



2026 Race Weekend



THREE IS HIS MAGIC NUMBER

Two-time defending men's marathon champ Jaime Marcos is determined to keep his streak alive. His hometown fans are rooting him on, too. 'To have a teacher at Dr. Howard who's won the race twice, it's really fun.'

Holding previous year's medals, Jaime Marcos takes a jog along the marathon route on Fox Drive in Champaign.

Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

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17TH CHRISTIE CLINIC ILLINOIS MARATHON RACE WEEKEND

POWER OF PERSEVERANCE



Mara Haiduc in the hospital.

Illini sophomore finds comfort in race experience

By JODI HECKEL
For The News-Gazette

University of Illinois sophomore Mara Haiduc began running at the start of this school year as a way to push herself and help her recovery from a serious illness. She'll run the Christie Clinic Illinois 10K on race weekend.

Training for the race and building up her mileage "was a huge accomplishment," said Haiduc, who is studying finance and strategy, innovation and entrepreneurship in the Gies College of Business. Even more so when you consider she began her running after going through cancer treatments.

In November 2024, during her first semester of college, she felt sick and was having horrible back pain. An X-ray showed some masses, and a CT scan and blood work confirmed a diagnosis of Stage 4 Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Haiduc finished her semester online and began chemotherapy and immunotherapy treatments that December. She had to take the spring semester off from college while undergoing treatments every two weeks for six months.

She initially was on steroids that kept her from sleeping, and her first round of chemotherapy was "absolutely brutal." But she also found she could recover from treatments within a couple of days, so she enrolled in two classes at a community college and started a small business doing beading and embroidery.

She said she was unhappy sitting around so

much, though, and she also had gained weight from the treatments. After a couple of months, she began doing a Pilates class almost daily and taking long walks.

"I'm young so my body is pretty resilient. I felt capable of doing this," Haiduc said.

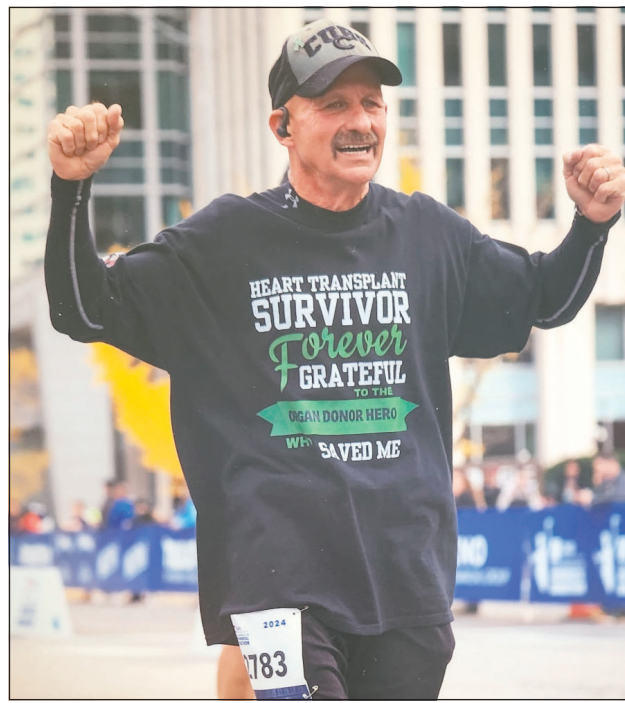
Her PET scans showed her to be cancer-free following her treatment, but it took her a while to accept the changes brought on by her illness — the loss of her hair and eyelashes, and the weight gain and not being able to wear her favorite clothes.

"At the beginning of the school year, I was kind of anxious. I wanted to be the best version of myself, push myself and get back into fitness," said Haiduc, who plays tennis and likes to stay in shape but has never been a runner.

She took up running and set a goal of running the half marathon. When she started training, she couldn't run for three minutes straight. She ran three times a week and worked up to running 4 miles.

But she injured her knee while skiing in January, so she now plans to run/walk the 10K race. She would like to run a half marathon at some point, although she admits that running isn't her favorite activity.

"I don't love running but the runner's high feels really good," Haiduc said. "I like pushing myself physically even if it's not my passion. I like working toward a goal. It shows me I can do hard things."



