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PARRISH, BITTER WIN 8TH ANNUAL THE WOODLANDS MARATHON BEAN, MIDDLETON THE HALF; \$107,300 RAISED FOR CHARITY

THE WOODLANDS, TX (March 2, 2019) – Very humid conditions and a light mist at the races' start - that slickened the streets for runners - failed to dampen the spirits of close to 4,700 finishers of the Fidelity Investments The Woodlands Marathon and the Houston Methodist The Woodlands Half Marathon, which produced 88 Boston qualifiers and raised \$107,300 as part of the Beck and Masten Charity Challenge.

Fulshear, Texas' **Ryan Parrish** and Phoenix, Arizona's **Nicole Bitter** captured the men's and women's crowns of the eighth annual Fidelity Investments The Woodlands Marathon in times of 2:29:08 and 2:58:35, respectively.

The duo each earned \$1,250 for their efforts.

Meanwhile, Houston's **Drew Bean** and Boise, Idaho's **Kinsey Middleton** went home with \$500 apiece for winning the Houston Methodist The Woodlands Half Marathon, also in its eighth year, in 1:07:44 and 1:15:29, respectively.

The 40-year-old Parrish said the weather wasn't much of a factor for him.

"It was actually a beautiful day. It was a little drizzly in the beginning, but the weather was great," he said. "I really liked the course. Everything was setup great. It was a great day."

While Collierville, Tennessee's **Adam Higham**, 33, was second – exactly two minutes behind Parrish in 2:31:08 earning him \$625, Parrish indicated it was the four-person Fort Bend Running Club relay team, though, that kept him on task.

"For the first three legs of the relay, they were pretty much right there," said Parrish, who prepped for the race with a 1:11:56 win at the Katy Half Marathon. "I thought it was great to have someone to run with so I really enjoyed it."

He said he saw Higham near the midway point after bearing north onto West Branch Crossing Drive, giving him a "boost of energy" knowing "that I could finish and finish hard."

Mexico's **Alfredo Shabot**, 38, rounded out the men's top three in 2:38:47, collecting \$300 for his efforts.

Bitter, who's training for this June's Western States 100-mile Endurance Run, came to The Woodlands to get in some speed work – with a marathon.

"I've not run a lot of marathons consistently," she said. "We thought it would be a good start doing some marathon training."

Today's win was Bitter's third marathon since December – California International and Phoenix the other two -- and didn't know that 2017 champion Melissa Hopper was lurking behind in second place.

"I pretty much ran most of it (the race) by myself," said the owner of seventh best women's 100-mile time – 14 hours, 22 minutes and 18 seconds at the 2015 Rocky Raccoon 100 in Huntsville – ever. "I actually didn't know she was so close. She ran a great race."

Hopper, who was third here a year ago, said Bitter shot off the start line and that she didn't see her until about mile 21.

"I was kind of closing in on her, but I just didn't have anything left at the end," she said, finishing 11 seconds behind in 2:58:46 to earn the \$625 second prize.

Spring's **Kenaia Neumann**, 23, edged out The Woodlands' **Sophie Pageau**, 46, by a second – stopping the clock in 3:16:56 – to garner third place and the \$300 prize.

Julius Michael, Frank Daughtery, Ingrid Mollenkopf and **Tricia Terry** (Fort Bend Running Club) won the four-person relay in 2:33:12 – the second-fastest relay time in the race's eight-year history.

Former Lamar University star and two-time UIL state champion from Little Cypress-Mauriceville **Drew Bean** had been battling injuries recently and was a late entry to Saturday's half marathon.

"I tried doing an 8K in downtown Houston a couple of weeks ago and my hamstrings gave me trouble," said the 29-year-old Bean, who now resides in Houston. "So another week of taking it easy and letting it heal; things just worked out well."

Bean said that last year's champion **Geoffrey Speelman** "took it out a little quick" while everyone else settled into a pace a little bit back.

At the start line, Bean saw a familiar face – Aurora, Colorado's **Gabe Cuadra**.

