

# MYSTIC PLACES WILL BE THE PLACE TO BE

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

The sad news is that the East Lyme Marathon, after 22 years of being a fall fixture on the New England road race circuit, is no longer. For those runners who may have fond (and maybe not-so-fond) memories of racing 26.2 miles through scenic East Lyme in the past, your place in history is secure. The good news is that Southeastern Connecticut will not be without a fall marathon. In fact, marathon racing in these parts plans on being bigger and better than ever before.

On Sunday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Mystic Places Marathon will take place beginning and ending in East Lyme's Rocky Neck State Park. The Mystic Places event replaces the former East Lyme Marathon, which flourished during the running boom of the eighties and survived setbacks like Hurricane Gloria, the loss of sponsorship (which led to the informal "Memorial Run"), and the competition from other in-state marathon pretenders (Stamford and Bridgeport) that have come and gone. Through it all, East Lyme has endured, and now looks to offer runners an event of an even greater magnitude. Race Committee Co-Chairman Tom Hinsch envisioned taking the East Lyme event to a new level. At the recommendation of East Lyme Race Directors Way Hedding and Pete Volkmar, Hinsch and the Mystic Places group recruited John Bysiewicz to coordinate their event. Bysiewicz, a former distance running standout at the University of Connecticut and now one of New England's top race directors, coordinates a number of top level races throughout Connecticut, including the nationally recognized New Haven 20K on Labor Day. With his extensive race directing experience and his own running credentials (Bysiewicz himself has a 2:22 marathon best to his credit), Bysiewicz knows just what it takes to make the Mystic Places Marathon a successful event.

In addition to the classic 26.2 mile footrace on Sunday, a full family-orientated weekend will be on tap for Saturday as well, featuring a Health and Fitness expo, children's races and activities, live music, the traditional pre-race pasta dinner, and a fireworks display courtesy of Mohegan Sun. Sunday's race will also feature a marathon relay, a post-race meal, live music, and an awards ceremony. One unique feature of the marathon relay is the "Legends" team, consisting of two-time Olympic marathoner and 1957 Boston Marathon Champion Johnny J. Kelly of Mystic, former Fitch High School standout and 1968 Boston marathon winner Amby Burfoot, Former 1,500 Meter Olympian Jan-Merrill Morin of Waterford, and 1972 Olympic marathon Gold medalist Frank Shorter, who will compete as a team along with Jodi Richards of Mystic. Richards won the auction to compete with the Legends Team, with auction proceeds benefiting the Connecticut Special Olympics. The five-person marathon relay teams will be competing alongside the marathon runners. There are also eight bands committed to play along the marathon route, which winds through scenic Black Point and downtown Niantic before returning to the finish in the park. Kenyans Francis Kamau, a 2:14 marathoner who recently ran 2:19 as a Masters runner, and Reuben Chesang, who won the October 13<sup>th</sup> Hartford Marathon in 2:19:00, are expected to lead the men's field. Poland's Kristina Pieczulis, a 2:37 marathon runner, and Mary-Lynn Currier of Avon, CT, the first American finisher at the 1998 Boston Marathon, are the top female marathon runners expected to compete.

The numbers for Mystic Places inaugural event are impressive. Over 1,100 runners have already entered the marathon, with another 65 marathon relay teams competing. The race has runners entered from 36 states and 3 countries, with about 40% of the race field traveling from out-of-state; all of which support the race's vision of becoming a tourism event. "Essentially we were looking to extend the tourist season another week", Bysiewicz explains of the October 28<sup>th</sup> race date. "And we wanted to give the local community something more than just a marathon," referring to the expo, bands, and fireworks as examples of a free event for the public to attend. Hedding and the past board of Directors of the East Lyme Marathon also remain involved in the race, overseeing the support along the race course. Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casino, in their first collaborative marketing effort of a major event, are the two major sponsors of the event, along with Backus and Lawrence and Memorial Hospitals, the Waterford Hotel Group, Pfizer Corporation, and a number of local vendors. "The goal was to keep the event right here in Southeastern Connecticut", Hedding explains. "It will truly be a hometown event".

Volunteers are always needed for the marathon. Anyone interested should contact Ellen Botinelli at (860) 444-2206 or [ebmystic@ctol.net](mailto:ebmystic@ctol.net). Other details can also be found on the race's web site at [www.mysticplacesmarathon.org](http://www.mysticplacesmarathon.org). Make every effort to get out to East Lyme for the weekend and support Connecticut's top marathon event.

