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Club set to reach £50k Hospice donations

Entry opens on Sunday July 3 for the annual 10k Christmas Cracker race at Weston-super-Mare. Runners of all abilities are encouraged to sign-up for the event which always sells out fast.

This year's race takes place on Sunday December 11 at 11am, and all runners are encouraged to wear fancy dress, or at the very least a piece of tinsel. The route starts at the Grand Pier and covers a flat course along the beach, through Uphill and back along the prom before ending on the beach again at the pier.

The race is organised by Weston Athletic Club, and every year the club donates a significant element of the race entry fees to local charity Weston Hospicecare. Since the hospice became the race's official charity 14 years ago, these donations have added up to £46,750, with the 2016 race set to see the £50,000 mark broken. The club's contribution is in addition to the great efforts made by individual runners with their own fundraising for the event.

Race director Malcolm Gammon, who organises the race on behalf of Weston Athletic Club said: "The Christmas Cracker is our biggest race of the year, and I am delighted that as well as it being huge fun for all involved, it makes such a positive contribution to such an important local charity.

"The event is aimed at participants of all abilities and attracts everyone from the area's top athletes to those who are new to running.

"The route for this year's event remains the same as last year, and every finisher will receive a technical t-shirt as well as their well-earned mince pie."

Last year's event saw the successful introduction of a 2k run called the 'Mini Cracker' strictly for younger runners. This will again take place on the beach at 10am ahead of the main race. Rob Skeen from Weston Athletic Club is in charge of the junior race and said: "We were really pleased with how many younger runners came along last year, and I'm hoping we see even more taking part this year, with junior running really taking off in the town.

"It's great that we can offer them a race all of their own, and reward them with a medal at the end."

The Mini Cracker is open to runners aged 7 to 15 and entry costs £1. Race entry details are on Weston Athletic Club's website at www.westonac.co.uk/christmascracker.

As well as the club's donation to Weston Hospicecare, participants will be encouraged to raise sponsorship money too. Kelsey Dehaney, Event Fundraiser for the charity said: "Last year's event raised an incredible £11,232 for Weston Hospicecare. This was made up of £5,000 from Weston Athletic Club, £3,232 from the Rudolfs in Training group, and the remaining £3,000 came from the fantastic runners who chose to raise money for the hospice.

"The money donated and raised last year has helped us to do so much for our local people and their families, both within the hospice and in our community. We are fortunate to be able to provide the physical, emotional and spiritual care they need to support them through a life-limiting illness, but we know we couldn't do it without the support of wonderful organisations like Weston Athletic Club."

Last year's event also saw the club donate £2,200 to five other charities - Barton Camp, Help For Heroes, Royal British Legion, the Luhimba Project and Comfort and Warmth.

Weston Athletic Club will also be organising a 10k training programme this autumn in the run-up to the event to help runners prepare for the race. Jim Wotton from the club organises the programme: "This will be the third year we have run a beginners' programme for the race, and we've helped 120 runners so far. Many of them had never run before, and some were lapsed runners, but the programme helped them to develop their confidence, fitness and technique with the goal of running the Christmas Cracker at the end of the 10 week course. Most of them achieved this, and many are still enjoying running on a regular basis.

"I really would encourage anyone who would like to get into running, by working towards an achievable goal, to get in touch. It's a great way to get started at the same time as a large number of other people who are all in exactly the same position. As well as preparing people physically, we'll also give people advice on pre-race nutrition, hydration and what kit to wear when running."

The Christmas Cracker training programme will begin on Monday September 26 with sessions every Monday evening at 7pm, and optional sessions every Saturday at 8am. A charge of £30 will be made at the beginning of the course and all the profits will go to Weston Hospicecare. All the coaches and leaders from the club give their time freely.

Entry for the race is available at www.westonac.co.uk/christmascracker and anyone wanting to sign-up or find out more about the pre-race training programme should contact Jim Wotton by email at jim.wotton@westonac.co.uk or by phone on 01934 814 208.

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Note to editors:

About Weston Hospicecare

Weston Hospicecare provides palliative care for people living with life-limiting illnesses in Weston-super-Mare and the surrounding areas. Our primary aim is to provide a quality of life that is pain free where patients can be treated and cared for by loved ones in a place of their choice be that here at the Hospice, their own home or a care home.

All of the services we provide are totally free of charge with only 19% of the £3million a year running cost funded by the NHS. The rest is raised through our volunteers, shops and fundraising events like the Christmas Cracker throughout the year to support patients and families.