"We were in the same classification. I remembered him from high school and I saw him on the start line and said, 'Dude, it's you. You've got a beard now,'" he said of the 29-year-old Rice Owl graduate who just moved back to Houston a few weeks ago.

Cuadra quickly recalled the past.

"Yes, we go way back, Drew and I," chuckled Cuadra, who ran against him at Friendswood High School. "He's been kicking my butt for a long time, but it felt great to be out there with him again. I haven't raced him in years."

"There was a pretty good pack of us out there dropping 5:10s and by mile eight, it was just Drew and I."

"We were on a downhill and I was just feeling good and picked it up a little bit," said Bean.

Cuadra added that Bean "made a little bit of a break and I couldn't hang on."

He crossed the finish line less than a minute behind in 1:09:41 to grab the \$300 second prize while Missouri City's **Richard Powell**, 30, beat Colorado Springs, Colorado's **Brian Marshall**, 23, by 50 seconds to take third – and the \$100 – in 1:09:05.

Middleton was looking for a little magic in the women's half marathon race.

The same kind, she said, that fellow Canadian **Rachel Cliff** might have left on the course from a year ago when she set the Canadian national half marathon record in 1:10:08.

"I kind of ran the whole thing by myself. About a mile to go, I caught one of the guys so I had a little bit of help," she said.

"I was pretty far off of the time that I wanted to hit, but that's OK. It was pretty humid out today, so I just put a good effort out."

Runners-up **Allie Schaich** and **Melissa Fairey** were near giddy in finishing second and third.

The duo, who ran for Rice and Georgia Tech, respectively, ran the marathon pace they need to be able to earn their Olympic Trials Marathon qualifying times at the end of next month at the Illinois Marathon in Champaign.

“It was perfect. Everything went to plan. It was easier than we expected so it felt really good,” the two said almost interchangeably. “If we can do that again, it will be a good day.” Both ladies finished in 1:18:42 as Schaich was listed in second and Fairey third.

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Sugar Land’s **Adessa Ellis**, 41, won the marathon’s handcycle division in 2:18:30 – more than four minutes ahead of Conroe’s **Robert Ferguson**.

She was just three minutes off of her personal best of 2:15:23 – set two weeks ago at the Galveston Marathon, but she said “this (course) had hills.”

Ferguson passed her twice as she had a broken brake and had to stop as she couldn’t turn the cable, but remarked that she “went and caught him”.

Houston’s **Alex Hordge**, 31, and Bryan’s **Leticia Sandoval**, 38, were the Visually Impaired division winners of the half marathon in 1:58:40 and 2:31:23, respectively, while Porter’s **Breanne Beale**, 26, and Houston’s **Michael Saldivar**, 21, won the Mobility Impaired divisions in 2:16:50 and 2:19:35.

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Just under 10 percent of the 900 individual finishers of the marathon – 88, to be exact – qualified for the 2020 Boston Marathon, which lowered its qualifying standards by five minutes – making it more difficult for runners to enter the prestigious race.

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More than 60 athletes participated in the race’s Beck and Masten Charity Challenge, raising \$107,300 for 11 different charities.

Will Byers was the leading fundraiser, garnering \$14,739 for the Cure San Filippo Foundation and earned a \$3,000 donation match from The Woodlands Marathon Management.

Since its first season, 650 athletes have raised over \$950,000 the race’s Charity Challenge for various local and international causes.

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The ninth annual The Woodlands Marathon and Half Marathon will be held on Saturday, March 6, 2020.

Registration opens at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 3, 2019.

About The Woodlands Marathon Management

The Woodlands Marathon Management is an event production company that operates with a primary goal of providing individuals the opportunity to participate in a running event that promotes the advancement of running. The directors of The Woodlands Marathon Management share a passion for The Woodlands community, the Houston region and the active sport lifestyle. They have teamed up to produce this premier event that will provide The Woodlands and surrounding communities options for living a healthy lifestyle with purpose.

For more information, please visit the event website at <http://www.thewoodlandsmarathon.com/>.

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