Honolulu Marathon
It's Amazing

Every year, I am amazed by the Honolulu Marathon in many ways, and tomorrow's 33rd running of the race will be no exception.

First of all, over 26,000 runners were registered at press time, well ahead of the 24,043 who had registered by this time last year. Honolulu Marathon Association president Dr. Jim Barahal estimates the final registrant count will be over 28,000, making this the largest Honolulu race since 2002. However, that number is still well below the record year of 1995 when 34,434 runners signed up.

The Honolulu Marathon is the third-largest marathon in the United States – trailing only New York (85,000 registrants) and Chicago (40,000) – and the sixth-largest in the world. That is a surprising statistic, considering Honolulu's relatively small population compared to the Big Apple and the Windy City.

One of the reasons for Honolulu's success is Japanese support and interest. Japan Airlines is the major sponsor. Other Japanese firms, including DC Card, Konami, Amino-Value, and NTT DoCoMo, are supporting or contributing sponsors. As a result of their financial and promotional assistance, there will be over 23,000 entrants from Japan in the race and its accompanying, noncompetitive Race Day Walk this year, up significantly from 2004. This is noteworthy considering that the value of the yen has slipped. It is currently at 120 to the dollar, compared to 104 last year, so it is now 15 percent more expensive for Japanese to visit Hawaii. This only emphasizes the value of the promotional partnership with Japanese sponsors.

The strong showing of Japanese runners also reflects the fact that Eri Hayakawa of Tokyo has been a top finisher in the women's division for the past two years. She broke the 2003 tape at a very respectable 2:31:56 to take first place. In 2004, she improved her time to 2:28:11, but still came in behind Russian Lyubov Morgunova, who ran a record 2:27:33 race.

Hayakawa will run again this year, along with a number of elite lady runners, many of whom come from Russia, including the record-holding Morgunova, who has won the women’s division three times. Her first name, Lyubov, means "Love" in Russian, by the way, and it seems safe to assume she loves the chance to run in Honolulu.

In the men's division, many of the elite runners come from Kenya. Last year's winner, Jimmy Muindi, will be looking for his fifth win in Honolulu. Three-time Honolulu winner, Mbarak Hussein, also from Kenya but now a U.S. citizen, will be running alongside Muindi, vying for the same prize.

The Honolulu Marathon has a huge economic impact on the entire state of Hawaii and in particular, on Waikiki. Hawaii Pacific University professor Jerry Agrusa and his students have studied the Honolulu Marathon for several years. They found that race participants and their traveling companions spend much of the month in Waikiki's shops and restaurants. They estimated that the 2004 Honolulu Marathon brought $90 million in visitor spending to Hawaii, not including the money spent by local participants. Prof. Agrusa is predicting that this year's race will bring $100 million into the state!

There is also a lot of spending by the race committee, which purchases things like 1.9 million paper cups, 70,000 sponges, 30,000 crisp apples, and 155,000 Mother's Oatmeal cookies. The committee rents tents covering 14.5 acres and hires local contractors for any of the event's needs.
number of services. See www.honolulumarathon.org/stats.html for a more complete rundown of what it takes to conduct this world-class event.

Outrigger and OHANA Hotels & Resorts are the official hotels of the Honolulu Marathon. In return, we provide complimentary and/or deeply discounted accommodations for many of the elite runners brought in by the race organizers. Our Waikiki properties have run high occupancies all week, and we are completely sold out for Saturday night. This is quite a contrast to the typical pre-holiday slump experienced at our neighbor island properties.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the Honolulu Marathon Association, particularly to its president, Dr. Jim Barahal. When he took over leadership of the association in 1987, there were only 10,413 entrants in the Honolulu Marathon. With a lot of work and dedication, the Marathon has grown, so that it is now the largest annual event in Hawaii, with over 80 percent of the entrants coming from out of state. Dr. Barahal puts in countless hours to make the Honolulu Marathon a premier sporting event. He has been honored with the Neal Shaw Blaisdell Award for “exemplary efforts to bring great recognition to sports in Hawaii,” but he deserves more accolades than that for his 18 astounding years of leadership at the helm of the ship that makes the Honolulu Marathon the world-class event it is.

The Honolulu Marathon must not be taken for granted. Data show that there has been an irregular but definite downward trend in the number of entrants from all areas over the past decade. Even though the number of entrants for 2005 is up over last year, it is still some 18 percent under the peak reached in 1995.

The Honolulu Marathon merits the support of everyone who benefits from the race, including hotels, shops, restaurants, transportation providers, and a wide range of other businesses, many of them far from Waikiki. The event certainly deserves the support it gets from the Hawaii Tourism Authority, which invests in it on behalf of the people of Hawaii, who all benefit from it, directly or indirectly.

At the finish line, only a handful of competitors are listed as winners, but in reality, everybody in Hawaii wins when the Honolulu Marathon races into town.