

This year's Ski to Sea race could be biggest yet



Head Boundary Bay brewer Aaron Smith holds a Ski to Sea ESB bottle, a beer designed this year that will now serve as the official beer of the Memorial Day weekend race. The beer will be available to the public in 22 oz. bottles and on tap at the brewery by May 6. Ryan Wynne | BBJ

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Ski to Sea racers who are hoping to put a little extra hop in their step this year might find the extra boost they're looking for at Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro, where an extra hoppy beer is brewing called Ski to Sea ESB.

Boundary Bay was asked to produce the official Ski to Sea beer by the nonprofit Whatcom Events, which took over as the race organizer in early 2010.

“We’ve been wanting to do this for several years now,” Janet Lightner, Boundary Bay general manager said. “We got the green light this year and we were very happy.”

The beer is being produced in time to mark 100 years of racing in the community. While Ski to Sea was born in 1973, the race is a descendant of the Mt. Baker Marathon. The marathon, which was first held in 1911, may have been the first adventure race in the United States, said Mel Monkalis, Whatcom Events executive director.

Race organizers decided to make a few other changes for the quasi centennial celebration, too. Firstly, they are extending the race from its usual 94 miles to 100. They are also bringing back the pre-race block party, which will be held at Boundary Bay from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. May 28, the Saturday before the race. The first 800 racers to show up to the party will get free beer mugs. There will also be a hula dancing contest — the top two winners will get free roundtrip tickets to Hawaii.

This year’s race will also be celebrated by Bellingham sister cities. One person from each sister city in South Korea, Russia, Australia, Chile, Japan, Finland and Mongolia will join a member of Bellingham Sister Cities Association to form a team.

With the help of Saturna Capital, which matched community donations, Whatcom Events was able to raise the \$11,000 needed to pay the airfare of these team members.

In addition to being a bit different from its predecessors, Ski to Sea 2011 also promises to be a big one. Last year, 464 teams competed and Monkalis said Whatcom Events is now talking about whether they can have more than 500 teams participate this year — by April 26, 2011, 521 teams had already registered and paid.