

Padilla bushwhacks field at annual 5K

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News Journal correspondent

Michael Padilla, 21, began running five years ago to lose weight he had gained while playing high school football.

On Saturday, he won his third Bushwacker 5K in 16 minutes, 16 seconds, joining the rest of the 1,287 participants in welcoming the race back to Pensacola Beach.

The event was moved to downtown last year because of damage to the beach caused by hurricanes Ivan and Dennis. Only 874 participants registered last year.

And for the third time in four years, Padilla brought home the winner's trophy.

The Pensacola native credits his best friend and mentor, Ryan Albertson, for introducing him to the sport.

"The weight came off and my times improved so quickly I realized this was something I could excel at," said Padilla, who went on to star as a runner at the University of West Florida after graduating from Pine Forest High School.

And excel he does. His fastest time in a 5K is 14:40, which he ran in 2005 at the LSU relays track meet.

"However," he he said, "I've only been able to run a 14:43 this year. I wanted to finish in the low 15:00s but, after the first mile when I hit the Bob Sikes Bridge, the wind felt like a hurricane in my face."

His victory was short-lived.

"I have to work today at Running Wild," he said smiling, minutes after accepting his first place trophy and gold medallion.

Padilla won the Bushwacker race in 2003 and 2004. He didn't compete last year because he had joined the Marine Corps and was in Quantico, Va., completing Officer Candidate School. He said he will be return-



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Local runner Michael Padilla won his third Bushwacker's 5K race this past Saturday with a time of 16 minutes and 16 seconds.

ing to Pensacola Naval Air Station during the fall for flight school.

Overall female winner, Jennifer McGanahan, also is no stranger to the winner's circle. The University of Florida graduate crossed the finish line in 19:49. She and sister, Ann, have many Bushwacker 5K trophies between them.

"I've been running since I was 14 years old, ran in college and have gotten back into running after taking

a break," said Jennifer McGanahan, 27.

The Pensacola native recently has accepted a position with the University of West Florida as a graduate assistant while she works on her master's in Exercise Science.

"I will be working with the cross country and track teams," she said smiling. "What really drives me is seeing other people inspired to achieve their goals."