

Cupid's Chase 5K benefits people with disabilities

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Valeria Rincon trains with Elija Villalpando on Saturday in preparation for the Cupid's Chase, which will take place on Feb. 14. (Robin Zielinski Sun-News)

LAS CRUCES >> Las Cruces resident Valeria Rincon, 39, has a goal this Valentine's Day. She will run the Cupid's Chase 5K in under 26 minutes.

"I'm really competitive," Rincon said. "I don't like to admit it, but I am. I realized that when I became a runner."

Rincon, part of team 9Round, said this will be her third time participating in the Community Options, Inc. annual Cupid's Chase, since she started running about three years ago. Last year, she finished the race in about 28 minutes, she said.

Rincon, who is now chairperson on the Community Options board, said one of the things that draws her to the Cupid's Chase run is that it benefits people with disabilities within the community.

"I think being on the board is what makes it exciting, and seeing "behind the scenes," she said. "You pay a lot of money for something you can do for free, but it's worth it because it's going to a good cause."

Community Options is a national nonprofit organization that provides housing, employment and support services for people who are disabled. Cupid's Chase is the organization's biggest annual fundraiser, held at 27 locations in nine states throughout the country on the same day. This will be the sixth annual Cupid's Chase in Las Cruces, with all proceeds going directly to the Las Cruces and El Paso Community Options offices to serve people with disabilities in the community, said Hector Johnson, executive director at Community Options in Las Cruces.

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"People with disabilities are just like you and I," Johnson said. "They have dreams, they have goals, and we're trying to make that happen for the people here."

Last year, the three-mile race attracted more than 380 people and raised about \$14,000, used to purchase televisions for sensory rooms, a computer lab, therapeutic equipment, field trips and wheelchair scales. While Johnson said the organization doesn't have a specific fundraising goal, he expects about 450 runners to attend this year's race.

Cupid's Chase will begin at 10 a.m. at the Mesilla Plaza on Saturday, Feb. 14. Participants who sign up for the race, will get to a white shirt reading "unavailable," if they are in a relationship, or a red shirt reading "available" if they are single.

"The big thing about this race is we want to spread love," Community Options Event Director Jose Solis, said.

New to this year's event will be the Singles Mingles tent, which will give available participants a chance to spark a love connection during the race.

"We're going to set up (tables and chairs) and flowers and chocolates for people to go and mingle" Solis said.

Rincon said she will be wearing an 'available' shirt this race, who will be racing with her 16-year-old son Elijah Villalpando.

"He's pretty much run every race with me," she said.

Rincon said she has a personal connection to the race's cause because her uncle is intellectually disabled.

"As runners, we forget why we signed up. We forget the charity," she said. "With Cupid's chase, I know it's going to stay here and make a difference. This money is going to be for the community to help someone who needs a chance — who needs an opportunity."

Solis said people of all fitness levels can participate in the race.

The top three overall finishers of the race will receive a trophy and a medal will be given to the top three finishers in each gender and age category.

A gift basket will also be given to the person wearing the best cupid outfit in the race, Solis said.

Those who show up early on race day can warm-up with a Mix-Fit and Zumba class before the race begins.

To register online or print a paper registration form visit cupidschase5k.com. For information, call 575-532-9275 or visit Cupid's Chase 5K Run on Facebook. .