

Giving thanks



Picture: Norm Drews

By Julia Emmons

The Atlanta Marathon, begun in 1963, is the oldest marathon in the American South. During its first twenty years, it was held in December on several different courses, the most infamous being a double loop course up one of the tougher hills in this very hilly city. Little wonder the field remained small. In 1980, the Atlanta Track Club decided to move the Marathon to Thanksgiving morning, when traffic in this car-dominated city is light, and runners could enjoy a long, hard run before an afternoon of over-indulgent calorie consumption...

Thanksgiving is the most joyous of American holidays. Celebrated on

the fourth Thursday of November, its central theme is the coming together of family and friends to share an elaborate meal which traditionally features a stuffed turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, several vegetable dishes made from recipes handed down through generations, and pumpkin pie for dessert. Thanksgiving is seen as the beginning of the holiday season that culminates in yet another elaborate meal: Christmas Dinner

The first Thanksgiving holiday occurred in 1863, at the height of the American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln's proclamation of the national holiday was the result of 17 years of lobbying by Sara Josepha Hale, a magazine editor who believed such a holiday might avert civil war, and then

subsequently argued it might heal the nation's raw wounds. Its theme was to recall the friendship shown by the Wampanoag Indians to the English pilgrims in 1621, when the Indians shared their food with the beleaguered little outpost at Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts, whose supplies were running low. Though the original menu was different - venison, duck, shellfish - the intent was the same: gathering together in friendship over a celebratory meal.

The organizers were proven right in moving the date. Thanksgiving morning is the perfect time for the Atlanta Marathon, and its accompanying Half Marathon (which began in 1984). The field has grown steadily, especially in the Half Marathon, which this November attracted over 7600 runners. The Atlanta Marathon itself usually has around 800, including a number of foreign nationals, attracted to this very American race on this very American holiday.

Foreign runners are also drawn to the Atlanta Marathon and Half Marathon because the present course was developed by the Atlanta Track Club for the 1996 Olympic marathons. This loop course was first used in 1992, and it showcases many of Atlanta's landmarks. It starts and finishes at Turner Field, the baseball stadium which evolved out of the 1996 Olympic Stadium. The first half of the course passes by Auburn Avenue, the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr., and rolls upwards on Piedmont Avenue through trendy Midtown to Peachtree Road in the middle of Buckhead, Atlanta's chief financial and shopping district (at about 16 km). The course turns right on Peachtree and goes out past Oglethorpe University and lavishly

The first half of the course passes by **Auburn Avenue**, the birthplace of **Martin Luther King Jr.**

which is also organized by the Atlanta Track Club, and takes place on Independence Day, July 4th. The Peachtree course finishes at Piedmont Park, around the 35km point in the Marathon. The final 7km of the Marathon takes runners back through thriving Midtown, resplendent with chic restaurants and boutiques and towering post-Modern office buildings, past the Margaret Mitchell House (writer of "Gone With The Wind"), the gloriously restored Fox Theater, and the major hotel district of Downtown Atlanta. In the final kilometer, runners pass by the 1996 Olympic torch, and go under the five golden Olympic rings.

On a bright, cool perfect day for running, the 2006 Atlanta Marathon and Half Marathon once again enjoyed the international flavor that has embellished the event since it became closely associated with the Olympics. The winner of the 45th running of the Marathon was Maurits Van Der Veen of the Netherlands, a professor at the University of Georgia in nearby Athens, GA., while the winner of the Masters category was Gabriel Helmlinger, a Frenchman who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. British-born Michael Green of Atlanta won the Half Marathon, while Canadian Brandi Pozniak won the women's race. In the past five years, event winners have included a Swiss, a Mexican, and two more runners born in the UK.

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elegant residential neighborhoods. The turn around point is in Chamblee, a pleasantly laid-back neighborhood on the fringe of Buckhead, best known for its modest antique stores. Remaining on Peachtree, Atlanta's wide and elegant signature thoroughfare, the course heads back through the center of Atlanta towards Turner Field.

The second half of the course picks up the route of the Peachtree Road Race, the 55,000-runner 10km

Though the internationally renowned Peachtree Road Race, the world's largest 10km, is most responsible for making Atlanta a famous running town it is the Atlanta Marathon and Half Marathon which most closely captures its heart. Runners come from most of the 50 U.S. states as well as a dozen foreign countries. Offering no prize money, the event attracts citizen athletes eager to share the holiday, and to give thanks for the ability to run



together in celebration of fitness. In a time of both national and international discord, it is an additional pleasure to run together, be it for 21km or for 42, all pointing in the same direction with the same common goal: to do one's best and finish well. This joyous atmosphere is also evident among

the 1200 seasoned volunteers who share their holiday morning as course monitors, water station crews, and finish area personnel.

Just in case one might forget what holiday it is, the pack of runners always includes a runner or two dressed as pilgrims.

RACE CONTACT DETAILS

The 2007 Atlanta Marathon and Half Marathon will be held on Thursday, November 22. Applications will be available on-line starting in June at www.atlantatrackclub.org. Because of the holiday, and the need to free the volunteers to enjoy their festive meals, there is a five hour time limit for the Marathon.

Full race contact listings start on page 74

RESULT

MEN:

1	Maurits VAN DER VEEN	NED	2:33:58
2	Scott P LOWE		2:38:10
3	Benjamin T CORONA		2:40:14
4	Mark COUGHLIN		2:44:35
5	Ken CSIPO		2:46:07
6	Timothy NIJAKOWSKI		2:53:30
7	Modesto ZEFERINO		2:55:38
8	Andy MEYER		2:56:18
9	Chuck JONES		2:57:23
10	Jonathan OBST		2:57:25

WOMEN:

1	Bethany HALL	USA	3:20:09
2	Jessica MORRIS	USA	3:22:04
3	Abby MATSON	USA	3:22:18
4	Lauren GILES	USA	3:26:46
5	Connie NELSON		3:27:08
6	Nancy ROLLINS	USA	3:28:41
7	Brittney JETT	USA	3:30:00
8	Wendy DONNAN		3:31:21
9	Sally J BROOKING		3:31:48
10	Susan MOSS		3:35:37

HALF MARATHON

MEN:

1	Michael GREEN	USA	1:06:29
2	Belay TEKA-KOSSA		1:06:49
3	Jared NYAMBOKI		1:08:22

WOMEN

1	Brandi POZNIAK	CAN	1:19:54
2	Donna GARCIA		1:21:56
3	Kate E BRUN		1:25:25