

Greeks pass the marathon flame to Hopkinton



Daily News photo by Ed Hopfmann

Spyros Zagaris, mayor of Marathon, Greece, hands the Marathon lantern to state Sen. Karen Spilka, D-Ashland, during a ceremony at the Hopkinton Senior Center yesterday. At right is Muriel Kramer, chairwoman of the Hopkinton selectmen, and Dimitri Kyriakides, whose father won the Boston Marathon in 1946.

By Michael Morton/Daily News staff

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Posted Apr 18, 2008 @ 12:34 AM

HOPKINTON —

Thanking the company for its continued support of the Boston Marathon and related events, selectmen declared yesterday "John Hancock Day" during a breakfast to honor visitors from Greece and their gift of a flame.

Representatives from John Hancock Insurance and Financial Services also received a citation during the senior center gathering from state Sen. Karen Spilka, D-Ashland, who said the company has helped make the Marathon "what it is today."

In addition to its role as one of the chief race sponsors, John Hancock supports the Adopt-a-Marathoner program, a long-standing event that brings Kenyan runners to Hopkinton's Elmwood Elementary School.

While the visit was canceled this year because of a chicken pox infection at two town schools, John Hancock has pledged to continue with the program next year and plans to hold a Marathon-themed event for the students before summer break.

"John Hancock is truly the embodiment of a committed partner," school Superintendent John Phelan Jr. said, before asking Adopt-a-Marathoner manager

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Fred Treseler to tell the Kenyans they were missed and to give them a traditional Swahili greeting of "jambo." Phelan said the program had "enriched the lives" of more than 4,000 students.

In turn, Jim Gallagher, a Hancock senior vice president, commended Hopkinton for its work hosting the Marathon's start over the years.

"We're thrilled to have the partnership we have with the community," he said.

The breakfast was also attended by a Greek contingent that included Dimitri Kyriakides, whose father won the 1946 Marathon; Spyros Zagaris, the mayor of sister city Marathon, Greece; seven athletes running in the Marathon; and their coach.

Seeking to promote his city as the birthplace of marathons - legend states that a messenger ran the distance to tell Athens leaders of victory after the 490 B.C. Battle of Marathon - Zagaris brought a flame lit at the warriors' tomb as a gift for Hopkinton. It was carried in a special foot-long, four-pound lantern during the flight, drawing confused looks from other passengers.

Outside the senior center, Kyriakides said he hoped the flame, which will remain in Hopkinton after the race, would be an inspiration for runners, residents and visitors.

"The flame, we believe, carries a lot of hope," he said.

With Kyriakides serving as translator, Zagaris added, "This is to give them hope for all the difficulties they have to face."

In addition to the flame and the Greeks, the breakfast also featured the unveiling of a new Ford Econoline van for the senior center. The van was provided at a discount by Herb Chambers Ford of Westborough, with Hopkinton resident Peter Dittman raising money for the purchase by running in his first Marathon.

"I'm kind of nervous about it," Dittman said. "But I figure the hard part is over - the fundraising."

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