

Catholic 5Ks promote health and worthwhile causes

written by Dwain Hebda |



As the winter weather fades away and temperatures climb upward, the number of 5K road races on any given weekend begins to pick up. Several of these races support worthwhile Catholic causes and institutions, so take the opportunity to lace up your sneakers and get out into the nice weather.

One Catholic race is already in the record books. The FX 5K Run/Walk and Pancake Breakfast in Fayetteville was held March 8 and benefitted the St. Joseph Church youth group.

Now in its sixth year, the race, named for St. Francis Xavier, is a great tune-up event before some of the longer races in the northwest corner of the state, such as Fayetteville Hogeye Marathon and the Bentonville Running Festival. Proceeds from the FX 5K will support youth's mission trip in the summer. The course began and ended at St. Joseph Church and wound through the mostly flat surrounding residential neighborhoods. Runners, joggers and walkers were all represented among the 100-plus participants, and a kids' one-mile fun run was held on the school's track.

Organizers also pointed out that thanks to its many loyal sponsors, the FX offers one unique perk compared to most 5Ks — runners' registration fee also included breakfast.

There is still time to register for these spring and fall races.

ROCKET 5K, Little Rock

Date: April 12

Benefiting: Catholic High School

Registration: www.rocketalumni.com/race

Race day registration: \$30

Entering its 10th year, the Rocket has firmly established itself as one of the best 5Ks not only among Catholic races, but on the entire Little Rock running calendar. The run offers something for everyone, including a kids' dash on the St. Vincent Track at the school's Roy Davis practice field and one of the more challenging 5K courses around thanks to the hilly residential neighborhood surrounding the school. The race's theme says it all, "Yeah, It's Tough. Get Over It!" Those less adventuresome are invited to bring their dogs and enjoy a shorter, milder 3K stroll led by Brother Richard Sanker, CFP, and the school's mascot German Shepherd, Zeke.

TOUR de PAUL 5K, Little Rock

Date: April 19

Benefiting: St. Vincent Health System

Registration: <https://www.stvincenthealth.com/webapps/TourdePaul/>

Race day registration: \$25

The newest of the three sports making up the annual Tour de Paul, the 5K race boasts a scenic and challenging course. The original course ran through the Little Rock Zoo and War Memorial Stadium, beginning and ending outside St. Vincent Infirmary; organizers have tweaked the course since and it now begins outside War Memorial Stadium, winds through the golf course, climbs the hill to the hospital and ends with a sprint in the football stadium captured on the Jumbotron. The well-organized event is also walker-friendly, but sorry, no pets.

REXFEST, Little Rock

Date: May 4

Benefiting: Christ the King charities

Registration: <http://www.rexfest.com>

Race day registration: \$20 (2013 price)

Set in the picturesque west Little Rock neighborhood ringing Pleasant Valley Country Club, Rexfest distinguishes itself as a four-mile course, rather than the usual 5K (3.1-mile) distance. The rolling hills are not as severe as other races, but there is enough elevation change to keep your heart rate up. The race is part of the Rexfest weekend hosted annually by Christ the King Church. Not up for the full distance? There's a 1.5-mile fun run and a one-mile kids' race available, as well as the "Pony Express" just for 4-to-6-year-olds. Why not make it a weekend? Attend the adults-only dinner and dance Friday night or take in the food and fun on the carnival on Sunday.

COLUMBUS DAY PATRIOTISM RUN 5K, North Little Rock

Date: Oct. 11

Benefiting: St. Joseph's Assembly, Knights of Columbus

Registration: www.racesonline.com

Race day registration: \$25

Running in the Columbus Day Patriotism Run is not only a good bit of exercise, all proceeds are used by Knights of Columbus St. Joseph's Assembly in their work with Fort Roots VA Hospital, aiding military families at Little Rock Air Force Base in Jacksonville and Camp Robinson in North Little Rock and supporting local Boy Scout troops. The family-friendly race is run on a flat, fast course, laid out on paved trails in North Little Rock's Burns Park Soccer Complex. The fall running date is well past Arkansas' brutal summer heat and the fall colors along the river make for a majestic setting. There are several local races to choose from in October, so make this one your pick and support a great cause in the process.