

Borgata employees running in Boston Marathon

KRISTINE AUBLE For the Press

Longtime Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa employees Donna Grocki and Carmelo Rivera have worked together for more than 10 years, and for the past two years, they've been running together.

After training for and completing multiple marathons between them, Grocki and Rivera will both run the Boston Marathon on Monday.

"To me, running the Boston Marathon is like hitting the jackpot. To me, it's just everything," Grocki said. "I just feel honored, and I just want to enjoy the whole experience and just take everything in and just give it 100 percent."

Grocki, 58, and Rivera, 55, started running together when a co-worker invited them run with a group at the Galloway Wildlife Refuge. Since then, the two have supported each other to reach their fitness goals.

"We push each other; we are each other's biggest fans," Grocki said. "We have the utmost respect for each other. We just try to motivate each other and help each other just get better and better."

As they both push themselves to get through rigorous workouts that include running anywhere from 40 to 65 miles each week, Grocki and Rivera agree having a someone running beside them makes the workouts more enjoyable.

"It doesn't feel like you're working too hard when you're hanging out with your friends," Rivera said. "If you were by yourself, you might feel like you're actually working harder, but when you're with other people time goes by and the miles seem a lot easier, which is easier to stay motivated"

Grocki, a Hammonton resident, picked up running again when she joined her daughter for the Philadelphia Half Marathon four years ago. This year alone Grocki ran both the New York Marathon and the Chicago Marathon, finishing each race with a time that qualified her for the Boston Marathon.

"I like being a part of people running from all different countries from all different ages. You just meet so many different people," Grocki said. "Runners, we're just a rare breed. We all have the same mindset."

As a veteran runner, Grocki said she is proud of Rivera, who ran his first marathon in September.

"What impresses me about Carmello is that this is his first marathon that he is qualifying for, and he gets into the Boston Marathon. People try for years to get into the Boston Marathon and can't make a qualifying time, and he runs one marathon," Grocki said. "That I just find totally amazing."

Rivera, who lives in Galloway Township, started running smaller distances and worked his way up longer races. Along the way, he lost 25 pounds and said running has helped with his overall health.

“I really like the meditative aspect of it when I’m out there. It helps me clear my mind, and just exercise in general sends off those endorphins so you feel great after a run,” Rivera said. “My whole life has just been on a positive upswing since I starting running two years ago. I got rid of some bad habits.”

Rivera and Grocki look forward to the experience in Boston and have individual goals for their race. Rivera would like to break his personal marathon record of 3 hours and 36 minutes to come in closer to 3:30.

Grocki said in previous marathons she focused on her times, but for her run Monday she is more interested in enjoying every moment up until she crosses the finish line.

“The main goal is to finish, bottom line, and one way or another I’m finishing,” Grocki said.

Grocki and Rivera said they plan to continue running once the big race is over.

“I plan on running until I’m in my 80s,” Grocki said with a laugh.