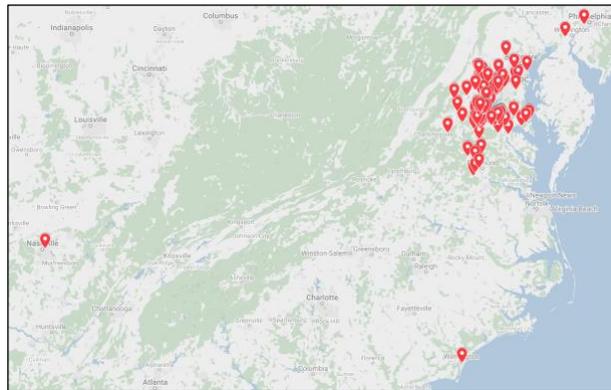
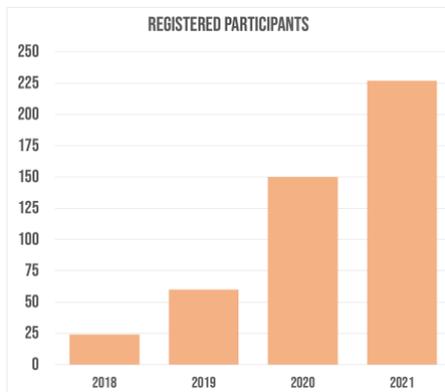


2021 Sheetz-to-Sheetz Trail Run Recap



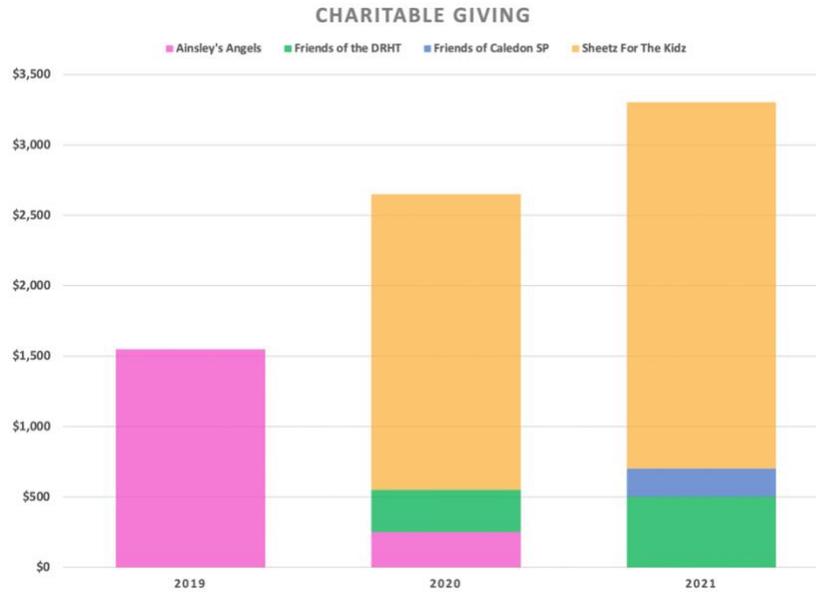
On March 13, 2021, we were blessed with perfect weather for the 4th annual [Sheetz-to-Sheetz Trail Run](#) in King George, Virginia. Despite limitations and modifications imposed to meet COVID-19 safety guidelines, a record 227 runners enjoyed what was for many the first in-person race since the pandemic began. By any measure, this year’s event was a tremendous success. Highlights include:

- Growth and Tourism** – Fueled largely by word-of-mouth, race registrations grew 51% to 227 runners, selling out in 7 days. We were able to add a few last-minute slots when Governor Northam raised the race participant limits in February. Runners converged from 6 states and D.C. with approximately 15% booking hotel rooms, mostly in Dahlgren. Per the post-race survey, 36% (82) were introduced to the [Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail](#) (DRHT) for the first time.



- Community Engagement** – It takes a community to pull off this event as evidenced by this year’s 55 volunteers! We had assistance from local organizations including the KGHS Cross-Country Team, Friends of Caledon, Friends of the DRHT, KG Amateur Radio Operators, KG Sheriff’s Office and KG County Schools. In addition, we partnered with Arsenal Events of Stafford as the second event of the inaugural King George Trail Series. We’re grateful to Arsenal Events also for the loan of equipment including a professional start/finish line structure and traffic signage.
- Charitable Giving** – Registration growth enabled us to increase our charitable donations for the third year in a row. To date, we’ve donated over \$3,300 in 2021 to local charities. The primary benefactor is the Sheetz employee charity, [Sheetz For The Kidz](#). Our \$2,600 donation directly supports holiday gifts and necessities for 48 local children in need. In addition, we donated to [Friends of the DRHT](#) and [Friends of Caledon State Park](#) in recognition of their support. In three years, our total charitable donations to local charities have surpassed \$7,500.





- Race Day Additions** – This year we added things to the event, some to mitigate COVID-19 and some to test new concepts. We added packet pickups in Fredericksburg and King George, start waves and end-to-end emergency communications. At mile Pi (3.14), we added a very popular Pie Station to complement the main aid station at the mid-course campsite. At the finish line, we routed runners behind the store via a finisher chute to a new staging area featuring a large tent and a photo booth.