JOHN RODINO

Heart transplant recipient paying things forward

By JODI HECKEL
For The News-Gazette

John Rodino of Pontiac will run the Illinois 5K at the Christie Clinic Race Weekend. Six years ago, he could barely walk.

Rodino, 63, was a firefighter and a runner when he had his first heart attack in 2002, at age 39, after finishing a 5-mile run. His heart stopped and his son performed CPR until paramedics arrived.

Rodino had three stents put in, and he returned to work and to running until, about a year and a half later, he collapsed while dragging a fire hose on a call. He said he realized he couldn't keep pushing himself, and he went on disability at 41.

"The mental part of it was hard," Rodino said.

Both of his parents had heart issues and suffered heart attacks, and Rodino learned he was genetically predisposed to clogged arteries. Over the years, he received 25 stents, had four heart attacks, with his heart stopping three times, and had a double bypass.

"I went through all this and it kept getting worse and worse," he said.

But although his arteries were unhealthy, his heart was still pumping strongly enough so that he was far down the list for a heart transplant. Two different hospitals told him there was nothing they could do for him.

By the time he had his fourth heart attack in October 2020, he had trouble walking from room to room in his house. He was in his garage when he felt the heart attack coming on. He decided not to phone for help.

"I just laid on the garage floor and talked to the Lord to come and get me," Rodino said.

His wife found him, and he ended up at the University of Chicago hospital, where an angiogram showed his heart was now pumping at only 9 percent. He received a heart transplant days later.

"Within seven months of getting my heart, I ran my first 5K and I just kept going. I get up every morning at 4 and run five miles," Rodino said.

He estimates he's run more than 150 5Ks and 30 10Ks with his new heart. "I've got a second chance on life. I wasn't going to take it lightly," he said.

Rodino wears a shirt in his races that reads "Heart transplant survivor, forever grateful to the organ donor hero who saved me."

He's active with the Maddog Strong Foundation, an Illinois organization that promotes organ and tissue donation. At the hospital where he got his transplant, Rodino talks with organ recipients who are afraid to be active and to people who need transplants but are afraid to go through with the surgeries.

"A lot of people think that after you get a transplant, you can't do things, but you can and I want to show people you can. I was blessed, and I do this so other people will be blessed," he said.

Rodino said he loves the feeling of peacefulness and calm that running gives him: "All my troubles, anything on my mind, leaves me. It's just me and the run. It's so relaxing."



Vinnie running with his mom, Jeny.

7-year-old Hoopeston boy reverses role for run

By JENNIFER BAILEY
jbailey@news-gazette.com

HOOPESTON — Seven-year-old Vinnie Tetter has become a pro at watching his mom run races and offering high-fives to race participants.

Now, he'll be one of the runners in the spotlight that others will be cheering on during the Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend.

Vinnie, who is autistic, will be running with his mom, Jeny, as part of Team Noah.

Through Walk, Run, & Roll with Team Noah, people with disabilities are able to complete the 5K with loved ones.

The event is named after Noah Lukach, who died six years ago from a respiratory illness. His family teamed up with the race weekend team to keep Noah's memory and legacy alive.

Noah's mom, Licia, says they "love that we continue to have new and past participants join us each year. We always have room for more."

Jeny Tetter, who also is a stay-at-home mom, homeschools Vinnie and is wife to Terry, has been a runner.

"I've been running just under a year. I've done a few 5Ks and trail run," she said. "Vinnie and my husband are there at every race to cheer me on."

In addition to being a spectator, Vinnie also gives any passers-by a high five.

"He loves the energy," Jeny said.

This will be Vinnie's first official race.

They have been preparing for it together.

"He started running

with me recently," Jeny said. "He has a little hard time running in our neighborhood, keeping on track."

But Jeny is ready to pitch in if he's not up for the full run. "If he gets tired, he'll probably piggyback," she said.

Vinnie has participated in Challenger Baseball, AMBUCS Super Soccer and Watseka also holds a football camp through the high school for special-needs kids.

They will see what the future holds.

As Jeny likes to say, Vinnie has one speed, going full speed ahead.

