

Walkers take a step forward in NorCal run

By TOM SELLERS

Don't think badly about those relatively slow-looking participants who'll be at the back of the pack in Saturday's 18th annual NorCal/John Frank Memorial Run.

The walkers are taking advantage of a new division in the multirace event, the three-mile walk. As of this morning, 85 people had signed up to walk, according to Linda Doniak of the sponsoring Shasta Wonderland Elite Athletic Team (SWEAT). Top walkers — no running, please — from 15 age groups will be recognized.

Entries in the 10- and three-mile runs and the one-mile fitness walk-run also are up from last year, when a total of 400 braved snow and cold. As of today, 78 10-milers, 232 three-milers and 62 walk-run entries had been received.

The short event begins at 9 a.m. Saturday, the runs and long walk at 10. All courses begin and end at Lake Redding Park.

The NorCal/John Frank is among

many race events to add walking to its list.

Doniak recalled that in last year's weather-hindered event "people came out for the one (mile) and changed to the three (mile run) and walked it in the snow.

"The participation is by far more important than the competition," said Doniak.

Joan Sullens also is a runner, but has a real soft spot for the art of walking.

Sullens, who is assisting in this year's walking segment of the NorCal, works with walkers of all ages in Mall-Walking, a program run by Mercy Medical Center in conjunction with the Mt. Shasta Mall and The Mall in downtown Redding.

After working on the Mercy March the past two Septembers (it drew 120 walkers last time), she is glad to see walking incorporated into a wider-appeal event.

"I think it's great. I've been pushing it," she said.

"These walkers are every bit as serious as the runners are about their times. They are competitive," she said.

A 15-minute mile is considered a good pace for a walker, she said.

Those thinking of lacing the shoes a notch looser and enjoying the scenery this year should note that walking has just about all the benefits of running — without some of the pain.

"The thing about walking that's so good is that it's virtually injury-free. It's the sport of a lifetime — it transcends all ages and you don't have to be physically fit to start it," Sullens said.

She sees a trend.

"Every entry blank I've seen recently has included a walking event as well as running," she said.

In addition to the Mercy March and the NorCal, the upcoming American Association of University Women's run (April 16) and the Red Bluff Dam Run (April 23) have included walks in their lineups.

Though walking will be a big part of the 1988 NorCal, the swift of foot have not been forgotten.

Doniak said three-mile recordholder Mark Fricker of Beaverton, Ore., will be back to try to better the time of 13:49 he set last year; women's 10-mile recordholder Yoshie Piles of Bella Vista returns to try to best her 1:02:27, also set in 1987; and Gid Rysdam of Oregon, the men's 10-mile winner last year, also will return.

The NorCal took on its extra name last year to honor former winner and state prep cross country champion John Frank, who was killed in an industrial accident in October 1986.

Race-day registration opens at 7 a.m. and closes at 9.

The race is co-sponsored by Bud Light, which donated \$2,000; the Hilltop Inn-C.R. Gibbs (where race packets are available until 8 tonight) and Pepsi Cola.

Proceeds go toward scholarships for athletes from five north state high schools.