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Free Press Marathon continues to grow

More room on bridge, bigger field

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This year there will be more room for runners on the Ambassador Bridge. The path for runners will be more than doubled this year from 10 feet to 22 feet. / JULIAN H. GONZALEZ/Detroit Free Press

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More legroom on the bridge, a sellout at 26.2 and 13.1 miles, and an app for runners and spectators.

There's plenty of news afoot about the 34th Detroit Free Press/Talmer Bank Marathon, which will take to the streets of Detroit and Windsor three weeks from today.

THE BRIDGE: The Free Press Marathon is the only race in North America that crosses an international border twice. In recent years, though, construction work has put the squeeze on runners while crossing the Ambassador Bridge early in the event.

The Detroit International Bridge Co. announced Friday that the path for runners on the bridge would be more than doubled this year from 10 feet to 22 feet. The extra

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lane, the company said, was the by-product of redecking the bridge, which, when finished in December, would widen the roadway by 8 feet.

"The additional running space comes as a result of the constant improvements we make on the bridge," Matthew Moroun, vice chairman for the bridge company, said in a statement. "We're proud to have the Ambassador Bridge play a significant role in this great event."

Moroun is the son of Ambassador Bridge owner Manuel (Matty) Moroun, whose

span has been a part of the marathon since 1999 (except for 2001, because of 9/11 security concerns). Each year, more than 80 bridge employees work during the race to assist runners and keep traffic crossing the border.

THE EVENT: The series of races that comprise the Free Press/Talmer Bank Marathon grew 551% from 2000 (3,588 participants) to 2010 (19,749 participants). This past week, the fields for the marathon (4,400) and half marathon (10,300) reached capacity, all but ensuring for the first time 20,000 runners, walkers, wheelers and handcyclists will take to the Motown streets on Oct. 16.

As of Friday, there was room for another 120 or so five-person relay teams and 530 runners in the 5K. To register, go to www.freepmarathon.com.

The marathon had a third sellout in the past week. The exhibitors for the Heath and Fitness Expo -- Oct. 14-15 at Cobo Center -- reached 88, up 22 from last year.

THE TECHNOLOGY: The marathon has created a smart phone app for iPhone and Android users. This free app, sponsored by Greektown Casino, can be used to register for events, check course maps, view aid stations, search results, see photos and track runners during the races.

"Detroit is the only race that crosses international borders twice and now we're the only major race with an app," Rich Harshbarger, executive race director, said in a statement. "We're proud to work with Greektown Casino on this exciting launch that puts information about this premier event right at users' fingertips."

To download the app, search for "Detroit Marathon" in the iTunes Store or Android Market.

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