For more about the Team Noah event, a Facebook page started by Licia's daughter, Kaycee Enyart, provides updates. They were to have at least 35 people run. Team Noah will start in the last wave of the 5K on Friday.

"We also feature Noah Nuggets that my twin sister, Lidia Jacobson, writes and produces. I then become the 'face' that you see. Noah Nuggets allow us to inform, educate and uplift our community on a variety of topics; from World Kindness Day to the legal use of a handicap placard," Licia added.

This year at the 5K they will be acknowledging participants who have been with them for five years.

"Noah brought joy to those who met him and loved the Christie Clinic Race Weekend," Licia said. "We want to carry on his legacy by allowing others with disabilities to participate and experience the thrill of the race weekend."

On your mark, get set, go!

A look at what's going on Thursday through Saturday as thousands of runners descend upon Champaign-Urbana:

THURSDAY, APRIL 23

- Health & Fitness Expo, 4-8 p.m., ARC, Gym 1
- Youth run registration, 4-8 p.m., ARC Gym 2
- Chip/number/race guide pickup, 4-8 p.m., ARC Gym 2
- Shirt/goody bag pickup, 4-8 p.m., ARC Gym 1
- The Michael Hogue Team Mile/Postrace Party, 7:30 p.m., First Street, north of Kirby Avenue; Postrace at The City Center

FRIDAY, APRIL 24

- Health & Fitness Expo, 10 a.m. until 7 p.m., ARC Gym 1
- Youth run registration, 10 a.m. until 7 p.m., ARC Gym 2
- Chip/number/race guide pickup, 10 a.m. until 7 p.m., ARC Gym 2

- Shirt/goody bag pickup, 10 a.m. until 7 p.m., ARC Gym 1
- 4th Mile, 6-10 p.m., Kirby Avenue between First and Fourth streets
- 5K national anthem, 7:20 p.m., Oak Street, south of St. Mary's Road
- 5K run/walk, 7:30 p.m. wave start, Oak Street, south of St. Mary's Road
- Postrace food, 7:50 to 9 p.m., Great West Hall, Gies Memorial Stadium

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

- Bag drop, 5:30 a.m., First Street, north of the start line
- Coffee/bagel bite bar, 6-8 a.m., First Street, north of the start line
- Start line lineup, 7 a.m., First Street and St. Mary's Road
- National anthem, 7:20 a.m., First Street and St. Mary's Road
- Wheelchair half marathon, 7:31 a.m., First Street and St. Mary's Road

- Marathon and half marathon, 7:33 a.m. wave start, First Street and St. Mary's Road
- 10K, 8 a.m. start, First Street and St. Mary's Road
- Postrace food, 8:30 a.m. until 2 p.m., Great West Hall, Gies Memorial Stadium

- Meijer 27th-mile celebrate victory bash, 8 a.m. until 2 p.m., Kirby Avenue between First and Fourth
- Postrace stretching zones, 8:30 a.m. until 2 p.m., Gies Memorial Stadium, southeast of the finish line, and the 27th mile on Kirby
- Youth run fun zone, noon until 2 p.m., Kirby Avenue, east of the 27th mile
- Youth run/postrace food, 3 p.m., Great West Hall, Gies Memorial Stadium



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17TH CHRISTIE CLINIC ILLINOIS MARATHON RACE WEEKEND

ONE-ON-ONE WITH ... JAN SEELEY

LEAVING A LEGACY

Race director: 'Our runners ... bring their very best on race day and leave a stamp, if you will. Impacting not just their lives, but the community'

There's a new procedure for starting this year's races that doesn't feature a gunshot. What's that all about?

It's called Start Without a Shot. It's a global initiative that is spreading, and more and more races are starting their running events with, instead of a gun, a cannon or some kind of a triggering sound. We'll be using a scientifically developed sound that has been tested to be non-triggering, so we won't be causing any distress for individuals who may have trauma or PTSD or some other neurodivergency. It felt like the right thing to do. We've been advertising and telling people we'll probably have time to practice a little bit.

I've listened to the audio file, and it's very soothing.

Supposedly, it is the most non-triggering sound anyone could listen to.

Dr. Howard Elementary School teacher Jaime Marcos is the men's marathon two-time defending champ. How unique is it to have a local runner searching for his third straight win?

