

Keeping It Safe

How To Play It Safe With Mother Nature

BY MARCIA BRADFORD

Victoria Seahorn, owner of Marathon Magic, knows from first-hand experience that runners who participate in XTERRA and other trail-running events are rugged individuals. After all, she's run in more than 29 marathons and numerous half-marathons. She's also been a race director for many years, organizing running events in several states, including the challenging XTERRA trail runs and marathons.

"Trail runners tend to be a different breed than most hard-surface runners," she commented. "They are used to going out running in all conditions and are very self-sufficient, usually bringing camelbaks (backpacks that allow the runner a steady supply of water) and enjoying all types of challenges.

All that being said, Seahorn is careful to take precautions, especially during a Deep South summer in Columbia, S.C. Even though the XTERRA Half-Marathon and 5K run at Harbison State Forest take participants through mostly shaded areas, the heat and humidity of July must be addressed, she said.

"We have five water stops for the runners and people out patrolling the courses at all times," she explained. "Most of these runners are used to taking a tumble—for some it's a badge of honor and they want photos of it—but we have people along the trails to make sure runners aren't seriously injured."

There's also the preparation that takes place a day or so before the event. Seahorn's typically out on the course the day before a race, with other staff and volunteers, marking the trail with flags that keep runners on the correct route and markers that indicate distance.

"During the Harbison event I used 1,000 hot pink flags along the Half-Marathon trail and 300 glowing yellow flags for the 5K. I also used XTERRA 'crime scene' tape to tell runners 'don't go there' to keep them on the right path," she said. "Harbison has a lot of cut-throughs and we want to make sure no one gets lost."

Because this year's heavy rains presented a potentially slippery terrain, Seahorn worked with state officials at Harbison to close the trails to bicyclists during the week prior to the race, preventing grooves that could cause runners to slip and fall.

"Weather is always a concern at outdoor venue events and of course it's hard to predict the weather," Seahorn commented. "But I



Shaded running courses and frequent water stops are two ways trail runners that participate in the XTERRA trail run stay safe in high humidity months like July.

do issue pre-race warnings via email blasts if needed. About the only thing that will delay a trail run is lightning. However, I have moved an XTERRA event in Colorado from October to September, after encountering blizzards there for the past two years.

A Perfect Fit

Seahorn, who has been directing the events in Columbia for the past three years, said the area offers a perfect fit for marathons. "First of all, Harbison State Forest has great trails and Ranger Miller and his crew are wonderful to work with," she said. "Also, the logistics are unbelievably good; there's a hotel just three miles from the forest."

Outstanding support from local sponsors and friends is also essential to the success of the event, Seahorn said. "Katie Walsh and the Half-Moon Outfitters, Jordan and his crew at Strictly Running, The Columbia Regional Sports Council, and the entire staff at The Hampton Inn On The Lake At Harbison all work hard to make this happen."

She added that the Columbia area has a large running community with a nice mix of people involved. In particular, she has enjoyed the participation of the Dutch Fork Cross Country Team. "These area middle and high school kids usually are among the fastest finishers in the 5K race, then jog back to the water stations and help others complete the marathon." ■