

THE INTERNATIONAL MARATHON CENTER

“The marathon is an art; the marathoner is an artist.”

Kiyoshi Nakamura

BY JENNIFER GRAHAM

WHILE A MARATHON ends at its finish line, 26.2 miles after the start, the cheers, pain and glory of distance running’s most prestigious race will go on forever at the International Marathon Center, which will incorporate a Marathon Museum and Hall of Fame.

With the marathon enjoying unprecedented popularity, both in participation and spectatorship, the time has come to create a central headquarters for the sport in the greater Boston area.

*“If you are losing faith in human nature,
go out and watch a marathon.”*

Kathrine Switzer

The International Marathon Center will be a place to honor the sport’s storied past, celebrate its present, and inspire and educate the marathoners of the future. Like the marathon itself, the creation of such a complex is no small task. But once completed, it will stand as a proud monument to the indomitable human spirit, the spirit that enables a human being to run for 26 miles and 385 yards.

The natural home for the International Marathon Center is the greater Boston area, which, worldwide, has come to be synonymous with long-distance running. Tens of thousands of runners and their families come to



Boston each April, but when the Center opens, they will have reason to come here all year.

Fully realized, the International Marathon Center will be a destination not only for runners, but for anyone

interested in long-distance running, and health and fitness in general. It will be an institution of international repute, but much more: a place where running enthusiasts will come to see pieces of marathoning's storied history; where children can get hands-on instruction about nutrition, exercise and human physiology; and where people who've never done anything more strenuous than walk to the mailbox can become inspired to take the first steps toward a life brimming with the rewards of exertion.

Like the Marathon Museum in Greece and the AIMS Museum in Germany, the International Marathon Center will feature artifacts, art and exhibits related to the sport. But the Center itself is just the beginning.

At completion, it will include a conference center that offers programs about a multitude of athletic endeavors, and an educational venue for the promotion of health, nutrition, fitness and the infinite reach of the human spirit. Fully developed to its potential, it can become a mecca of long-distance running, a place to which runners from all over the country plan a pilgrimage.

Envision the seven women who first ran the Boston Marathon at a panel open to the public and advertised all over the country. Or Olympian Ryan Hall leading a clinic here for high-school distance runners. Or Adidas, Nike, New Balance and Saucony designers holding forth on how they put together the hottest new shoes. A first-rate facility will draw first-rate speakers, and this amazing complex, in a destination region like eastern Massachusetts, will bustle with activity from the first day that it opens. It will be the race expo that never ends.

“The music of a marathon is a powerful strain, one of those tunes of glory.”

George Sheehan

Virtually every large city in the world has a marathon, making the sport a global ambassador of good will between diverse peoples. The International Marathon Center will solidify existing relationships between

marathons, and build on them. It will increase international awareness of the connection between democracy, the Battle of Marathon, and the marathon race itself, while strengthening ties between Greece, the United States and other governments – local, regional and national.

Further, it affords the development of a much-needed network to link the directors and organizations that put on more than 3,000 marathons around the world each year. It will be a central clearinghouse of information related to race management and logistics, a well-maintained smorgasbord of the best practices of this magnificent sport.

“Bid me run, and I will strive with things impossible.”

Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

While several areas in greater Boston may be conducive to such a complex, the town of Hopkinton is uniquely suited as to be the best possible location for the International Marathon Center. Already known nationally as the start of the world's greatest road race, Hopkinton enjoys a reputation as a friend to long-distance running and to athletes from all over the world. Additionally, the recent development of 700 acres adjacent to the marathon course presents intriguing opportunities for a site. The Legacy Farms development – combined with the marathon starting line, the Hopkinton offices of the Boston Athletic Association, and the town's excellent access to highways and rail – suggest Hopkinton as the ideal location for a large complex with international import.

Anyone can collect a few singlets and newspaper clippings, put them in a room and call it a museum, just like most anyone can run around a block. But the marathon itself does not celebrate small efforts, but great ones. Likewise, the International Marathon Center must be a place of comparable ambition. Like the storied race it honors, it will be an endeavor worth our time and investment.