

JULIA MALLON and ELI RODRIGUEZ CAPTURE

NAPA-TO-SONOMA WINE COUNTRY HALF MARATHON

July 19, 2009, Sonoma, CA. Former standout Santa Rosa high school and Stanford runner Julia Mallon, now residing in Miami, won her first Napa-to-Sonoma Wine Country Half Marathon in a time of 1:22:01. Eli Rodriguez of Whittier, CA continued his recent winning streak, running the course for his first time victoriously in 1:09.25.

Nearly 3,000 runners competed on this winding, picturesque course that started at Cuvaison Carneros Estate winery in Napa and finished in historic Sonoma Plaza. Favorite Tesfaya Dirba of Ethiopia had a half-minute lead until mile eight when his calf muscle flared, allowing Eli Rodriguez, 25, to take charge of the race as they approached mile ten. Ed Baker of Palo Alto ended up in second with a time of 1:10:20.2, while Tesfaya Dirba struggled to finish third with a time of 1:12:40. Rodriguez and Mallon both received a Ball Watch, a double magnum of Artesa wine and \$500 for first place. Second and third place finishers received \$300 and \$200 respectively, with a magnum of wine from Cline Cellars.

The day provided perfect running temperatures for the elite runners, however, Mallon, 30, also battled a pulled leg muscle. "I felt it early in the race and had to pull back for while", said Julia. "But I was really motivated to win this race, being back home again and running on this beautiful course." Mallon was able to hold off Lisbeth Sunshine, 45, of San Francisco, who finished second overall in the women's division with a time of 1:22:23. The current top ranked female runner in the US in the 50-54 age group, Christine Kennedy of Los Altos, CA, competed in her first Wine Country Half Marathon, finishing third in the time of 1:24:39 beating nearly 2,000 other women, most of which who were younger.

Amongst the runners for this year's sold out event was actress and Jenny Craig spokesperson Valerie Bertinelli. Valerie finished her first-ever half marathon in a time of 2:12:20, placing 51st out of 133 runners in her age group. HLN meteorologist Bob Van Dillen, served as honorary chairman for the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation's half marathon training program, Team Challenge (www.ccteamchallenge.org). Rolf Benirschke, former place kicker for the San Diego Chargers also supported the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America and completed the race finishing in a time of 1:53.46.

Upon completing the 13.1 mile journey through spectacular wine country terrain, participants gathered with family, friends and other runners at the popular Wine & Music Festival, where two dozen of the area's finest wineries poured, as finishers celebrated their accomplishment.

Race director Matt Dockstader was thrilled with the outcome of the event; "we had it all today; great weather, a very competitive race, and a lot of fun!" He added, "best of all, the event was able to generate almost two and half million dollars for charity thanks to the efforts of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation and Hanna Boys Center."

For full results and more information visit the event website www.napa2sonoma.com.

Destination Races is also the producer of the Santa Barbara Wine Country Half Marathon and the Wine Country Healdsburg Half Marathon. Further information on sister events may be found online at www.destinationraces.com and Facebook.

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