## Racing Roundup

Uncasville's Todd Bennett continues to chalk up his share of wins this season. Bennett returned to the Greater Downtown Merchants Road Race in Norwich on September 6<sup>th</sup> after a wrong turn at halfway forced him to drop out of last year's race. Running a different course this year, Bennett was again guided off course and reached the finish line early, but was awarded the win over Eddie Eckard and Mike Fusaro. Eckard also followed Bennett off course and Fusaro, who had been running in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, was initially awarded the victory, but graciously declared Bennett the winner. Bennett also won the Lisbon Fall Festival 3.5 Mile Road Race on September 22<sup>nd</sup> in 19:23, with William Beckwith claiming runner-up honors in 19:34. On the women's side, Norwich's Melissa Perkins-Banas continues to turn out top level performances on the roads this year from every distance from 5K to the marathon. Perkins-Banas was the top female finisher at Lisbon in 20:29, good for 8<sup>th</sup> place overall.....Canterbury's Chad Johnson is also having a banner year on the roads. Johnson won the Liberty Bank 5 Mile Road Race in Old Saybrook on September 16<sup>th</sup> in 25:15, which served as the USATF State Championship. Uncasville's Chadwick Brown placed 4<sup>th</sup> overall in 25:40, while Mystic's Martha Marz (3<sup>rd</sup> female in 29:33) and Perkins-Banas (4<sup>th</sup> in 29:51) also posted impressive performances. Johnson has showed no signs of slowing down after his terrific 17<sup>th</sup> place finish against a national-class field at the New Haven 20K on Labor Day. Johnson's time in 1:04:40 in New Haven measured up against some of the country's top distance runners. Dan Browne, a former Army standout now training in Colorado, won the race in 1:00:09 to claim his second national U.S. title this season. Both Johnson and Brown, along with teammate Steve Herrera of Waterford, were instrumental in securing a state team title for the Mohegan Striders in 2001. Herrera is currently recovering from a stress fracture he suffered during the final miles in New Haven. Herrera was forced to hobble to the finish line in 1:11:51, still good enough for 58<sup>th</sup> overall in a field of over 2,000.....Kevin Grant of New London (15:21) outran Chadwick Brown (15:54) to win the Strides for Great Neck 5K on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Heather Clark (20:49) was the top female finisher.....Former St. Bernard High School and Holy Cross standout Chris Hansen was the 4<sup>th</sup> place American finisher in the 35-39 year age group at the World Duathlon Championships in Rimini, Italy on September 16<sup>th</sup>. Hansen completed the course, which consisted of a 10K run, 40K bike, and another 5K run, in 2:01:55, a personal best by over 3 ½ minutes. Hansen also represented the United States at the 1995 Championships in Cancun, Mexico. Team USA led over 20 different countries in the opening ceremony parade as a goodwill gesture due to the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks.

## This month in history

October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1985 – Just after 18 miles into the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual East Lyme Marathon, Norwich's Tim Smith began to prove he knew a thing or two about marathon racing. The 37 year-old Smith, who 3 years earlier had posted a 2:23:56 East Lyme course record that still stands today, ran down three of the area's strongest distance runners in Bob Stack, Joe Banas, and Bill Marshall over the final miles to win the race for the third time. Smith made up 100 yards in less than a mile to pass Banas in the 24<sup>th</sup> mile, closing to within 150 yards of Marshall's lead. Just over a mile later, Smith had taken control of the race, passing Marshall and hitting the tape in 2:34:15 for the 26.2-mile distance. Stack moved up to claim runner-up honors in 2:35:53, with Bill Millea of West Warwick, RI 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2:36:05. Marshall, passed by both Stack and Millea in the final 200 meters, struggled home valiantly to hang on for 4<sup>th</sup> (2:36:12). Other top local finishers joining the elite sub 3 hour club included Banas (6<sup>th</sup> in 2:38:44), New London's Jeff Kotecki (7<sup>th</sup> in 2:40:22) and Jim Butler (8<sup>th</sup> in 2:42:40), Dennis Tetreault of Lisbon (12<sup>th</sup> in 2:51:14), and Oakdale's Jim Carper (13<sup>th</sup> in 2:51:34). 19 year-old Janice Palonen-Boyes of Canterbury, a former cross-country standout at NFA, was the top female finisher in 3:15:21. The marathon, originally scheduled to be run on September 29<sup>th</sup> but postponed due to Hurricane Gloria, had 169 official finishers.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at [www.moheganstriders.org](http://www.moheganstriders.org). He can also be reached by e-mail at [kdcsikorski@netzero.net](mailto:kdcsikorski@netzero.net).