As much as this event is about having runners nationally — we're at 43 states — we have such a density of local participants. So to have somebody, a teacher at Dr. Howard, who's won the race twice, it's really fun. I know from reading my own media guide that he's had some injuries this year, so hopefully he'll be able to have a strong race, whether he wins or not. But it is nice, for sure.



Provided

You mentioned the field. How is registration going?

Really well. We're down to not a lot of spots in the marathon, in the half and the 10K. Still have a fair number in the 5K, but those go fast. But something just happened. Last year, the Carmel (Ind.) Marathon got canceled in the middle of the night before it was to be run, which was the Saturday before the race. So we had a whole lot of people who came to our race. Well, the Carmel Marathon (on Wednesday) announced, because they're looking at weather that they've deemed might not be compatible with road running, that they have postponed their race until May 31. So our registration has blown up a little bit. It probably makes it more likely that we're going to have a complete sellout in four major events, which is the marathon, half-marathon, 10K and 5K.

What's the theme of this year's race?

"Leave your Legacy," and it's aspirational, certainly, but it speaks to how all of our runners work hard to train and bring their very best on race day and leave a stamp, if you will. Impacting not just their lives, but the community. Our medal designer knocked it out of the park in that it looks like a pocket watch. It opens up in the belly of the medal. There's a time dial in hours, minutes and seconds. Participants in the marathon, half-marathon, 10K and 5K will be able to use their hands to manipulate the time dial and actually scroll in their finished time that will be locked in forever. Sort of that legacy idea. The medals are a throwback pocket watch thing. But then to be able to scroll and lock in their finished time allows that time to be part of their legacy of the event.

There are different race lengths for different skill levels, so that seems like it ties in nicely with the theme of this year's race.

That's part of having that ladder of events, right? We laid down the relay this year. It just never kind of caught back on after (the pandemic), but we added two I-Challenges that combine our shortest races. So we have something called the micro I-Challenge, which is the mile and the 5K, and the Nano I-Challenge, which is the mile and the youth run. But the idea is to have something that, no matter what your age and ability, you can find a race to do.

Where does this event fall in the landscape of popular races around the U.S. and around the world?

It's interesting, because in our early years, we had over 20,000 runners, and this year, we'll probably have 12,000. And I'm happy with that. After all the challenges that we had, there just weren't as many races back then, which is why we got a bigger piece of the pie. There are so many races, we're just happy to get the ones we do. We're not trying to be the biggest race. We're trying to be the best race. So we want to keep working on how to make the experience personal, memorable, make people want to come back. We want to be a race that has a really great reputation and that matters much more. It's not about the numbers. It's about the quality of the event and the experience, and we want to make sure that the first finisher and the last finisher have the same experience.

How much community and volunteer support factors into making this a success?

We have about 80 sponsors, and 79 of them are local. That is incredible. The amount of local buy-in across all kinds of industries is amazing. We have over 2,000 volunteers. The community buy-in is huge. I like to say the grumpy people go out of town this weekend, and it just leaves people who really care about the event. Runners tell us the fandom is amazing. The people come out of their house, they tailgate. The event shines a really bright light on our community, and so there's a lot of community pride, and this event is part of what it means to live in Champaign, Urbana and now Savoy. We're just super fortunate to have such a great community.

How will the installation of Gies Memorial Stadium's new scoreboard impact race-day operations?

That was the big thing we had to work around. We've reallocated where our medical assets are. All those assets are on the northeast side. We need to be able to take critically ill runners out of that stadium as fast as possible. Our ambulances will be staged in the Irwin Drive alleyway east of where the runners come in. If we need to take runners in from the course or out from the stadium, they will use that team tunnel. Because there's only one way in and out as we cannot use the horse-shoe. And who knows, maybe it'll work out better, and that's where we'll have them going forward.

— JOEY WRIGHT



The City of Champaign welcomes all racers, fans, and visitors for an exciting and fun-filled race weekend!



