

Runners tame the Wildflower

Local resident Jorn Jensen wins overall title

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Posted: Monday, April 4, 2016 2:29 pm

The 33rd running of the American Association of University Women's Wildflower Run brought out more than 1,000 competitors who hailed from South County to the far reaches of the globe.



Winners of the 2016 Wildflower Run Men's 10K: 1st Place Jorn T. Jensen; 2nd Place Bihama Vedaste; and 3rd Place Abel Bedolla. The Wildflower Run took place April 3 in Morgan Hill.

The 10K overall winner brought a mix of both the local and international as 47-year-old Denmark implant Jorn T. Jensen, now a Morgan Hill resident, crossed the finish line in 35 minutes, 24 seconds to take the top prize with extended family visiting from his native land in attendance.

“This was for the family,” said Jensen, whose two nephews competed in the 5K Run. “It’s great. It’s rehearsal for a Memorial Day 10K I’m running in Marin. This was a very good test for me.”

Jensen said second-place finisher Bihama Vedaste, 26, who completed the course in 36:38, pushed the pace early on through the first two miles of the 6.2-mile race that wound through northeast Morgan Hill neighborhoods and ended up full circle at Live Oak High School.

“I took over the pace-setting on the third mile and I felt if I kept that pace or increased it just a little bit that I could put him in some trouble and start to build a gap and that’s exactly what happened,” Jensen explained.

Rounding out the top five in the men’s 10K field were third-place Abel Bedolla (37:35), fourth-place Alonso Torres (37:32) and fifth-place Darrin Rohr of Morgan Hill (38:33).



The 2016 Wildflower Run's top winners in the Women's 10K event: 1st place Stephanie Lynch (left) and 2nd place Merlin Vassigh.

The first woman to conquer the course was 40-year-old Gilroyan Stephanie Lynch, who bested the field in 42:14 ahead of runner-up Merlin Vassigh of San Jose (42:39) and third-place finisher Stephanie Kato (43:55). Morgan Hill’s Tennille Jones, 39, took fourth in 45:58, while 17-year-old Kelsey Valentine placed fifth in 47:15.



The start of the April 3 Wildflower Run's 5K event, the most popular of the annual AAUW fundraiser's races.

From babies being pushed in strollers for the 5K Stroller Run to active seniors competing in the Senior 2K, 817 participants logged times on the Racemine event management system, which can be viewed on the organizer's wildflowerrun.org website.

“It’s a fun run and everyone seems so nice,” said 5K participant Sandi Vierra of Twain Harte in Sonora County whose family has made it a tradition to get together for the Wildflower.

Vierra’s husband Patrick was in the same group set to tackle the 5K along with her sister Sally Shepherd and her husband Dave Shepherd of Roseville, while another sister—Gilroyan Susan Patereau—was already off in the 10K.

“It’s a reason for us to get together and it’s for a good cause,” said Sally Shepherd, who enjoys everything Morgan Hill has to offer while in town. “We shop, we eat and we have wine, and then we come here.”



Wildflower Run Kids' 5K winner Walker Napoli gets a congratulatory hug from his grandfather Laszlo Kabat while grandmother Piroska Kabat looks on.



Children enjoyed the 2K Kids' run at the 2016 Wildflower Run, a fundraiser for the American Association of University Women which took place at Live Oak High School April 3.

From old friends to new ones, Joanna Demelo, of Gilroy, and Jessica Dicker of Aptos just recently met up at the race. Demelo said she started running because she wanted to get into shape and live a healthier lifestyle.

“I sit behind a desk at work all week,” said Demelo as she geared up for only her second 5K event.

Dicker has been running for about a year and enjoys the scenic views, meeting others who share her same passion and venturing out on her own for races.

“I like running outside. I don’t like being on a treadmill,” Dicker added.

For 71-year-old Gilroyan Gary Mader, the Wildflower Run was a test of will as he persevered through a pulled hamstring to win the Senior 2K race. Mader said he won his age group in last year’s Wildflower 5K but the injury forced him to do the 2K in 2016.

“I originally came out to win it and everything, but I pulled my hamstring playing softball so I just figured I go through the motions and see how it felt,” said Mader, who has run off and on since high school and competed collegiately at San Fernando Valley State (now called CSU Northridge).



Wildflower Run Women’s 5K winner Kaylah Grant is surrounded by supporters after the race, which is a fundraiser for the American Association of University Women.

It was a Morgan Hill sweep in the 5K women's field as 16-year-old Kaylah Grant's 18:20 was tops overall with 15-year-old Emily Harris in second at 19:35 and 12-year-old Audry Reed in third at 20:58.



Eduardo Guzman won the 2016 Wildflower Run's Men's 5K race April 3.

In the 5K men's field, 22-year-old Eduardo Guzman of Hollister (19:18) claimed first place ahead of runner-up Ken Christopher, 30, of Gilroy (20:05) and third-place finisher Horacio Zamora, 43, of Watsonville (20:15).

"This is a base time for me. I'm trying to get back into shape," said Guzman, a 2011 league champion at San Benito High School who ran for Hartnell College as well. "It was surprising (to win). But after the first mile, I noticed the pace and then I decided to go out and try to win."



The Wildflower Run's top three finishers in the Dad's (Men's) 5K Stroller category: 1st place Fabian Weber; 2nd place Joe Iacocca; 3rd place Jonathan Sinclair.

In the 5K Stroller races, Morgan Hill's Fabian Weber, 39, took the daddy tape in 20:11, while Natalia Smith, 37, of Morgan Hill, won the mommy title in 26:12.

In the 5K walks, 71-year-old Louis Bookbinder won the men's field, while 56-year-old Gilroyan Catherine Starks was the victor in the women's field, according to RM Timing results.



Donna Awender placed first in the Senior Women's 2K race at the April 3 Wildflower Run.

The local AAUW chapter makes sure there is always one true winner as the group uses the money raised from the Wildflower run to “provide funds to support education of women and girls.”

The first run in 1984 raised \$1,000 that was donated to the AAUW Educational Foundation, according to organizers. Two years ago, the run raised \$40,000 and enabled AAUW to send eight middle school girls to a science and math camp, provide eight scholarships to local high school and community college females, conduct a speech contest and also provide followup grants to previous scholarship winners in college. Last year’s race generated \$49,000 that went toward scholarships and advocacy for women and girls.

“I am delighted with the success of this year’s Wildflower Run. We had over 1,000 runners and walkers, the weather was perfect, and the event ran flawlessly, thanks to the 150 volunteers and SVE’s timing services,” Wildflower co-director Elizabeth Mandel said. “I see this outpouring of support, year after year, as both a reflection of the generosity of our remarkable community and a vote of confidence in the difference AAUW Morgan Hill makes through the many local scholarships and grants we provide for women and girls.”

This year, Mandel added that AAUW received a record \$25,000 in corporate sponsorships and almost \$10,000 in individual donations.