

SEND TO PRINTER | CLOSE WINDOW

Off on the Right Foot

Marin's thriving trail running clubs leave no runner behind

BY SOMER FLAHERTY



Left to right: Nancy Williams, Heidi Klausner and Laurel Kato. The all women Team Luna Chix enjoys a practice run on the Sun Trail on Mount Tamalpais.

PHOTO BY TIM PORTER

member all-female Team Luna Chix is to support women's efforts to learn a new sport, train and gain confidence. The Marin trail-running team holds events to raise funds for breast cancer research and monthly clinics and runs where participants get tips on stretching, nutrition and trail safety. San Rafael resident and captain Laurel Kato, who started trail running about 10 years ago, says she joined the team because she was always looking for someone to run with. At the group's next run on July 12 starting at the Tennessee Valley parking area in Mill Valley, runners of all abilities are welcome; the team "leaves no woman behind."

With hundreds of miles of trails crisscrossing Marin, it's no wonder the county has become a refuge for weekend warriors escaping urban pavement. It's the type of landscape people travel the globe to find, and it's right in our backyard. Of course, couch potatoes who like to look at the mountain, not climb it, may have trouble imagining what drives runners to hit the hills before the coffee shops are even open. Perhaps that's why local trail running groups have caught on. Not only is the camaraderie a boost, but the groups serve as a runner's own personal cheering section for what's usually a solo endeavor.

The goal of the 225-



Over 30 years ago the coed group Tamalpa Runners was formed; ever since, it's been dedicated to the proposition that "not all runners are created equal, but everyone in the club can have a great time running." The 700-plus members sponsor competitive racing teams and group fun runs; their collective successes range from world age-group record holder to Olympic Trial competitors to Dipsea champions — in fact, they've won that team title 25 years in a row. Greenbrae resident Jen Erickson got involved with Tamalpa five years ago when she started helping out at races as a way to meet people.

“From there, I was smitten with this large yet very personal club.” Each Saturday members and others interested in joining meet for a morning run; it starts at Mountain Home Inn at 9 a.m. and covers seven to 10 miles of Mount Tam terrain, from the fire lookout atop East Peak to the base in Muir Woods National Park.

High obesity rates in children prompted triathlete and personal trainer Kim Juarez to start Team Lola in 2006. Instead of lecturing kids about exercise and nutrition, she wanted to get them moving with a fitness goal in mind. The eight- to 12-week program, which originally started out just for girls, include weekly nutrition lessons coupled with training runs, and at the end of each program, participants race in a local 5K to half-marathon race. Juarez, being a longtime trail runner, added a trail running program to her offerings last year: Team Lola’s seven-week Trail Mix program takes girls ages 10 to 14 out on a new trail in southern Marin each week to practice and learn new running techniques. “The girls get out there and mix it up on the trails,” Juarez says. “The kids also get to see how different each trail can be: fire roads, single track, rocks, dirt, big hills.” Trail Mix has proved so popular she now plans to offer versions for boys and women as well. “Besides being beautiful, running on the trails is so much gentler on our bodies, which is important to teach people of all ages,” she asserts. “Get off the pavement and enjoy the mountain!”



Image 1: Members of the Bay Area Trail Running Luna Chix

Image 2: Jamie Berns of Tamalpa on the Sunnyside Trail (photo by Roy Rivers)

Image 3: Members of Team Lola, led by coach Kim Juarez, hit the trails with their parents.

Team Luna Chix

415.306.2654 <http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/trailunachix/>

Tamalpa Runners

415.721.3791, tamalparunners.org

Team Lola

415.515.7497, teamlola.com

Marin Triathlon
Leaving a light footprint

Athletic events are not generally known for their light ecological footprint. But the folks behind this October’s inaugural Marin County Triathlon are stepping up to make a change. “As we started planning, it became clear that everything we do to produce the event can be done in a sustainable way,” says the Olympic distance event’s founder and executive director, Mark Liebert. “Like generating all the power from solar energy, not using the typical plastic water bottles but going with compostable paper and stainless steel instead; finding race goodie bags made from yesterday’s yogurt containers; having all the awards, trophies and finishing medals made from recycled materials; using live plants and rope instead of the traditional barricades; offering only organic food and beverages; shuttle buses using biodeisel and on and on.” Enrollment is low impact, too: there is space for only 1,000 participants. All event proceeds will go to three charities: Lupus Foundation of Northern California, Girls on the Run, and Jenny’s Light (a foundation to support women with postpartum depression). The course—a 1.5K swim, 40K bike and 10K run along San Pablo Bay—will start at McNears Beach County Park in San Rafael. Visit marintriathlon.com.