



# State's Day of RUNNING

To celebrate and promote a healthier Kentucky

BY ABBY LAUB

There is a new breed of runners taking over the state of Kentucky, and they're not the four-legged, jockey-toting, racetrack type.

The Commonwealth is experiencing a running boom that is echoing the larger national trend and helping the state shake off its reputation for poor health.

"Races are growing in the Bluegrass State and all over the country because running and walking are sports one can afford to do inexpensively in our recovering economy," said **Pru Miller Radcliffe**, manager of the Louisville Triple Crown of Running. "It's a sport that is motivating for an individual, or as a group, and increases one's self-confidence at a time when other things might be pulling them down. And let's face it: Kentucky provides some of the country's best scenic routes and views along each course."

The Louisville Triple Crown of Running hosts the Papa John's 10 Miler on March 31, which also is the same day as RunTheBluegrass in Lexington. RunTheBluegrass has both 5K and half-marathon options, as well as a team relay option for the half-marathon.

"When we began planning for 2012's event, the actual race date is always one of the first, biggest items to nail down," said RunTheBluegrass Director **Eric Patrick Marr**. "With our new venue at Keeneland we can't run in April—and we wanted to run on a Saturday instead of a Sunday, so March 31 naturally became our choice. And instead of 'competing' with Louisville's popular Papa John's 10 Miler, I figured because there is so much opportunity for growth in our entire region, we should make March 31 a day for all of Kentucky to celebrate new, healthy living statewide."

The idea resonated with Kentucky first lady **Jane Beshear**, who actively promotes healthy living.

"We all know that a proper diet and exercise are the keys to living long, healthy lives," Beshear said. "Active, healthful lifestyles help reduce our risk of illness and increase both our physical and emotional well-being. I encourage everyone that can to participate in the upcoming Day of Running and urge all Kentuckians to get out and get healthy."

The idea also has gotten a lot of support from Lexington's leadership. Lexington Mayor **Jim Gray** is involved in supporting RunTheBluegrass, as the city has upped its efforts to get healthy after *Men's Health* magazine ranked it the most sedentary city in the nation in 2010.

Marr has partnered with Gray to promote the event and Day of Running as a whole as a means not only to get Lexington and the state healthier physically, but also economically.

"Running transforms your life for the better," Marr explained. "Your body, your mind and your social life—all things that directly impact our economy and our individual lives. It is time Kentucky moved [way] up in the national rankings of healthiest states in America."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Kentucky is a consistently poor performer—in the top 10 for least healthy—in overall state health rankings, but with ever-increasing participation in thousands of races across the state every year, that trend could begin to shift.

RunTheBluegrass is expecting to almost double its participation in its second year—anticipating up to 2,000 runners at its Keeneland-based race.

Marr said running is a simple way to get healthy. "It's something you can directly control, yourself," he said. "You don't need anyone else's permission; you don't need someone to hire you or approve of you. It's arguably the simplest way to begin taking control of your own destiny, and you can start at any moment you wish."

The Louisville Triple Crown of Running events also have experienced an enormous surge in participation since its founding more than 20 years ago.

"When it began in 1981, it had only 1,200 to 1,500 [participants] per event," Radcliffe said. "However, in 2011 the Anthem 5K Fitness Classic had over 10,000 registered, while the Rodes City Run 10K and the Papa John's 10 Miler each had well over 9,000."

The Rodes City Run 10K originated the Louisville Triple Crown of Running in 1981, with race director **Fred Teale** driving the operation both then and now.

Radcliffe thinks the events grow every year because the series is so well-established in local and national race circles, with three very different courses and a well-known charity reaping the benefits.

"It is a series that has become a goal for runners and walkers from 29 states and several countries," she said. "Our race calendar also provides a perfect platform for spring training. Each of the three races is spaced two weeks apart, with the Papa John's 10 Miler two to three weeks prior to the Kentucky Derby Festival miniMarathon. Our runners love this timing."

"The fact that the races benefit the Crusade for Children is an added bonus and makes everyone feel that they are giving back to the community and doing what they can."

And she thinks having even more choices on the Day of Running and throughout the year as a whole is beneficial to the state.

"Choices are always a good thing," she added.

Kentucky's choices on the Day of Running are varied and include the scenic beauty of Lexington's famous horse farms. Marr argues that the state's racecourses are tops in the nation, offering runners an experience unique to the Bluegrass State.

"Without question, it is some of the prettiest countryside to run through anywhere in the United States," he said. "The Bluegrass' Thoroughbreds and rolling farmlands are absolutely breathtaking."

When the Day of Running takes place on March 31, thousands of runners across the state will be hitting the pavement that leads them through this gorgeous scenery.