

Getting social in women's racing

Freihofer's Run gaining with Facebook, Twitter

By **PETE IORIZZO**
Staff writer

The **Freihofer's Run for Women** wants to be your Facebook friend.

Or it can follow you on Twitter. Just send it a tweet.

The annual 3.1-mile race through downtown Albany, which attracts thousands of local women as well as elite athletes from around the world, is now using social-networking Web sites to find new runners and foster a community among its longtime participants.

"I think it's kind of cool," said event director George Regan, who has his own Facebook page as well.

A Freihofer's Run for Women group on Facebook includes more than 275 members. And its page on Twitter.com, a site on which bloggers offer brief but frequent updates, includes more than 140 followers. The Freihofer's tweets and posts on walls.

Regan said social-networking is one reason registrations are on pace to be higher than in recent

years. As of this past week, almost 2,800 women had registered for the race, which is more than 350 runners ahead of the pace from 2008, when a total of 3,387 women turned out.

"It's a great communications tool," Regan said. "Any way that you can communicate to your audience is a good thing. And for young people, this is what they're doing. My daughters couldn't believe I have a Facebook page."

The Freihofer's is just one example of many companies and events now marketing through social-networking Web sites. Since signing up is free, the publicity comes far cheaper than through traditional means, like billboards, newspaper ads or in-store flyers.

Sanjay Putrevu, chairman of the marketing department for the University at Albany, said research shows that sites like Facebook and Twitter are particularly popular among women and young adults, which are a large part of the Freihofer's target audience.

"This forum has become very convenient when you want to

Please see **FREIHOFFER'S C7** ▶ share information," Putrevu said. "For some types of information, e-mail is not convenient. You need to know the person's coordinates. Here, you have a wall for the public to see."

Most Freihofer's runners already appear to be Web-savvy. Regan said almost 65 percent of registrations from the 2008 run happened online.

Though growing in the number of users, the race's Twitter and Fa-

cebook pages are right now limited to mostly news releases, with links to the race's Web site (<http://www.freihofersrun.com>). The vast majority of updates come from race officials.

Chris Bowcutt, a Web marketing consultant who helped established the Freihofer's social-networking pages, said the race's goal in coming years is to have those pages become forums where runners, volunteers and the event staff all converse.

"That is the goal — to form a community," Bowcutt said. "One of the future efforts for Freihofer's is to have it driven by people who run the race, just the common people who run. They can drive the process themselves and have it be a fun thing."

The Freihofer's also might include incentives for joining its Facebook page. For instance, Regan said he might in the next few years offer those who register through Facebook autographed pictures from the elite runners or coupons.

"Not only are we going to continue doing these things," Regan said, "but we're going to expand on them."

▶ *Pete Iorizzo can be reached at 454-5425 or by e-mail at piorizzo@timesunion.com.*

Freihofer's Run

- **When:** Saturday
- **Where:** Downtown Albany
- **More information on Web:** <http://freihofersrun.com> and <http://twitter.com/freihofersrun>

