

Jim Humphrey picked a good year to hand over the reins of the Star City Half Marathon and 10k. The 34th running will be like no other.

COVID-19 disrupted everything event on the calendar and the Star City Half Marathon was no exception. No longer a stand-alone event the Saturday before Thanksgiving, the race is now a virtual competition where runners can leg out 13.1 miles (or 10k) any time in November and submit their time.

Despite the necessary change, Humphrey has one overall message: "Get out there and run. Do something. Don't just stay inside and die on the vine."

He knows a great attraction of races is the camaraderie enjoyed running with friends or in groups. While conscientious about the dangers of gatherings during a pandemic, but heartened by research indicating that outdoor activities seem to have a vanishingly small rate of transmission, Humphrey said promotion of the race is a balancing act.

"It's a compromise of what to do to ask for a group to run together, but then not have a group get together," Humphrey said.

The original date of the half marathon and 10K was Nov. 21. That's the day Humphrey expects most people will get out on the course, if just for tradition.

The advantage of allowing the race to be run any time in November is a runner can choose a day and time most suitable. The disadvantage is the course is not marked and the intersections are not secured.

"The understanding is it's not guarded, protected or even marked," Humphrey said. "There's a race app, so as you're running you can get guidance to stay on course. It also helps on the timing."

The timing will be kept by the runners and sent in to VAS via the RaceJoy app. While it's possible to fudge the results, the app greatly reduces that chance. Plus, Humphrey said runners are not likely to consider falsifying their times.

"Runners, in general, are honest about their times," he said. "The front runners are extremely particular about the timing. People in certain age groups competing against themselves or friends are going to be honest. If their running with their friends they'll know how they stand with them."

There are two half-marathon courses to pick from. One is the planned course for the 2020 race that has portions on the city streets; the second course stays on the greenways. Either option is allowable for competitors to qualify for prizes.

Humphrey said that while the Star City Half Marathon and 10k is a heritage race, designed and promoted to serious runners and "not meant for the masses," the event has gained popularity because of the unique additions.

"We wanted it to be a Taste of Roanoke. When they finish, instead of a bagel or a banana, we offered comfort food from Roanoke restaurants like chili from the Texas Tavern or corn bread and pinto beans

from the Roanoker. We even had beer. All that was provided. And there were discounts at places downtown. It was more than just a race where you finished and went home by 11 a.m.”

Unfortunately, the food and the fun will have to wait for another year. But this year’s swag bag is still solid, a benefit of VAS involvement, Humphrey said. “There’s a great new medal and the shirts are really an improvement.”.

Humphrey took the race from about 300 entrants to 900 in his time. He also added the 10k race and worked to promote the event to serious runners from all over this part of the country, making the Star City Half recognized far and wide

Talking about the event, Humphrey’s love of the race is so clear it’s hard to believe he’s passed the torch.

“Even though it’s been my baby for so long, it was time to let it go,” he said.

Getting to know Pete Lampman in years past made Humphrey comfortable with the idea of handing the race to VAS.

“Pete Lampman was a key factor in why I wanted to hand the race off to VAS, but getting to know [current President Dan Foutz] and the whole staff I was really impressed. It’s in great hands,” Humphrey said.

Registration can be done through the web sites of Commonwealth Games or the Star City Striders. The deadline is Nov. 21.