

Locals run in the L.A. Marathon

By **BEATRIZ E. VALENZUELA** and **JACOB PAINTER**
Staff Writers – Daily Press 3/1/2008

Sarah Alvarado / Staff Photographer

Zach Woodruff, eighth-grader at Academy of Academic Excellence, ties his running shoes before practicing for the L.A. Marathon.



APPLE VALLEY – In remembrance of a loved one, personal gratification and bonding – these are just some of the reasons locals have decided to run in Sunday’s Los Angeles marathon.

“I’ve watched all kinds of people cross the finish line and thought ‘I can do this,’” said Lydia Hudson, 58, of Apple Valley.

Hudson is not just an avid runner, but also the chaperone for the Academy for Academic Excellence Students Run Los Angeles team. The group of 32 students has been training since the beginning of the school year to complete the marathon.

“I can say I’ve run the marathon twice. Not a lot of people can say that,” said Haily

Unferdorfer, 13.

The group teaches kids to set a goal and meet it, said Karen Bridges, leader of the team. This is Bridges' second year running and she initially did it to bond with her daughter, Sara.

This will also mark the second time Russ Vestal laces up his running shoes, but he is running for his brother and church.

"Last year my mom passed away and I ran for her," said Vestal. "This year my brother died and I thought I would do it for him."

Vestal also hopes to raise enough money through sponsorships to help build an addition to Life Church in Hesperia, which he said has been an important source of support for him.

Along with the personal satisfaction, the support that runners receive from the crowd is amazing, said Vestal.

"To hear perfect strangers say to you, 'Come on Russ, you can do it! Keep going!' is really hard to describe," he said.

"A marathon is not about the destination," said Hudson. "It's about the journey."



Sarah Alvarado / Staff Photographer Aidan Fahnestock and Brandon Sauer, both students at Academy of Academic Excellence, practice for the L.A. Marathon.

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