

# The first traffic on the new Fort Hamer Bridge was paved with people

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## PARRISH

The new Fort Hamer Bridge saw its first traffic jam Saturday morning as thousands crossed the bridge on foot.

The Fort Hamer Bridge Run 5K, 10K and mile walk brought people to the foot of the bridge before the sun rose on Saturday.

Though the 2,300-foot Fort Hamer Bridge [won't open officially to traffic](#) until Sept. 23, race participants caught a sneak peek during their morning run. The new bridge and improvements to Fort Hamer Road and Upper Manatee River Road cost \$32.69 million.

Organizers announced they had 2,600 people registered for the 10K and 5K runs along with a one-mile walk, saying it was the largest 5K and 10K race in the county. Several children's races were held before the runners took their marks.

There were so many participants that vehicular traffic was backed up for those trying to get to the bridge. Officials pushed back the start to 8 a.m. so hundreds of runners and walkers could make it to the starting line.

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David Kelly, race participant

One pedestrian, David Kelly, made Saturday's journey with a patriotic approach by carrying an American flag.

Kelly is part of a [men's fitness group, F3](#) — which stands for fitness, fellowship and faith — that meets every Saturday morning in Greenbrook Park. He said he

was participating in the Fort Hamer Bridge Run mainly for fitness, but also as an opportunity show patriotism.

“The flag is a part of our workout, but it’s also a great way to honor our country. It’s a great way to honor our veterans and those who have served for our country,” Kelly said of carrying the colors.

He added that crossing the bridge made this particular race unique.

“It’s not something you get to do every day, and people say you were on the bridge before the cars were. That’s pretty cool,” Kelly said.

While Kelly ran to honor the troops, Jodie Hyvonen ran with a group from the Parrish YMCA in honor of her mother, who died in 2013.

“I’m running for her today, September 30 and all the time,” Hyvonen said.

The back of Hyvonen’s shirt read, “I’m running for my mom.”

Dorothy Neely, 86, and her friend, Joyce Broom, 58, came out to participate in the one-mile walk. Though she laughed when she held onto her walker and said the most walking she does is around her house, Neely said she came for the thrill of the event.

Broom looked over and laughed and said, “I’m trying to keep up with her!”

“I wanted to do it as soon as they announced it,” Neely said.

Proceeds from the race’s entry fees will be divided between the Parrish Y Branch Scholarship Fund, the Parrish Foundation and Manatee County Youth Rowing.

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