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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Blue Ridge Marathon Presents \$20,000 to FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway
Money to be used for Parkway beautification and education.

Roanoke, Va. (May 25, 2010) – Organizers of the [Blue Ridge Marathon](#) today presented \$20,000 to [FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway](#), which will use the funding to further its mission to preserve, promote and enhance the scenic highway. FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway was the designated beneficiary of the Blue Ridge Marathon. The signature ascents on the 26.2-mile course took place on the Parkway, which is celebrating its [75th Anniversary](#) in 2010.

Pete Eshelman, director of [outdoor branding](#) for the [Roanoke Regional Partnership](#), and co-chair of the marathon, praised the [National Park Service](#) for permitting access to the scenic highway. He attributed the event's financial success to community support and sponsors who signed on early. "[National College](#), [Carilion Clinic](#), [Valley Bank](#), [Finks Jewelers](#) and [Roanoke](#)

[Parks and Recreation](#) believed in this idea and supported this great community event almost from the beginning. Their support enabled us to properly market the marathon as a destination attraction.” Eshelman noted that the marathon and half-marathon drew 942 (more than 1,000 registered) runners from 34 states and London, England.

“The Blue Ridge Marathon has accomplished an incredibly successful outdoor brand for the Roanoke Valley,” said FRIENDS Executive Director Susan J. Mills, Ph.D. “We were proud to assist with the volunteer efforts through our network of chapters providing 100 of the 300 volunteers and also, additional rescue/first aid stations through the support of a board member. This event was a team effort with tremendous community support!” she said. Mills further explained that, “100-percent of this donation will be used to provide funding for events along the Blue Ridge Parkway and FRIENDS Save Parkway Views Program.” She said Parkway outdoor programs such as the Roanoke Campground Music Program, Peaks of Otter and Mabry Mill programs, which could not be funded by local chapters, would now be funded. Mills said the money is even more welcome at a time, “when the economy makes fundraising particularly challenging.”

Though he could not be present for the check presentation, Honorary Race Chair, [Rep. Bob Goodlatte](#) of Roanoke thanked organizers for their efforts and said he hoped the Marathon “...Would continue to grow and make contributions to the quality of life in the Valley in so many ways.”

Blue Ridge Parkway Superintendent [Phil Francis](#), also on hand for the check presentation, said he was pleased the community had found a new way to connect with the Parkway. “Groups like FRIENDS are integral to the long-term success of the Parkway,” he said. “Not only did the marathon help draw national attention to our 75th Anniversary, it was another way to show the world what a beautiful attraction we have running along the crest of the Blue Ridge.” Francis noted that the funding was like “found money” and would make FRIENDS’ impact even greater.

National College President and CEO Frank Longaker was one of the first to support the event financially when National College signed on to be the event’s title sponsor. “We saw the potential for a marathon in the Roanoke Valley,” said Longaker, an avid endurance event participant and finisher of the event’s 13.1 mile half marathon. The beauty and difficulty of the Roanoke course will attract people from all over the country and beyond. This event is only going to grow.”

The run is touted as one of the most difficult on-road marathons in America. The course was designed to connect the Parkway with downtown Roanoke, while showcasing some of the Roanoke Valley’s key attractions, including the [greenway system](#). Plans for next year include more mileage on the greenway with the completion of the low water bridge in Wasena Park. Organizers are also eyeing one more addition – another significant hill.

“The runners tell us they loved this course despite the difficulty,” said Race Director Ronny Angell, citing early survey responses from participants that show a 99-percent approval rating.

“We want to be sure we have bragging rights as the toughest race there is, so we’re looking at our options,” Angell said.

While organizers are still working on plans for next year’s event, they said the date had been set for April 16, 2011.



Photo L to R: John Carlin, John Carlin Agency; Phil Francis, NPS BRP Superintendent; Pete Eschelman, Director of Outdoor Branding at RoanokeOutside.com & Roanoke Regional Partnership.

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FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Inc. is a Blue Ridge Parkway partner organization. FRIENDS is a nonprofit membership organization that has served the Blue Ridge Parkway for over 20 years. Individuals or organizations interested in learning about other volunteer opportunities or ways to financially support Parkway programs should call, write or visit on the Internet: FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Inc. P.O. Box 20986, Roanoke, VA 24018 / Telephone 540.772.2992 or 800.228.PARK (7275) / E-mail: Staff@FriendsBRP.org / Website: www.BlueRidgeFriends.org