over the three races (6 miles, 13.1 miles and 26.2 miles). Runners and walkers of all ages and abilities took to the roads on a crisp December morning to celebrate the first Marathon event in West Cork. Entrants came from as far afield as Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA. Thanks to the people of Clonakilty, Inchydoney, Rathbarry and Ardfield the entrants in the 2010 races received a typically warm West Cork welcome. This created a special festive atmosphere which set last years event apart from other races around Ireland.

This year the Clonakilty Waterfront Marathon promises to attract a record number of entrants. Already the entries are coming thick and fast. Entries for this years race have been received again from Germany, the UK, USA and Israel. Notable names to watch out for include Ken Beggs from East Antrim Harriers Athletics club who will complete his 100th marathon, and will be accompanied by his wife running her very first 26.2 mile race! Cork native Jerry Forde, Ireland's most accomplished wheelchair athlete will complete his 201st marathon in Clonakilty this year. The founder of the Longford Marathon and Longford Athletics Club, Liam Fenelon, will also make an appearance. Liam ran his 232nd marathon in Dublin on October 31st 2011. These extraordinary and inspirational people share an amazing zest for life, and live life to the full through road running.

Whether you are considering getting fit in 2012, losing a few pounds for Christmas or remaining focussed on training over the winter months, the Clonakilty Waterfront Marathon has a race suitable for all. Road running is a sport that is accessible to everybody and is not the preserve of the elite athlete. Running promotes fitness which in turn improves mood, sleep patterns, energy levels, concentration span and helps ward off the winter blues. The organisers are themselves keen runners and collectively have completed over 50 marathons around the world. Their hope is to take a little of the best features of each race and create a truly memorable experience again in Clonakilty.

This year saw the establishment of the Clonakilty Road Runners Athletics Club which aims to promote athletics and fitness to the wider community in Clonakilty. For more information email clonroadrunners@gmail.com or look for the clonakilty road runners page on facebook.

December 10th will be the final day of distinguished service of Garda Superintendent Patrick Maher. A Tipperary native, Superintendent Maher has served with An Garda Siochana since 1972 and has been a valued supporter of community projects in Clonakilty and the wider West Cork region. Without his valued input and support, the 2010 Clonakilty Waterfront Marathon would not have been possible. Another notable retiree and supporter of the marathon is John O'Reilly who retires from the Clonakilty town council later this month. John was instrumental in assisting with the logistics last year and he is currently in training for the 2011 event! The organisers of the Clonakilty Waterfront Marathon wish both Pat and John every happiness in their retirement.

On July 16 the marathon lost a friend and supporter when Paidi McCullagh passed away. Paidi manned the half way point at Cloghna Head overlooking long strand and Galley Head. This is one

of the most picturesque parts of the marathon course and Paidi took pride in encouraging the runners last year as they entered the second half of their marathon adventure. He will be missed this year and remembered for the enthusiasm and friendship he showed to all. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.*

For more information on the Clonailty Waterfront Marathon visit the website www.runclon.ie or email runclon@gmail.com. Online entries can be made via the website and postal entries are also accepted by printing and mailing the application form on the runclon website. Whether you are intending to participate in this year's event, volunteer to assist in stewarding the race as it passes through your locality or simply wish to cheer the participants onward toward their personal goals, the organisers would love to hear from you. Please email on runclon@gmail.com.