SE DISTRICT SPEECH CONTEST

Right: Wendeline Napier and Olivia Napier of Moyers 4-H Club
Below: Elizabeth Potter & Marlee Speer of Moyers 4-H Club

Luke Blansett of Antlers 4-H Club
Lilly Pardue of Antlers 4-H Club
UPCOMING EVENTS

April 19th
4-H County Officer applications due

April 23rd
County Deadline to enter SE District Horse Show

May 3rd
Townhall Meeting & County Officer Election
Extension Office @ 5:30 PM
**Officer Apps due April 19th**

May 20th
SE District Food Showdown and FCS Skill-A-Thon
Ada, OK
*Contact Barbara to participate*

June 2-4th
SE District Horse Show
Ada, OK

June 19th
SE District Leadership LEAP
Ada, OK

June 25th
SE District Animal Science Field Day
Ada, OK

June 27th
SE District FCS Skills Day
Atoka, OK
*Contact Barbara to participate*

**County Registration Deadlines**

April 19th
4-H County Officer applications due

April 23rd
Registration due for SE District Horse Show

May 3rd
Registration due for SE District Food Showdown & FCS Skills Day
Ada, OK
*Contact Barbara to participate*

June 7th
Registration due for SE District Animal Science Field Day
Southeast District 4-H program to benefit from Boston Marathon appearance
By Trisha Gedon

STILLWATER, Okla. (March 25, 2019) – When the starter’s pistol fires April 15, signaling the beginning of the race for the 30,000 participants in the 2019 Boston Marathon, residents of Pushmataha County will see a familiar face in the crowd of runners.

Ryan Witt, husband of Elizabeth Witt, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension educator, 4-H Youth Development, secured a spot in the famous marathon through a lottery system with the company for which he works.

“My company, John Hancock, is a principal sponsor of the Boston Marathon. Because of that, they are given 1,000 charity spots in the race,” Witt said. “Of those 1,000 spots, they open 150 of them in a lottery system for employees in the company. I’ve never run a marathon in my life, but I just thought, why not?”

He is not a complete novice to the sport of running, although he’d never binned off anything quite like a 26.2 mile run. When Witt was younger, his dad was a runner and traveled to 5K and 10K races on the weekends. When Witt started in training, Witt’s pace man. That led Witt to participating in track in his early teen years where he ran the mile for his school’s team. He even set a course record for the 5K in the 14 and under age group.

Once he hit high school, Witt said he traded in his running shoes for cleats and weights and baseball and football became his sports of choice. He did not take up running seriously again until a new job brought him and his family to Oklahoma in 2014.

“New jobs, a new state, a young daughter and another on the way was a bit stressful, so I started running again,” he said. “I ran for stress relief and not competitively.”

Witt submitted his name to the marathon lottery last fall, along with more than 450 other John Hancock employees, and initially ended up on the waiting list. Witt went ahead and started his training, even though he was not sure he would make it on the team.

“If I’d waited until I knew for sure, I would have been too far behind in my training,” he said. “I found out Nov. 20 that I’d gotten on the team.”

As a runner in a charity spot, Witt must raise $5,000 for a non-profit organization, so he chose the Oklahoma 4-H Foundation and earmarked the money for 4-H programming in southeast Oklahoma and Pushmataha County. He said he had the option to raise $2,500 for a charity in the Boston area, but chose to raise the required $5,000 for the organization close to home.

“I figured if I was going to raise that much money, it would be nice for it to benefit my local area. With my wife being a 4-H educator, I know the good things 4-H does,” he said.

Because he works in the forestry industry, Witt said some of the money will be used to implement forestry education within 4-H.

“When I was in 4-H, I was involved in leadership activities,” Elizabeth Witt said. “I also want to do more job readiness training, such as resume writing, interview skills and how to dress. These are important skills for our club members to know.”

Donations can be made to the Oklahoma 4-H Foundation online through Crowdrise at http://www.crowdrise.com/o/en/campaign/ryans-run-for-the-4-h-foundation.

Part of the benefit of being on John Hancock’s team of runners, Witt has access to a nutritionist, physical therapist and two running coaches. He said he is thankful for this extra guidance.

“In the beginning, the training was easier than I thought it would be. The first couple of weeks I felt like I wasn’t doing anything and the over-achiever in me started taking matters into my own hands and running faster, steeper and longer than the training plan, which was developed by experts, recommended,” he said. “After several weeks of overachieving, I was confident and setting personal records. Then came the overuse injuries. First it was the hip, then the knee, then the back. I’d developed all kinds of nagging injuries and I hadn’t even started my long-training run of 16 or more miles.”

He started having doubts in his ability to be healthy enough to run the marathon and thought about the people he was letting down. But then a lightbulb went off.

“I thought back on a phrase my old supervisor used to say —‘it’s not a sprint, it’s a marathon,’” he said. “That’s when I realized the training plan was written by people who had actually done this before and was intended to prepare me for the marathon while still keeping me healthy enough to actually run it. I began to follow the plan like I should be and my injuries started to slowly go away. Although the training eventually got very demanding, I was healthy enough to persevere.”

He also has learned how to balance his food intake to help ensure he consumes enough calories to maintain his stamina. He said he also has to learn how to fuel his body while running.

Another aspect of training he had not taken into consideration is the pace in which he went through running shoes.

“I’ve already gone through five pairs of shoes,” Witt said. “I can get about 300 to 400 running miles out of each pair. I have the pair I’ll wear in the race and they’ve got about 100 miles on them.”

On the day of the race, Witt said his family will be able to track him on an app so they will know when to head to the finish line to see him complete the race.

“My goal is to finish the race in under three hours, which means a pace of about seven minutes per mile,” he said. “Running in a race through the streets of Boston with 30,000 other runners certainly will be different than my training runs in Pushmataha County, but I’m ready for the challenge.”

Witt says he has already started thinking about what is next after he crosses the finish line of this year’s race. He said this kind of commitment does not stop when he reaches the finish line.

“I’d definitely like to earn my way back to Boston as a qualifier. Training like this is a family commitment and I definitely wouldn’t have made it through without the support and understanding of my awesome wife and kids,” he said. “Right now, we’re thinking of running a destination marathon every year. There are so many cities out there we haven’t seen, and this is a great opportunity for family bonding.”

Not only has Witt become more physically fit during the course of his training, he also has learned something about himself.

“I questioned whether I could complete the training and still perform my role as a husband, father and forester,” he said. “This experience has taught me I don’t have to do it all myself. The support I receive from my family and coworkers is awesome. They’ve picked up the slack when I’ve struggled with time management. There’s never a good time in your schedule to fit in a 22-mile run, but I’ve learned if I can fit a marathon into my already overwhelming schedule, then I can do anything.”

Witt is responsible for all travel expenses, lodging and race registration. A GoFundMe account has been set up to help the family with these expenses. Donations may be made at https://www.gofundme.com/witt-family-boston-marathon-trip.

This year marks the 123rd Boston Marathon. Last year, the non-profit runners sponsored by John Hancock raised $13.1 million for charities.
Stay up to date on 4-H opportunities by following us on our Facebook page!

Facebook

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