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Bajan down to run in London marathon

4/10/2011

By Petra Harvey

THE Virgin London Marathon is one of the biggest in the world and Barbadian Danielle Collins will make up just one of the 1 800 foreign runners who will participate in the 2011 version of the race.

Collins will form part of Richard Branson's Virgin Unite 'Changing the Course' Marathon Team for the April 17 event. Virgin Unite is the non-profit foundation of the Virgin Group and its aim is to revolutionise the way businesses and the social sector work together.

Collins is scheduled to leave Barbados on April 12 and while speaking to the Barbados Advocate recently, she admitted that she was shocked she was asked to be a member of the Virgin Unite team. She noted that she had been trying to run in the London Marathon for the past three years with no success. Out of the 41 000 people who run in the marathon, only 1 800 people internationally are allocated a slot in the race.

"I am running on Richard Branson's employee team. I have been trying to get into the London Marathon for three years and I was not successful; it is really difficult to get in. Out of the 41 000 people who run it, only 1 800 people internationally are given a space. So I am competing with thousands of runners world wide for a spot in the line-up.

"I provide gift baskets for Virgin Holidays here, so when people come from England on the vacation packages, we provide small gift baskets for them. So I have been begging my client here for six months, 'Isn't there a little space? Isn't there [anything] you can do to have a Barbados representative out there?'

"I kept bugging them and bugging them and they kept e-mailing and e-mailing and it took six months until the e-mail got to the right person. On January 17th, three months to the date of the marathon, I got an e-mail saying they would put me on the employee team. I only wanted one space out of 41 000; I never thought I would actually be on Richard Branson's employee team. But with that came a big responsibility. It is a charity space, which means you are running for charity and you have to raise money for charity," said Collins.

The 41-year-old Collins ended up raising £3 135 for charity through a raffle for two tickets to London on Virgin Atlantic. She has also participated in the Disney Marathon in Orlando and plans to run in the Berlin Marathon in September this year.

In addition to being one of the top five international marathons in the world, the London Marathon is also a large celebratory sporting festival in terms of number of participants. The race has raised over £450 million for charity since it was first run in 1981 and currently holds the Guinness World Record as the largest annual fund raising event in the world.

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