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Contact:

Julie Armstrong, Marketing Communications Director

831-625-6226 / Julie@bsim.org



Monterey Peninsula Wins First-ever "Outstanding Runner Friendly Community" Designation

Road Runners Club of America shines national spotlight on California's Central Coast for its runner friendly businesses, government, infrastructure and focus on fitness.

California's Monterey Peninsula has been named the "Outstanding Runner Friendly Community" by the Road Runners Club of America (RRCA) in a first-ever competition for the honor.

RRCA, the oldest and largest distance running organization in the U.S., established the competition to recognize communities that help improve the quality of life for residents and visitors through physical activity offerings such as running trails and infrastructure, events, easy access, clubs and organizations and more.

"Monterey Peninsula was a clear standout for this award," said Jean Knaack, RRCA Executive Director. She cited letters of support from the mayor of Monterey, the head of the local Convention & Visitors Bureau, State Parks Superintendent, local business owners and others. "The community is meeting and exceeding our criteria and has set a strong example for others to follow."

The comprehensive application was submitted by the Big Sur International Marathon, a long time member of RRCA, with support from the local running club. Detailed responses to questions covered many aspects of the local community. 'Infrastructure' elements included mention of a scenic 18+ mile contiguous running path along the Monterey Bay coastline, state-of-the-art running tracks, miles of dirt and paved roads at trails on the former Ft. Ord military base, and others, all with easy access to parking, restrooms and water.

Local government was highlighted as being runner-friendly and encouraging organized runs and walks throughout the various Monterey Peninsula cities. The annual Big Sur International Marathon which takes place along California's Highway One drawing thousands of participants from throughout the world, involves coordination by several state and local agencies, and the Big Sur Half Marathon on Monterey Bay travels through two popular Peninsula cities, Monterey and Pacific Grove. The local communities also are home to several smaller 10K runs, an annual triathlon, and numerous charity walks along the coastal trail.

"We have a great working relationship with all of our local municipalities," said Wally Kastner, race director for both Big Sur events. The police and fire departments, city services and city

management are all very supportive. They understand that our races bring great economic benefits to the area."

Monterey mayor Chuck Della Sala highlighted the city's popular Sports Center complex and the recreation trail, noting, "The City of Monterey has built the infrastructure to support many running and athletic activities in our community" and added, "From restaurants to retail shops to businesses that offer places to gather, the Monterey Peninsula is truly a runner's paradise."

Knaack of RRCA, drew attention to "the excellent video" prepared for the application. The six-minute piece features scenes of the running trails in the area and interviews with several local business and government leaders providing on-air interviews. Olympic marathoner and Monterey Peninsula resident Blake Russell spoke of the variety of running trails and the temperate year-round weather in the area. The video can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LgEjt2yaOc>

Other key elements of the Runner Friendly Community designation were local media support for the sport of running, partnerships with area hospitals to focus on health and wellness, a local scholarship fund to outstanding high school runners, and the nationally-recognized JUST RUN youth fitness program, developed by the Big Sur International Marathon and currently in place in schools throughout Monterey County and in 14 additional states throughout the U.S.

RRCA presented the first annual award to Monterey Peninsula at its national meeting held in Fredericksburg, Virginia in late May. Runner up cities in the competition included Dallas and Wichita Falls, TX and Fredericksburg, VA.

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