

Bridge race comes off as smoothly

By MICHAEL LAFFERTY
Staff Writer

SEVEN MILE BRIDGE — When the gun launching more than 1,000 runners on a race across this bridge went off April 23 at 7:30 a.m., the skies were dark and the morning was quiet except for the wind.

But 37 minutes and 33 seconds later, the sun was starting to make an appearance and the applause and cheers were thunderous as William Springer, 43, raised his arms in a traditional winning attitude and broke the tape to win the second annual Seven Mile Bridge Run.

Mr. Springer, who came from Fort Lauderdale to run the race, averaged 5:33 per mile during the run and outdistanced second-place finisher Jeff Ehiert by nine seconds.

Mr. Ehiert, 24, finished with a time of 37:42 with 30-year-old Jim Loran coming in third place at 38:04.

Breaking the tape as the first woman across the bridge was Sharon Beal, a 36-year-old Fort Lauderdale resident who covered the seven-mile distance in 42:51. More significantly was Miss Beal's continuation of her winning ways.

She placed first in the race last year, though her time this year was 49 seconds lower.

Placing second overall in the women's division was Lezzette Payne, 25, of Key West who came across with a time of 43:06. Another Keys resident, Debbie Robertson, 29, of Tavernier placed third with a time of 44:15.

In addition to the top finishers and the age division winners were the runners who were special, and it was the runners that the race was for.

One man Mark Miller of Marathon, carried 100 pounds of sand across the bridge on his back. At the end, he was walking but still moving forward.

Burt Henry also ran the entire seven miles in a little more than an hour. Mr. Henry, who lives in Marathon, is blind. Said Mr. Henry, "I just wanted to finish."

One man reportedly lost a shoe along the way. Rather than stop, he finished wearing no shoes at all.

From the strong, swift young runners to the older people who ran for reasons other than winning to people who were picked up before they could finish the race so the bridge could reopen on time, everyone had their day.

The dire warnings of huge traffic tie-ups never came about.

According to Lt. Rick Roth of the Monroe County Sheriff's Department, the biggest

backup of cars was between 9 a.m. and 9s.:07 when cars got back on U.S. One. The motorist he said, were expecting the bridge to reopen exactly at 9 a.m.

By 9:30 a.m., said Lt. Roth, traffic was back to normal.

Mike Puto, chief for the Marathon Volunteer Fire and Rescue, said there were a total of three minor medical cases during and after the race.

Diane Chaplin, race director for the Seven Mile Bridge Run, said she was feeling very good about the run and just a little relieved that it was over.

"It's a very rewarding feeling," she said. "A week ago I wouldn't have told you that." Miss Chaplin said that while she would not direct next year's race, if one were to be organized, she didn't expect a negative response because of the smooth running of this year's race and because of the positive economic response from local businesses.

Some local motels reportedly filled up before the race with the manager of the Holiday Inn at Marathon saying the normal 60 percent capacity for this time of year was at 95 percent or 97 percent because of the run.



Keynoter photo by KEVIN WADLOW

RUNNERS CHARGE forward for the start of the second annual Seven Mile Bridge Run. The gun went off precisely at 7:30 a.m. with cool temperatures and a slight tailwind benefiting the runners.



Photo by ANDY NEWMAN

THE IMMENSITY of the Seven Mile Bridge is pictured here as runners crowd the span. It was the second year the event has been held and was considered a success by race organizers. Any medical or traffic problems were considered minor by agencies involved with the run.