



# RAP run results are encouraging

The event draws 1,320 runners, \$92,000 for the program and praise for its volunteers for being well organized.

BY DAVID RICE  
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NEW PORT RICHEY — In just four years, the RAP River Run has developed into a premier racing event, with 1,320 runners crossing the finish line Saturday.

“Those are numbers you’d associate with a marathon more than a 5K,” marveled Rich Bekesh, chairman of the Youth and Alternatives Program board.

Bekesh pitched the idea of the 5K and 1-mile fun run a few years ago to raise money for the RAP House, which provides assistance to children who are runaways, homeless or need short-term housing.

“We wanted to give the children a goal that had to do with health and fitness,” said Bekesh, an avid runner himself. “I’ve always believed that if you work toward being physically fit then you’ll be healthier emotionally and mentally. These kids need that type of help so I wanted to give them something like this to participate in and show them what they can do when they put their mind into it.”

This year’s event raised about \$92,000 — an important supplement to the RAP House as state dollars continue to shrink.

“This event has allowed us the financial ability to give the kids things they need to make their lives better,” Bekesh said. “The state budget for social programs continues to get cut, but this event allows us to not have to cut counselors or cut back the cause.”

Perhaps most impressive is that the event is coordinated by an all-volunteer staff.

Amanda Murphy, a financial adviser for Raymond James, is the leadership chairwoman who led the organizational effort. She and her team of volunteers have put in countless hours coordinating everything from the sponsorships to the



Photo by DAVID RICE

Charles Roose, 46, enters the final leg of the RAP River Run through downtown New Port Richey on Saturday, where hundreds of spectators lined the streets near the finish line.



Photo by DAVID RICE

Gulf High’s cross country coach Dean Lofton pushes his two daughters, Alanta and Aubrey, across the finish line Saturday alongside Trinity’s Doug Burg at the RAP River Run.

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Not that Bekesh is surprised. His firm, Spring Engineering Inc., has poured a lot of money into the race, and Bekesh acquired sponsorships from clients such as Best Buy and Carra-bba’s to bring even more attention to it.

“I always had big expectations for this race,” Bekesh said. “I’m very satisfied with where we’re at. You look at our first year; people said we wouldn’t have 75 runners, but we had 500. Now we’re over 1,000 and I’m aiming to get this race to where it’s over 2,000 people.”

Competitors have come to know the race as one of the best around. Gulf High’s cross country coach Dean Lofton encourages his runners to participate. This year, he took along his two young daughters in a jogging stroller. “They really get the people out here for this,” Lofton said. “I figure in order to encourage my kids to run I’d better bring them along. We’ve got about 30 kids from the team in this race because the organizers get people to sponsor them. It’s really a wonderful event.”

Every year the race also attracts newcomers such as George Witty, who competed in his first running event.

“I jog a lot, and when I heard my nephew was going to run it for a good cause, I figured why not?” Witty said. “The course was good and it’s been well organized. I may do another after trying this; it was a lot of fun.”

## FAST FACTS

### Results on Web

For results and information about the RAP River Run, visit [rapriverrun.com](http://rapriverrun.com).

race format. “We have 125 volunteers, and almost all of them have other jobs,” Murphy said. “We started eight months ago with the logo for this year and went right into the marketing side of it. Myself and a few others have been putting in a minimum of four hours per day for the last few months on top of our regular jobs. The result has been amazing.”

This year, people traveled from across the state and the region to participate in the race through downtown New