Following the event, 52% of participants responded to an online survey. Based upon survey feedback and race-day interactions, it's abundantly clear what participants like best about the event. We'll continue to preserve and enhance these characteristics:

- Laid back, casual, untimed event** – Only 40% of respondents rated race timing as important. While that's up from last year, we plan to keep the non-competitive focus of the event by avoiding race timing. In response to a "What did you like?" question, specific comments included:
 - The untimed nature made it very laid back... never been in an event like that.*
 - I appreciate the laid-back nature (no official time keeping). It allows us to run with purpose but without the stress of what the clock says.*
 - Low-key, no timing, fun & friendly.*
 - Best – not timed. Not a race. Just a fun event!*
 - Enjoyed having the event untimed – just a time to enjoy the sunshine and be with friends especially after a long year of COVID.*
 - The atmosphere was so fun and welcoming. No pressure like regular races. Loved it!*
- Themed aid stations and posters** – In an effort to distinguish this event from all other races, we offer fun and unique aid stations along the way, serving pie, s'mores, Peeps, hot apple cider and other unexpected treats. We tested a new Mile Pi station this year with over 96% of responders rating it *good* or *awesome*. We also post funny motivational signs at each mile marker.
 - The aid stations were awesome (LOVE the s'mores and pi stations!)*
 - The party at the 10k mark makes this race the best.*
 - The themed aid stations and the funny signs that provided photo ops. The fact that it's not an officially timed event is important because it gives you the flexibility to stop and enjoy them.*
 - The aid stations were a great boost.*
 - LOVED the signs! Too funny.*
 - The Sheetz road signs were a fantastic add-on this year – kudos!*

- Quality finisher items** – Most serious runners have a closet full of t-shirts and a drawer full of race medals, so our signature high-quality Sheetz mug and Sheetz food continue to be much-appreciated alternatives. Thanks to Deelitefull Doggie Treats of King George, we even rewarded canine runners with their own finisher rewards. 95% rated the finisher items as *good* to *awesome*. Comments included:
 - Excellent swag. Seriously, it gets better every year.*
 - Always a great vibe and the best goodies of any event.*
 - The finishers swag is 10/10.*
- Fun, unique vibe** – Starting with the unique concept of running from one Sheetz to another, this “race” doesn’t take itself too seriously. Many comments highlight the intentionally fun and quirky atmosphere:
 - I loved the entire vibe of the race!*
 - Rare to find a race like this one.*
 - It is one of my favorite events. It is fun, relaxing and overall, a hoot!*
- Loyalty** – The survey yielded a Net Promoter Score of 86, much higher than the 58 organizational average. This is an indication of how willing runners are to return and recommend the event to friends and family:
 - It’s my second year and I’ll be back. It’s just a fun time!*
 - I will continue to preach the gospel of this race to all my friends and God-willing, as long as I am able to continue running, I will come.*
 - Definitely planning to make this a yearly must-do on my race calendar.*
 - I loved the trail, the vibe and the swag at this event! I will definitely be back!*
- Safety** – In a question intended to measure safety ranging from COVID-19 protocols, traffic management, course markings and running in isolated areas, we were very pleased to see 97.5% of responders said they felt *very* to *extremely safe* at the event. 96% pointed to the King George Sherriff’s Office escort for the first 1.5 miles as important.

Of course, there’s always room for improvement. We didn’t quite meet the mark in these areas:

- Start Line** – Our starting waves were admittedly rushed and confused as we tried to minimize traffic disruptions and get runners on course as quickly as possible. Communication was hampered by runners not being able to hear start line announcements as they huddled in unexpected areas our sound system did not reach.
- Traffic Management** – While we added new traffic control signage and a team of volunteers, we under-estimated the time it would take to re-locate signage, leaving the Indiantown Road intersection without proper signage until runners were already passing through. Elsewhere, we needed to have traffic control at the Muscoe Place crossing even though it’s infrequently traveled. In addition, our numbers are now such that runners cannot fit in the Kings Highway shoulder – we need to look into closing off the rightmost westbound lane to improve safety.
- Shirts** – This was our first year offering shirts as a registration option. The unisex sizing, 50/50 cotton/polyester material and lack of X-Small were not popular.

Our vision for 2022 and beyond include growth and tweaks, but above all we’ll endeavor to retain and emphasize the unique and fun aspects of this event cited above. While we believe the event can continue to grow, we’re also mindful that there’s a practical limit at which point crowding will detract from the rural, small-town vibe. A primary near-term goal is to engage with Pennsylvania-based corporate Sheetz and the naval base in Dahlgren as partners in promoting the event as a regional attraction. Given the military history of the rail trail and the local impact of the base, adding a military presence (e.g., uniformed personnel welcoming runners at the finish) is a natural progression. The largest logistical change we’re exploring is moving the parking area from KG Middle School near the start

to the King George Gateway Shopping Center near the finish in Dahlgren. This allows for a more relaxed and friendly finish line experience where runners can lounge around at Sheetz with friends afterwards and walk back to their hotel or one of the many restaurants for lunch before heading out. This further simplifies logistics and offers new opportunities to promote local businesses, hotels and restaurants.

All things considered, we are thankful for being able to host a challenging yet fun, safe and popular event. It encouraged community involvement and wellness, introducing nearly a hundred runners to King George's DRHT for the first time. It was great to see the community come together in support of local charities, and we're thankful two more special needs athletes were able to participate and enjoy the county's trails thanks to Ainsleys' Angels. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, we showed running is back, and people are yearning to get back to normal. We expect our next event (**March 12, 2022**) to be bigger and better than ever!

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Many thanks to our 2021 sponsors!

