

RACE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT REGARDING COVID-19

Posted July 14th, 2020

First off – On behalf of the Magnolia race crew, I want to thank everyone who has supported our small event for the past 9 years. Our number 1 goal is to continue to plan and provide a quality event that embodies the Hospitality State. I love this race and I love this community. We are hoping and praying that our event can be held on November 21. In the meantime, we are observing and learning from other events, soliciting advice and planning every feasible precaution to ensure our event can be held safely and enjoyably, within the everchanging guidelines and restrictions.

Please understand that everything written here is not the final answer. We are 4 months away from Magnolia. **Everything can change or nothing can change.** These are unprecedented times and only a few people in this world are pandemic experts. I am not one of them. We are 100% dependent on local and state government officials for the final word on our event. Restrictions and guidelines are changing daily.

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES THE RACE WILL HAPPEN? It's impossible for me or any of us to answer that question right now. As of today, the race is happening. In the past 2 weeks (late June-early July) Mississippi has seen its highest numbers of COVID cases and new restrictions were just placed on several counties. Lauderdale County has been a hotspot from Day 1. Those new restrictions fortunately didn't include Lauderdale so that's a good thing.

HOW DIFFERENT WILL THE RACE LOOK COMPARED TO PAST YEARS? Very different. Currently, the City of Meridian has a restriction on outside gatherings to less than 100 people. As of this posting, we have over 200 registered participants. I have personally spoken with several city officials and have discussed ways to manage Magnolia should these restrictions still be in place. Those officials that I have spoken with want to see our event go forward. They are hopeful and encouraging and plan to help us as much as they are allowed to, within the guidelines. Here are some changes you might see:

- Staggered start or corral starts.
- Restrictions on family/friends gathering to watch the start.
- Aid station modifications, including cupless service, requiring runners to carry bottles/hydration packs
- Limited post-race food at the finish line, likely limited to individually wrapped items (sandwiches, chips, granola bars, etc)
- Picking up another runner's bib packet may be prohibited due to the need for everyone to sign a new waiver that wasn't available/necessary before.
- All race volunteers and race officials who will be in direct contact with runners will wear masks and/or gloves.

Again, the City has the final word and at any point, they can revoke our event permit. I will do whatever I can to find a way to ensure the race happens in the safest way possible, but as with every event in every city in every state in the US, we are at the mercy of the local government officials.

IF THE RACE DOESN'T HAPPEN, WILL THERE BE A VIRTUAL OPTION OR REFUND? If we are far enough out from race day that we have yet to purchase shirts, bags, bibs, etc, then we will offer multiple options including refunds (refunds, deferments, and the chance to donate your entry fee). If those items have been purchased, then NO REFUND will be offered. We will offer a shirt pickup day at some point and will do our best to ship shirts to those out of the area. We are a very small event with a very limited budget. We donate at least 75% of our proceeds to our charity, Alzheimer's Mississippi. The remaining money is kept to purchase items for the race (example- our new directional signs purchased last year). Full Disclosure-As Race Director, I do not get paid for organizing this event.

We have not thoroughly discussed a Virtual option yet (we are still working as if the event is happening), but when/if the need arises, we will announce details at a later date.

I am a firm believer in the "always earned, never given" race philosophy. If our race is cancelled outright and we choose not to offer a virtual option, we will not be distributing medals. We will hold the 9th running of the Magnolia Marathon in November 2021 and will use our 9-sided medallions for that event. If we choose to offer a virtual option, then we will likely offer the 9-sided medallions to those who submit a finish time. The 2021 race will be the 10th annual event. Please remember that our neck ribbons are also provided by a vendor and may not be available, depending on when/if this option is offered.

WILL WE BE ABLE TO MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY WITH DECISIONS WE MAKE? No. Never. We get it. Myself and the rest of the Magnolia Crew are avid runners. We are all tired of COVID. But it's still here and there's no way to know how long it will be here. I personally have had 7 races on my schedule to cancel or postpone. It's extremely frustrating! I hope that you all will have understanding that the decisions we make are made with the best intentions. If you feel the need to gripe about a decision that we've made or will make, please send me an email instead of just posting on social media. I always answer every email personally.

Pace on,

Evelyn Watkins

Magnolia Marathon Race Director

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