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Rugged journey

Native son Gomez sets record in hilly, challenging Waldoboro Half-Marathon

Cake of Bar Harbor second, Nicholas of Gorham first female to cross tough 13.1-mile course

By Ken Waltz | Sep 27, 2020



Darren Winchenbach is in high spirits during his trek on Sept. 26 in the second annual Waldoboro Half-Marathon.

Photo by: Zack Miller

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WALDOBORO — A passionate group of distance runners descended on this small, hill-dominated town built on the lumber and shipbuilding industries — and now the fisheries and many other noble occupations — to accept the rugged challenge that is the Waldoboro Half-Marathon.

The in-person, 30-runner field in the "no frills, just hills" second annual event included some of the finest, most dedicated athletes around, including first-place finisher and area native Robert Gomez, who set a course record in his remarkable first-place journey.

Watch video and see nearly 50 photos below.

The field was capped at 30 in-person participants who had to qualify to tackle the grueling, hilly terrain. Billed as New England's "hardest half-marathon," race director Lucas McNelly said, "If you finish, you get a beer."

And that beer probably was a welcome sight after a taxing journey around a town essentially built on hills.

In the midst of a pandemic, the event included a small number of runners and volunteers to mitigate the COVID-19 safety impact on the area and

maintain proper social distancing.

Runners wore face masks at the start and finish of the races and carried their masks on the 13.1-mile course to put on if/when needed.

Gomez, a Friendship native who attended local schools, including Medomak Valley High School in Waldoboro for a time, surged to the win. The 37-year-old Portland resident finished in one hour, 19 minutes and 17 seconds, for a 6:03-mile pace.

Judson Cake, 42, of Bar Harbor was second at 1:22:16.4, for a 6:17-mile pace.

The first female finisher was Laurie Nicholas, 52, of Gorham, who crossed the course in 1:50:20, for a 8:25-mile pace, for 11th overall. Nicholas broke the previous course record for women, held by Catherine Huang at 1:54.23.

McNelly said the event was capped at 30 runners to "to stay well under the governor's limits for gatherings" and two people dropped out too late to fill the spots from the event's wait list.

Ultimately, McNelly said the event ran 28 runners in six waves of four or five.

Additionally, eight participated in the social distance option as those people ran the course earlier in the week. "That gave them a chance to run the course safely by themselves on their own schedule. But they still had to run the course," McNelly said.

Social distance runner Mirabele Ticu ran the course with her dog, Prem, on Friday, Sept. 25.

Gomez won and set a course record. The entire first wave of five of runners broke Bryan Lamoreau's course record of 1:30:19. Gomez set the overall standard for the course, while Cake set a new master's course record.

Jason Bigonia, 43, of Walpole (1:31.42) lowered his own master's record of 1:38:40, but it was not enough to maintain the mark.

As the first-place finishers for their gender, Gomez and Nicholas earned \$50 gift cards to Moody's Diner. All the finishers earned a beer from Odd Alewives Farm Brewery, a finisher's medal, and their black bib for 2021 and beyond (if they are new).

"We had really strong mask compliance," McNelly said. "Every single runner crossed the finish line in a mask."

"There was an overwhelming feeling from the runners that they were happy to have an actual event to run, but equally happy to have one that was doing everything it could to do it safely."

Runners had to qualify for race day and the social-distancing version by

having run a 2:15 half-marathon in the last two years, McNelly said.

"This is partly to protect you from yourself and to give us piece of mind, but this race has a qualifying standard — like Boston, but easier," McNelly said. "In order to run this, you need to have run a half-marathon in 2:15 or less in the last two years. This is not so much to keep people out as it is to make sure everyone who starts the race can finish it. This should absolutely not be your first half-marathon. We just want to be confident that you'll be OK. We won't have people on the course ready to call a medic."

The qualification standards for 2020 were: Half-marathon: 2:15. 15-miler: 2:35. 30K: 3:20. 20-miler: 3:35. Marathon: 4:40.

If one finished the race in 2019, that person automatically qualified for 2020.

McNelly said Waldoboro is built on hills. So many hills. The Waldoboro Day 5-kilometer, traditionally held in June (but not this year due to the pandemic), generally is considered one of the most challenging 3.1-mile treks in Maine.

