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## Local runner braves heat — and police — to finish race

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[liPublished]: Sunday, 10/21/07 The 30th annual Chicago Marathon was called off midway through the race earlier this month, but that didn't stop one Hendersonville woman from crossing the finish line. Despite the race being cancelled due to extreme temperatures, local resident Charlene Alcorn, a member of HEAT (Hendersonville Endurance Athletic Team), finished all 26.2 miles. But this was no ordinary marathon; at 88 degrees, the temperature was more than 20 degrees above normal. Alcorn started seeing some runners having difficulty after only three miles into the race, but even at the six-mile mark, that didn't seem odd.

"Every race has its share of runners who shouldn't be there, and Chicago was no exception. But then I started noticing the first-aid stations were unusually full," she said. "Runners were sitting, lying down and throwing up. Some even had IVs in their arms."

By the halfway point, Alcorn began to hear ambulances and fire trucks and started to worry as that continued.

"By mile 19, the sound of sirens was constant, and every first-aid station I passed was overflowing," she said. "Gatorade and water stations were running noticeably short, and my guess is by the time the runners behind me got to those stations, there was none left." □

Fire trucks began opening hydrants and using hoses to help cool the runners, and then officials made the announcement for everyone to stop running.

"I thought it was a joke until helicopters flew over announcing the race was cancelled, pleading with runners to start walking," said Alcorn.

With less than seven miles to go, Alcorn, who had trained all summer in Hendersonville's 100-plus degree heat, kept going; finishing the race would be her reward for months of hard work.

"As a marathoner, when you get up to those 20-plus miles, sometimes it's easier to keep running than to walk," she said. "When I heard an officer threaten to pull a runner from the course, I slowed down, but then I started running again."

By the 23-mile mark, she heard rumors that a runner had died, but, feeling fine, she continued. After five hours and 45 minutes, she rounded the only hill on the course and saw the finish-line banner.

More than two hours after the race was cancelled, Alcorn got the reward she had

worked so hard for. She would not be one of the 11,000 who didn't finish.

The 35 year-old runner who indeed died at mile 19 had a heart condition not yet diagnosed, and more than 300 others were transported to area hospitals for heat-related illnesses.

"My theory is that many of the runners were from northern states and were not used to training in such hot weather," said Alcorn.

Shari Payne of Goodlettsville, who ran with Alcorn and also finished the race, said weather reports confirmed that it would not be the flat, cool race Chicago was known for and described the whole experience as "surreal".

"I've never seen so many runners lying down on the side, and I have never seen IVs in anyone's arm," she said. "I was having a lot of heat problems around mile 14, and a little boy handed me a (wet) washrag, which I kept through the end of the race. It helped to keep my body temperature down."

Mark Evans, one of the founding members of HEAT, said he and others in the group were proud of Alcorn's victory.

"This was a great accomplishment for Charlene, especially given the heat conditions," he said. "It always gives you a great satisfaction to think you've helped someone with encouragement and advice."

Already gearing up for her next race, a half-marathon in Goodlettsville on Nov. 3, Alcorn is sure she'll never forget how the events unfolded on that hot October day in Chicago.

"This marathon will go down in my journal as one to remember," she said.

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