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## Hot Chocolate run raises \$90,000

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Monday, December 7, 2009

**NORTHAMPTON** - About 4,100 people participated in the sixth annual Mayor Higgins' Hot Chocolate Run Saturday and raised a record-breaking \$90,000 to support survivors of domestic violence and their children at Safe Passage.

The event drew 1,000 more people than last year, many of whom formed teams with colleagues, family members and friends. One team that ran dressed as marshmallows.

"It was fantastic," said Jennifer Dieringer, an event organizer. "Over the years it's become a sort of must-do tradition for local folks."

About half of the crowd chose the two-mile walk, while the other half took on a challenging 5K road race. Erik Nedeau, of Belchertown, won first place in the race with a time of 15 minutes and 35 seconds. Jennifer Campbell, of Newmarket, N.H., was the fastest woman with a 17-minute, 11-second race. The top 25 runners received prizes. The top three places won New Balance sneakers among other gifts awarded by area merchants.

The second largest road race in western Massachusetts, the Hot Chocolate Run moved this year to Old South Street at the foot of Crafts Avenue to accommodate a large crowd. About 600 more people came out than organizers anticipated, and the event raised about \$15,000 more than the \$75,000 organizers projected.

"It's a great time of year to do a race because there aren't a whole lot of other races going on," Dieringer said.

The number of teams quadrupled this year, Dieringer said, and included groups from the Sugarloaf Mountain Athletic Club, Southampton Road School, Doherty, Wallace, Pillsbury & Murphy law firm, Webber & Grinnell Insurance and Health New England, which named itself the "Polar Pacers." More than 200 teams participated.

The \$90,000 netted goes to Safe Passage, a Northampton organization that provides crisis intervention, support, and advocacy services to women and their children who have experienced domestic violence. Safe Passage also houses families in its shelter program. The Hot Chocolate Run is an important source of funds for its services, according to La Wanza Lett-Brewington, the agency's executive director.

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KEVIN GUTTING

Runners pass Northampton City Hall near the beginning of the run.

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