

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Team Penobscot running in Boston Marathon for their river

By Julia Bayly, Special to the BDN

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INDIAN ISLAND, Maine — Thousands of runners will take to the streets in the 117th annual Boston Marathon on April 15, including three runners from Maine with a bit more than athletic competition on their minds

Barry Dana of Solon, Bob Bryant of Indian Island and Dale Lolar, also of Indian Island, are all members of Team Penobscot running the 26 miles to raise funds for, and awareness of, the Penobscot River Restoration Project.

“Growing up along the [Penobscot] River to me means the river is me and I am the river,” Dana, former chief of the Penobscot Indian Nation, said. “It’s part of thousands of years of history with my people where running is an interregal part of our way of life.”

All three members of Team Penobscot feel those deep ties to running and to the river and hope their participation in the upcoming marathon will bring attention to ongoing efforts to help return it to a more natural state.

The Penobscot River Restoration Project, partnering with The Nature Conservancy and other groups, including the Penobscot Indian Nation, is working to remove two dams on the river and build a fish bypass around a third dam.

Hundreds of miles of habitat along the Penobscot and its tributaries would be reopened for sea-run fish and other migratory species.

Organizers behind Team Penobscot hope to raise \$20,000 toward those efforts.

“The Nature Conservancy is in partnership with other organizations to complete the restoration project along the Penobscot River,” said Kate Dempsey, director of external affairs with The Nature Conservancy. “The Penobscot Indian Nation has been a leader in this project.”

Slated for removal as early as this summer is the Great Works Dam and plans call for the removal of the dam at Veazie and the fish bypass at Howland.

Completion of the project means species like Atlantic Salmon and alewives will have the

first unimpeded access to their historical spawning grounds in more than 150 years.

When the opportunity arose to secure three starting positions in the upcoming Boston Marathon, Dempsey said her organization jumped at it.

The three members of Team Penobscot already had a strong reputation as runners, she said.

"I've been running competitively since I was 11," Dana said. "In the last couple of years I have taken running a step further and made it a year-round training commitment."

Each year Dana; Lolar, a counselor on Indian Island; Bryant, Indian Island police chief; and hundreds of other members of the Penobscot Indian Nation participate in the Katahdin 100, a 100-mile run retracing traditional travel routes from Indian Island to Mt. Katahdin.

"It's obvious they are fantastic runners," Dempsey said.

"I've lived on the river all my life so it's in my blood," Lolar said. "I've seen it polluted and start to get cleaned up and I feel afraid that it may be in jeopardy of losing ground in the effort to clean it up."

Lolar hopes his running the Boston Marathon — his third — will help bring more attention to that cleanup work.

"It's a little something I can contribute through my efforts utilizing the gifts God gave me to run at this level and enjoy what running brings to me," he said.

Lolar was already signed up and had qualified for the Boston Marathon and said he is happy to run as part of Team Penobscot and bring his running partner Bryant along for the trip.

"I've been running three years now and I am involved with the Penobscot Community," Bryant said. "I live here, I work here and my wife and children are tribal members."

Bryant had been training for a marathon at Sugarloaf on May 20, but it did not take much convincing for him to opt for Boston instead, even though it meant cramming 16 weeks worth of training into nine weeks.

"It's going good," Bryant said. "I think I am really ready and I am excited to have this opportunity to represent the Penobscot Nation for such a great cause."

When Dana got the call about the marathon, he and his wife Lori were already logging marathon-worthy miles on their own training runs.

"I had about six weeks to get ready, but with my base it was doable," Dana said. "I learned a long time ago to never get out of shape."

The challenge, Dana said, will come if he tries to complete the marathon at a fast pace.

"I have been told I will probably start out too fast," he said. "You have tens of thousands

of people running and if I don't keep a certain pace they are going to run over me."

The bigger appeal of the Boston Marathon, Dana said, is representing his people and raising the funds for the Penobscot River Restoration Project as a tribal member.

"We have had Penobscots run the marathon in the past," Dana said.

In 1911 and again in 1912, Andrew Sockalexis completed the marathon, finishing second both times, according to Penobscot Nation historical information.

"It will be nice to rekindle that Penobscot connection," Dana said.

"This is about restoring a river to its natural intent," Bryant said. "This is something dear to me, to my wife and children — the river is life-sustaining for them [and] it's part of them.

"Knowing we are following [Andrew Sockalexis'] footsteps and the reasons we are running will be on my mind as I run," Bryant said. "There is always a point when your body starts to feel the miles and your mind starts to feel the miles and thinking about the river and Andrew will help get me through that."

All three runners were hesitant to predict their finishing times, not wanting to jinx their runs, but all do hope to complete the course in under four hours.

"Sagama is our word for chief and its original meaning was for a person hardened by running," Dana said. "Running is that extension of thousands of years of tradition."

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