The Michael Hogue Team



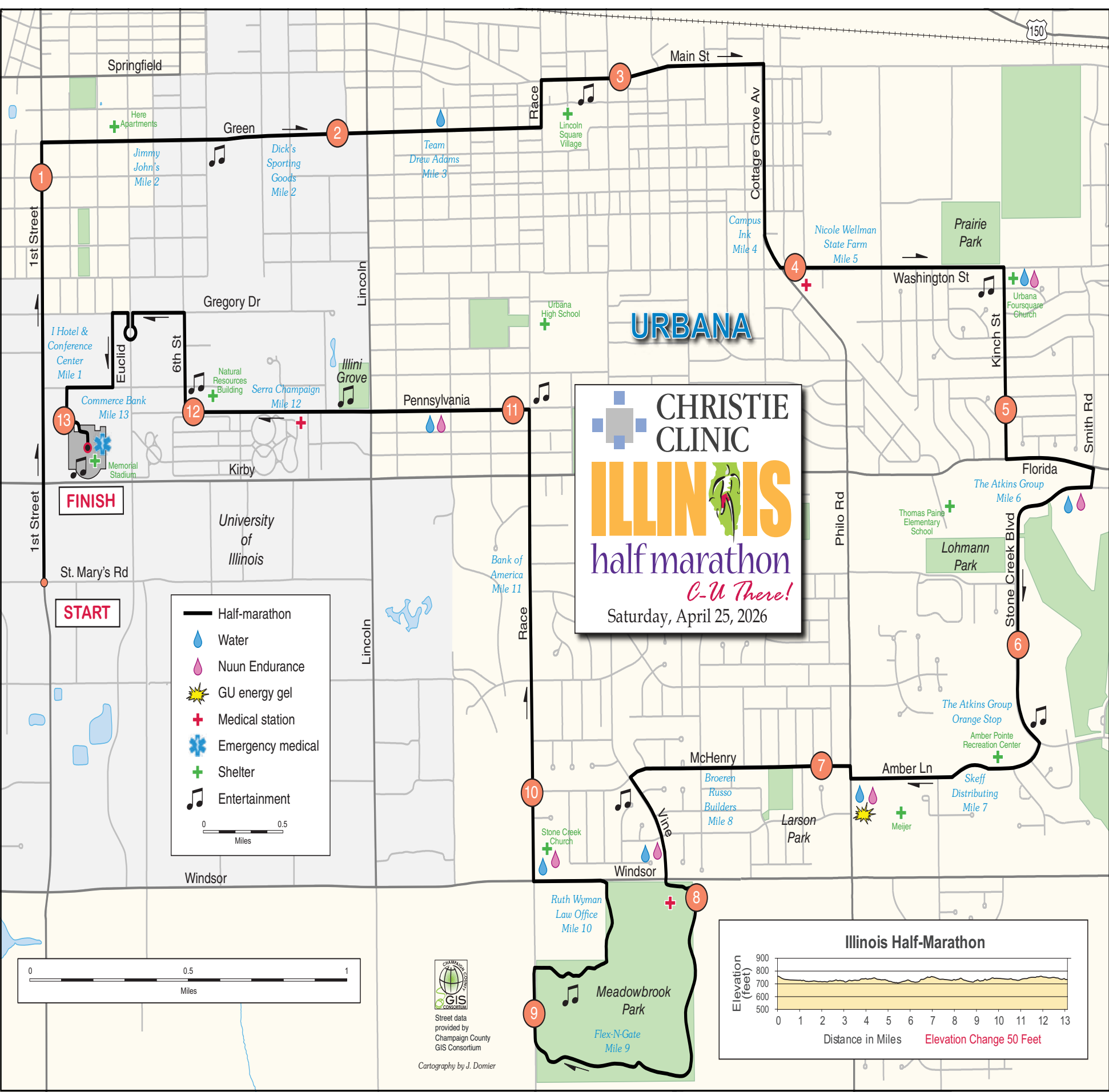
The Michael Hogue Team at RE/MAX Realty Associates is proud to sponsor the Michael Hogue Team Mile on Thursday, April 23rd!

Join us as we kick off the Illinois Marathon weekend with this exciting event. We're passionate about supporting our community, whether it's selling your old home, finding your perfect new home, or cheering you on at the finish line!

