

# More than 30,000 Runners Expected for Marathon

This year's Marine Corps Marathon is expected to draw a record crowd of spectators as well.

BY DAVID SCHULTZ  
 THE CONNECTION

**Y**ou don't have to run 26.2 miles to have a good time at the Marine Corps Marathon. In fact, for those who aren't in good physical condition, it's probably better if you don't.

Over the last decade or so, the Marine Corps Marathon has evolved from an event for mostly hardcore running

enthusiasts to "the people's marathon," in which hundreds of not thousands of first-time marathoners take to the streets to prove they can complete the ultimate test of will and stamina.

"It is really, truly the people's marathon."

— Rick Nealis, Marine Corps Marathon race director

"When I ran the marathon [in the early 80s] the goal was to get faster," Rick Nealis said.

"Now you're running because you turn 40 or 50 or you run for leukemia. You're running for a cause."

Nealis is the director of the Marine Corps Marathon, the annual footrace through the streets of Arlington and Washington D.C. that has become the region's signature running event. The 33rd running of the marathon, which is set to take place later this month, is expected to draw more than 30,000 runners and 100,000 spectators.

**NEALIS SAID** that the race really began to increase in popularity after 1994 when Oprah Winfrey surprised everyone and entered the Marine Corps Marathon field.

Winfrey was looking to celebrate her 40th birthday by running a marathon. At the time, she had been taking a lot of flak for her strong criticisms of the cattle industry and she was looking for a race that could provide her with ample security.

"I wrote her and said 'If you're worried about safety, there's no safer place than to be with the Marines,'" Nealis said. "About six weeks later her people called and said 'We don't want anyone to know but she's coming here.'"

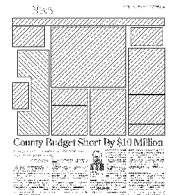
Since then, the race has maintained its popularity by keeping a populist flair, Nealis said. The Marine Corps Marathon doesn't offer prize money to the winners. This discourages professional runners from entering and adds to the perception that anyone can enter and run, Nealis said. "It is really, truly the people's marathon," he said.

He also said that, because uniformed Marines are working the race, it has a reputation as being one of the most well organized marathons in the country. "One of the things you hear from a lot of runners is that they don't hear the word sir or ma'am [at other races]," Nealis said. "It's a small thing but it makes such an impression on these people."

**WHILE THE** race organizers are focused on making sure the runners have everything they need to complete the race, Arlington County officials are most concerned with those who will be standing on the sidelines. "It means a lot for our economy," Arlington County Board Chairman Walter Tejada (D) said.

Not only is the start and finish of the race located in the county, but ten of the Marine Corps Marathon's 26.2 miles go through Arlington. This year, Arlington will be using colorful, graffiti-styled mile markers designed by Alexandria-based artist Kevin Irvin to let the runners know how far they have to go. Local businesses are also gearing up to accommodate the tens of thousands of people who will be coming to the area to cheer on their friends and family in the race.

The Crystal City area will be holding a family-friendly event throughout the day and then a post-race concert featuring rock group The BoDeans in the evening. Angela



Fox, the head of the Crystal City BID, a group that promotes commerce in the area, said that the Marine Corps Marathon is expected to be a huge moneymaker for local businesses. "This is our largest event of the year," she said.

The Rosslyn area will also see a tremendous surge in visitors on race day. The Marine Corps Marathon's start and finish is located at the Iwo Jima Memorial, just a few hundred yards away from the Rosslyn Metro Station. Cecilia Cassidy, the executive director of the Rosslyn BID, said that

her group is focused on providing fun and entertainment for the non-runners. "We're trying to make it a great party for you during the day while you're waiting for your runners to come back," she said.

### Get Involved

The 33rd annual Marine Corps Marathon will be held on Sunday, October 26. The race begins at 8 a.m. near the Iwo Jima Memorial in Rosslyn. Festivities will be held throughout the day in Rosslyn and also in Crsytal City. For more information, visit the Marine Corps Marathon's Web site at [www.marinemarathon.com](http://www.marinemarathon.com).



**Race director Rick Nealis and County Board Chairman Walter Tejada (D) unveil mile marker 26 for the upcoming Marine Corps Marathon.**