"But that doesn't have any of the hard hills," he said. "To truly run Waldoboro, you have to run the big hills. Thus began the Waldoboro Half-Marathon: the hardest road half-marathon in New England (and, we would argue, the Eastern United States). We think it's one of the hardest in the country and probably has the hardest finish."

McNelly said event organizers "fit in as many hills as we could in 13.1 miles without having to cross Route 1. Are we missing some hills? Yes. But we don't think [the runners will] mind."

He said the event has crammed roughly 1,400 feet of elevation into 13.1 miles — and 550 in the final 3.5 miles — to take it to the limit. There are seven hills with a gradient of at least 10 percent, including two in the final mile. Forty-five percent of the course is uphill. It is the perfect tune-up for a fall goal race. "We always say that if you can do well in Waldoboro, everywhere else is easy," he said.

The social-distancing version was run Monday through Saturday, Sept. 21-26, but it was not a virtual event, it had to be on the same challenging course.

The individual 2020 race results, with place, name, age, town/city, overall time and mile pace listed (and social distance runner indicated with *), were: 1, Robert Gomez, 37, Portland, 1:19:17.9, 6:03; 2, Judson Cake, 42, Bar Harbor, 1:22:16.4, 6:17; 3, Bryan Lamoreau, 32, South Portland, 1:22:28.6; 6:18; 4, Canyon Woodward, 27, Franklin, N.C., 1:25:29.5, 6:32; 5, Keith Drago, 33, Rockport, 1:30:00.3, 6:52; 6, Daniel Bannon, 35, Cumberland Center, 1:31:04.4, 6:57; 7, Jason Bigonia, 43, Walpole, 1:31:42.0, 7:00; 8, Bryan Dore, 37, Pittston, 1:40:34.0, 7:41*; 9, Darren Winchenbach, 39,

Saco, 1:44:02.5, 7:57; 10, Juan Meneses, 33, Newcastle, 1:49:34.7, 8:22; 11, Laurie Nicholas, 52, Gorham, 1:50:20.8, 8:25; 12, James Romer, 48, Portland, 1:52:10.4, 8:34; 13, William Sproul, 52, New Gloucester, 1:54:00.1, 8:42; 14, William Driscoll, 48, Salem, Mass., 1:54:23.2, 8:44; 15, Gena Bosshart, 36, Manchester, 1:56:11.9, 8:52; 16, Amanda Greeley, 31, Johns Island, S.C., 1:56:13.5, 8:52; 17, Kristyn Kleman, 30, Bristol, 1:56:42, 8:55; 18, Jim Flangan, 40, South Portland, 1:57:20, 8:58; 19, James Landoli, 34, Washington, 1:57:32.9, 8:58; 20, Lyra Collard, 37, Waterville, 1:57:44.3, 8:59; 21, Matthew Walsh, 53, Amesbury, Mass., 2:00:13.7, 9:11; 22, Steve Cartwright, 69, Tenants Harbor, 2:00:24.6, 9:12 (barefoot runner); 23, Patti McDonald, 33, Auburn, 2:00:24.8, 9:12; 24, Jamar Croom, 42, Augusta, 2:01:14.5, 9:15; 25, Jody MColman, 51, Portland, 2:01:40.0, 9:17*; 26, Carl Buxbaum, 59, Marblehead, Mass., 2:01:53.4, 9:18; 27, Andrew Evans, 38, Summerville, S.C., 2:03:50.3, 9:27; 28, Dale Turner, 64, Waldoboro, 2:06:31.0, 9:40*; 29, Mirabela Ticu, 37, St. Petersburg, Fla., 2:13:43.0, 10:12*; 49, Peter Ilgenfritz, 58, Boothbay Harbor, 2:17:44.3, 10:31; 31, Randall Joubert, 47, Nobleboro, 2:21:07.0, 10:46*; 32, Theresa Withee, 53, Hope, 2:25:18.8, 11:06*; 33, Barbara Daggett, 50, Thomaston, 2:25:26.0, 11:06*; 34, Laura Buxbaum, 62, Waldoboro, 2:31:59.3, 11:36; 35, Rebecca Wylie, 45, Nobleboro, 2:53:49.0, 13:16*; and 36, A.J. Hungerford, 54, Portland, 2:57:59.2, 13:35.

Waldoboro Half-Marathon

Waldoboro Half Marathon



Waldoboro Half-Marathon on Sept. 26. (Video by: Zack Miller)

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Jamar Croom, right, and Lyra Collard. *(Photo by: Zack Miller)*

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