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### **Cracker celebrates 30th anniversary**

Entry opens on Saturday, July 1 for the annual 10k Christmas Cracker race at Weston-super-Mare. This year the race celebrates its 30th anniversary, and organisers Weston Athletic Club have a couple of bonuses in store for everyone who takes part.

This year's race will feel especially festive as it takes place the weekend before Christmas on Sunday December 17, at 11 a.m. Everyone who finishes the race will receive a special anniversary race t-shirt, a mince pie and be able to download official race photographs free of charge for the first time.

As always, runners are encouraged to wear fancy dress and there will be a competition to find the best dressed teams and individuals before the race. 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 portion of the race's entry fees to Weston Hospicecare, a local charity. Since the hospice became the race's official charity 15 years ago, these donations have added up to over £50,000. The club's contribution is in addition to the great efforts made by individual runners who have been doing 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 this year is promising to be our best yet as we celebrate our 30th year.

"Entries sell-out every year, and I think this year's will go quicker than normal as runners will want to get their hands on our special edition 30th anniversary finishers' t-shirt.

"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."

Race day will also include a 2k 'Mini Cracker', which is strictly for younger runners. This will again take place on the beach at 10 a.m. ahead of the main race. Rob Skeen from Weston Athletic Club is in charge of the junior race, and he said: "2017 will be the third year we have organised the junior event, and I'm hoping we see

even more taking part this year. It's the perfect event for those junior runners who are already enjoying the junior prom run and the weekly parkrun, but all junior runners are welcome to take part."

The Mini Cracker is open to runners aged 7 to 15, and entry costs £1. All junior race finishers receive a medal. Race entry details are on Weston Athletic Club's website at [www.westonac.co.uk/christmascracker](http://www.westonac.co.uk/christmascracker).

Although the club makes a donation to Weston Hospicecare, participants are encouraged to raise sponsorship money, too. Alison Sopp, Director of Fundraising and Communications at the hospice said: "The Christmas Cracker is such a fun, festive event, and we're so pleased to have the ongoing support of everyone at Weston Athletic Club.

"Over the years, the club has raised a significant sum to help us care for our patients and their loved ones, and we are incredibly grateful for the funds and support that participants, sponsors and organisers give. We hope the event will continue to grow and serve as a festive tradition for many!"

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, and he said, "This will be the fourth year we have run a beginners' programme for the race, and we've helped 160 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, October 2 with sessions every Monday evening at 7 p.m. and optional sessions every Saturday at 8 a.m.. A charge of £30, which will be donated to Weston Hospicecare, will be made at the beginning of the course. All of the coaches and leaders from the club give their time freely.

Entry for the race is available at [www.westonac.co.uk/christmascracker](http://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](mailto:jim.wotton@westonac.co.uk) or by phone on 01934 814 208.

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