

# CONNECTICUT POST

## Record numbers for Fairfield race

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CORRESPONDENT

FAIRFIELD — A record crowd of athletes turned out for Sunday's Stratton Faxon Fairfield Road Race at Jennings Beach. The half marathon was the day's biggest event, with 3,116 of the 4,251 racers in attendance running. The crowd was the largest ever for the race.

"I really think we've taken this to another level this year," race director Steve Lobdell said. "We have a thousand more runners than last year."

Also included in the day's activities were a 5K race and a 1K fun run.

"We actually had people from 40 states and six or seven countries come in," Lobdell said. "Runners World (magazine) last year for the month of June named us the race of the month."

An eclectic group of people came out to the course. The men's half marathon winner was Worku Beyi of Ethiopia, while his wife, Buzunesh Deba, took first on the women's circuit. Beyi finished two minutes off his half-marathon best of 1:02 at 1:04.10 and edged out fellow countryman Ketema Nigusse. Deba finished at 1:14.10.

"The course is a tough course," said Beyi after his win. "There is a lot of hills."

The hills took their toll on more than a few runners. Joe Simoncek, of Milford, said the course was one of the best runs around but was hard because of the numerous hills along the way.

"It's a beautiful course,

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Steve Lobdell  
FAIRFIELD ROAD RACE DIRECTOR

though," Simoncek said. "It's very well run."

The course's scenic route is one of the race's many attractions. The Fairfield Fire Department, which hosted the race, dispatched flyers to all the homes along the route a few days before the race, encouraging residents to come out and cheer on the runners.

Spectators lined the course to cheer the runners. Homemade sprinkler systems were turned on, bands played on the side of the roads, and spectators made their own water stations to provide extra hydration for the racers.

"We get this relationship between the runners thanking everybody for participating and in kind we get the people that are out on the course, they like hearing it, so it's kind of a win-win," Lobdell said. The event was well-organized and took extra effort to make it possible.

"We probably have about 400 total volunteers," said assistant director John Cieplinski. "About 200 Girl Scout volunteers run water stations and Boy Scouts help at intersections to guide the runners."



SHELLEY CRYAN/ FOR THE CONNECTICUT POST

Above, Ethiopia's Worku Beyi of Ethiopia crosses the finish line to win the 29th annual Fairfield Half Marathon on Sunday morning at Jennings Beach. Beyi's wife, Buzunesh Deba, captured the women's event. Below, spectators lined the streets of Fairfield and Southport to support the runners. These young fans hold up signs on Rowland Road.

