

Amazing Race

Rio Grill's Resolution Run Celebrates 30 Years

BY RENEE BRINCKS



On the first day of each year, Eileen LaMothe laces up her shoes and goes out for a run.

The Carmel resident and Monterey Peninsula College nursing instructor maintains healthy habits, but her New Year's Day tradition also supports a wider objective. By participating in

Rio Grill's Resolution Run, which marks 30 years on January 1, 2020, LaMothe has helped to raise more than \$1 million for local charities over the past three decades.

"Next year will be my 30th Rio Run. I've done them all," she says. "I love to run, and I'm always interested in giving back. So, it's a great way to

start the new year."

LaMothe's husband, Pierre, has completed nearly all of the races with her. Their two sons, now adults who run competitively, started taking part in Rio Resolution Run presentations when they were young. LaMothe credits Tony Tollner, managing partner of Rio Grill and the

Photo: Wayne Capili





Photo: Wayne Capili

Eileen LaMothe is about to run in her 30th Rio Grill Resolution Run. Founder Tony Tollner (right) is managing partner of Rio Grill.

Downtown Dining restaurant group, for creating a family-friendly event with a civic focus.

"You can run. You can walk. You can bring the baby or the dog. When it's over, everyone goes to Rio Grill for brunch and prizes," she says. "Tony has an attitude of gratitude and a commitment to supporting very worthwhile nonprofits. He celebrates everyone who comes to this event, and that's why participants keep coming back."

LaMothe credits Tony Tollner, managing partner of Rio Grill and the Downtown Dining restaurant group, for creating a family-friendly event with a civic focus.



Photo: Kelli Utall

Tony Tollner thought of a New Year's Day fundraising event in the 1990s when he was on the board of Family Resource Center.

Tollner traces the event's origins to the early 1990s, when he was a Family Resource Center board member. The nonprofit struggled to make payroll, so he suggested a New Year's Day run that would generate funds for the group.

"We didn't make much money that first year—I think that Rio Grill actually made a donation to extend the impact—but it took off from there," Tollner says.

These days, between 1,200 and 1,400 individuals register in Rio Grill's Resolution Run every year. Five- and 10-kilometer courses spotlight local landmarks such as Mission Trail Park, the Carmel Mission and, for long-route runners, Scenic Road and Carmel Beach. After completing the course, participants are invited to brunch at Rio Grill.

Just hours after ending busy New Year's Eve dinner shifts, restaurant team members return to set up registration tables and cook for hungry

runners. Approximately 100 volunteers also assist, setting up the brunch tent, passing out participant T-shirts and preparing additional food.

"We have teamed up since day one with the Monterey Kiwanis. They are absolutely amazing. They come over that morning and set up their own griddles and make thousands of pancakes. We provide the pancake mix, and we make scrambled eggs and sausage and coffee for 500 or 600 people," says Tollner, who also hands out gifts, raffle prizes and certificates for top finishers in various categories.

The real prize, however, comes when the race team donates proceeds to local charities. Tollner and Julie Ann Lozano, who has helped organize Rio Grill's Resolution Run for much of its 30-year history, look for partners that have small budgets and a serious commitment to improving the lives of children.

Over the past three decades, Rio Resolution



Photo: Wayne Capili

Larry Levine, George Lang and Jennie Martineau are Kiwanis Club volunteers who cook thousands of pancakes in the brunch tent for event racers.

Run recipients have ranged from Suicide Prevention Services to Community Partnership for Youth to the current beneficiary, Coastal Kids Home Care. The Salinas-based nonprofit pediatric home health agency serves more than 650 children a year, support-

ing youngsters with injuries, major illnesses and chronic conditions.

"Coastal Kids Home Care was started by a nurse who realized that there was no specialized hospice care for kids with a terminal disease. She started and grew this nonprofit into

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Photo: Wayne Capilli

The Rio Grill Resolution Run raised over \$30,000 for Coastal Kids Home Care, an organization that provides low-cost, high-quality home health care for children.

something extraordinary," Tollner says. "That's the kind of organization we like to work with."

From 2012 to 2014, Rio Grill's Resolution Run raised more than \$117,000 to support Natividad Foundation's purchase of a specialized neonatal transport unit. Staff members use the

equipment to move more than 90 newborns a year between medical facilities in Monterey and San Benito counties.

"Critically ill and premature babies from throughout Monterey County have had their lives saved with this advanced neonatal trans-

port unit," says Dr. Gary Gray, Natividad CEO.

When Tollner visited the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit to view the equipment, he watched a nurse change the diaper of a two-pound baby. The significance of that experience hasn't left him.

"It's just awesome to know that we're making that kind of impact," Tollner says.

Feedback from racers presents its own reward, he adds.

"It's great when parents come up and say, 'I love starting my year this way. I love bringing my kids to this event,'" says Tollner. "And, we're making a significant financial difference in the lives of kids and organizations doing good work. It feels really good to be in the middle of that."

Rio Grill's Resolution Run celebrates its 30th anniversary on January 1, 2020. For route and registration information and more, please visit riogrillresolutionrun.com.



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