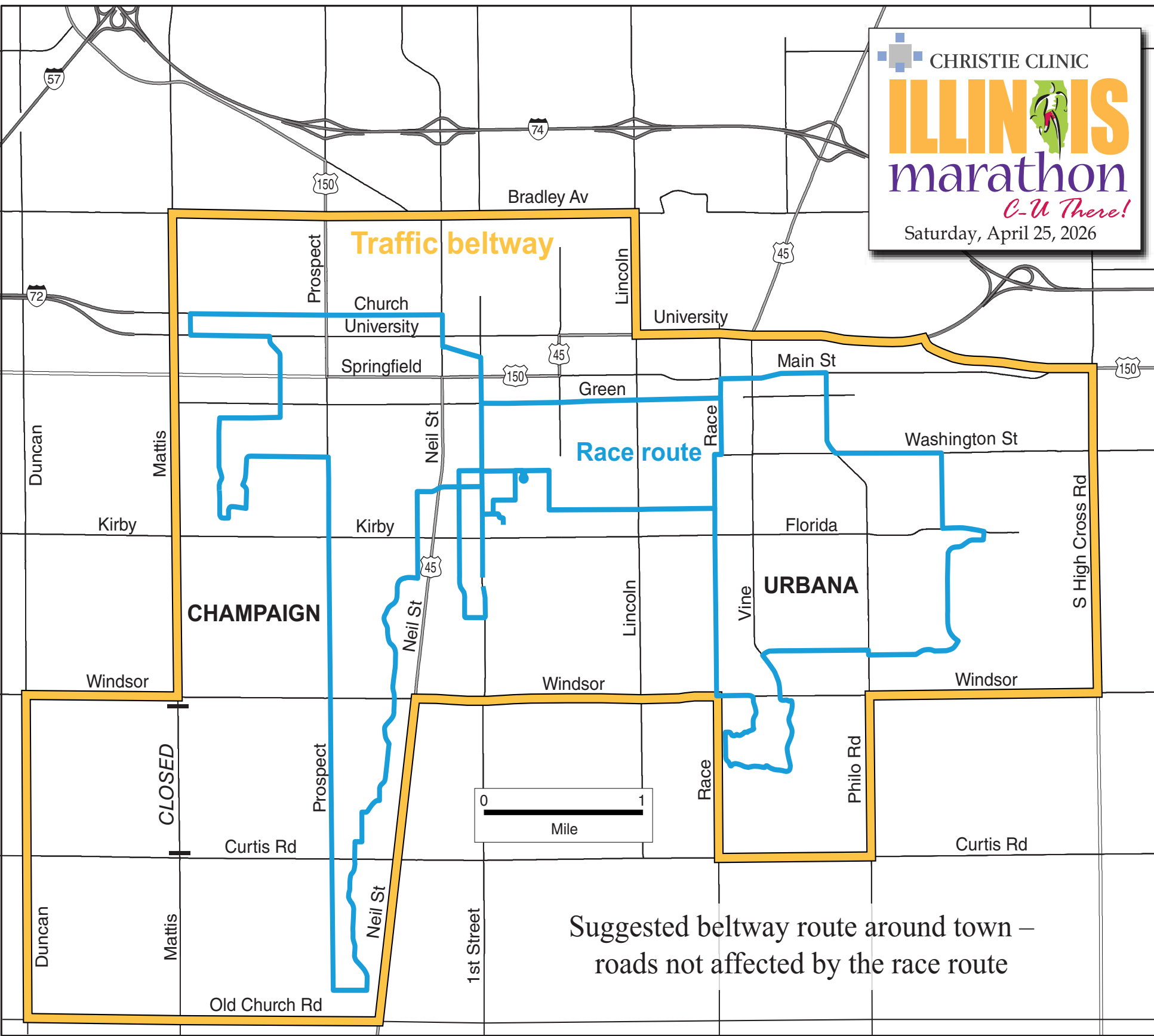
The Michael Hogue Team, we are here from start to finish. See you at the race!



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Jack Dalbey/The News-Gazette
Reis Armstrong-Desantis crosses the 2025 Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon's finish line.

At news-gazette.com
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Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

Runners make their way up First Street in Champaign during the 2025 Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon.

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