

Harvest Stompede offers runners/walkers a grape stomping time

Paul and Sara Kennedy chuckled as they laced up their shoes in anticipation of running through the vineyards of the Leelanau Peninsula. The Kennedys are from Leadville, Colorado and the two have traveled the furthest to participate in the Leelanau Peninsula's Vintners Second Annual Harvest Stompede. They are not alone though as the event has attracted participants from 15 states and Canada. "We were here for a conference at the Grand Traverse Resort last year, heard about the inaugural run and signed up," said Paul. "We had so much fun that we planned our vacation here around this event. Heck we live at 10,000 feet in the mountains but we found this run to be challenging and very scenic. The views are absolutely breathtaking. The bonus came after the run when we found out this area makes world-class wines."

Race organizers are shocked at how quickly the race has taken off. They expect a large turnout for their Fourth Annual Harvest Stompede September 18, 2003.

"The first year we had 148 participants and we had hoped to get 100. Last year we had just over 600, we couldn't believe how word spread about this run," said Nate Rousse, race director. "I think there is a little bit of a mystery about our event, we don't advertise much and it is all word of mouth. We are limiting participation to 800 this year and with 3 months to go we are half way sold out."

The Leelanau Peninsula Vintners Association (LPVA) that sponsors the event offers several options for participants. For the competitive trail runner there is a 7-mile run through vineyards, cherry orchards and on gently rolling hills that give panoramic views

of the peninsula and West Grand Traverse Bay. There is also a 5 k run and a course for those interested in walking among the vineyards.

"We developed a new course for walkers last year," said Rousse. "A good portion of our participants are walkers and we want to give them their own course, make it more scenic for them."

The run and walk through the vineyards is only part of the day. The LPVA also offers a unique wine tasting event where a special wine pour is paired up with a gourmet pasta dish at each winery. Each participant receives a commemorative Harvest Stompede logo wine glass. Participants who do the run receive a commemorative long sleeve shirt with the popular Harvest Stompede Logo on it.

"We have a lot of people who ask if they can purchase these shirts," said

Tony Ciccone, whose winery Ciccone Vineyards serves as the start and finish point for the run. "The only way to get a shirt is to do either the run or the walk."

Rousse agrees with only giving the shirts to run/walk participants.

"These shirts are like badges or medals, you wear these with pride, because this isn't your ordinary run through the streets or walk around a track," said Rousse. "After completing the Harvest Stompede you won't soon forget the experience, it has in its short life become one of the top trail runs in the Midwest."

Rousse is correct in his assessment of the races climb in popularity. In its inaugural year Tom Henderson of Michigan Runner Magazine picked the Harvest Stompede as the top new race of 2001. Several running writers around the state selected the Harvest

Stompede as "must do" run and put it on their top 10 list. Last year Trail Runner Magazine, an international publication that highlights the world's unique trail runs, wrote a feature article on the Harvest Stompede.

The 2003 Harvest Stompede attracted the attention Runner's World, considered to be the bible for runners, who will send in a writer and photographer for a feature on the event to appear in one of the 2004 issues of the magazine.

It was also selected as the top run in Michigan by Midwest Living Magazine and will be featured in their August issue.

The run/walk begins at Ciccone Vineyards weaving through Dolcetto and Gewürztraminer grapes dangling from the vines and nearing harvest leading runners and walkers to the vineyards of L. Mawby, maker of fine sparkling wines.

From there 7-mile participants (5k runners/walkers will veer off through the orchards and woods and back through several rows of vineyards) will run through cherry orchards to Black Star Farms where they will weave through the terraced vineyard at the entrance of Black Star. Turning around and heading back through the woods participants will find themselves running along a ridge high above West Grand Traverse Bay making their way back through Mawby's vineyards and to the finish line at Ciccone's. A finish line with a surprise.

"We have a pit of grapes for everyone to run or walk through," said Ciccone. "If your shoes are expensive take them off, but go through the grapes, we don't want excuses."

The event will conclude with an awards ceremony where organizers will be passing out Harvest Stompede logo medals for top finishers in various age categories. Walkers will have their names placed in a hat for a drawing of various prizes.

New this year will be the top male and female finishers in the 7-mile will win their weight in wine.

Rousse and Ciccone both encourage participants to get registered early, as the run/walk and wine tasting events will sell out. The LPVA is offering a special package price for those who want to do both events. For additional information visit the LPVA website at www.lpwiners.com or call (231) 938-1811. Entry forms are online or available at area running stores and wine shops.

Rick Coates writes from his home in Acme, Michigan

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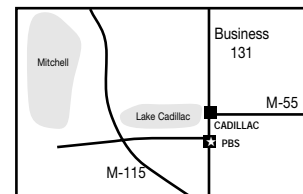
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