

Zombies to invade Ramblewood in Darlington Oct. 22

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Ramblewood in Darlington has hosted a broad variety of events over the years, ranging from marching band camps to nudist conventions. The latest booking, however, may be the most unusual yet for the secluded 200-acre facility near the Conowingo Dam.

This one, scheduled for Oct. 22, is a 5K race in which faux-zombies chase the participants over and around a dozen obstacles.

And the inaugural event is being organized by a local company, Reed Street Productions LLC, started specifically to put on this race. It has already gained significant interest and even though the first race has yet to be run, the group is already planning six more races across the country in 2012.

The race looks to draw as many as 10,000 participants, each paying up to \$77 to kick his or her cardiovascular system into high gear with twin stimuli of strenuous exertion and stark terror. The promoters hope to tap into a significant population of zombie lovers, a demographic group long neglected by the running community.

“We've always been huge fans of zombie folklore and wanted to create a live action experience that provides fans with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Ryan Hogan, managing member of Reed Street Productions, said.

A zombie is defined as the body of a dead person given life by a supernatural force. Zombies are mute and have an evil purpose that does not normally include setting the pace in a 5K.

The race is entitled “Run for Your Lives.” It is not to be confused with Run for Your Life, a former Baltimore-area running program, the name of which denoted long-term health benefits, not short-term hazards.

In concept, this race is similar to the Warrior Dash, a 3.5-mile run through mud and obstacles held in Quarryville, Pa., last October and Skirmish, Pa., in June. The first race drew 11,000, and the second, 15,000, including many from Harford County.

As of Tuesday, about 8,000 had registered for Run For Your Lives, which will be capped at 10,000 runners. It has drawn runners from 26 states, mostly Maryland, Delaware and Pennsylvania, as well as a group of about 30 coming from Canada. The deadline for runner entries is Oct. 1. Information on entering the race can be found at runforyourlives.com.

The races demonstrated that mud is a strong drawing card. The zombie event may well trump the others in mud quality: “racers must navigate this sewage system filled with mud, trash and other forms of disgusting sewage,” says the press release.

A good way to prepare for the event, according to the promoter's press release, is to watch zombie flicks: "We recommend some running, along with in-depth studying of zombie movies. It's not the fastest who will win; it's the one that can best out-manuever his foes."

Studying zombie movies is apparently equivalent to studying game films in the NFL. It may prove to be the decisive edge for those hoping to win one of the five age groups or the two brackets for military participants.

To assuage the pain of racing the simulated undead through simulated sewage, there will be live entertainment, music, vendors, food and beer for the participants after they reach the safety of the finish line. The post-chase event is called the Apocalypse Party.

A portion of the proceeds from the race will be donated to the American Red Cross, which will also be on-site race day collecting donations.

Reed Street

Hogan and Derrick Smith, the other managing member, got the idea for the run last October and have been planning ever since. Their six-member company became incorporated in February.

Hogan, 26, is active duty Navy and attends University of Maryland. Smith, 27, worked in several hotels and attended community college "here and there" before taking on this endeavor full-time.

The event is being marketed by MGH Marketing in Owings Mills, which apparently is doing a pretty good job. Races are already in the works for next year, in Atlanta, Boston, Indianapolis, Seattle/Portland, San Diego/Los Angeles and Austin, Texas.

"We hope to expand to more," Smith, 26, said.

"We started talking to properties in March," he said. "As we went through the process and got more attention, it got easier. We figured if the race goes well, we'll go nationwide in 2012."

Hogan, Smith and their colleague, Ryan Secret, grew up in Bel Air and went to Bel Air High School.

"We always hung out on Reed Street," Smith said, so it seemed a perfect name for their company.

For the time being, the company will stick to zombie-themed races "as long as it's popular.

"We could do different themes ... I feel like we could do just about anything," Smith said.