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## Anna Gammal Ready to Work with Elite Boston Marathon Runners Again

By Jean Cann - The Hopkinton Independent Staff Writer

Hopkinton's Anna Gammal, who has run the Boston Marathon herself, has been working as a massage therapist for Elite Boston Marathon runners since 2004 at John Hancock's Elite Athlete Village. The Wednesday before Patriot's Day she checks into the Copley Plaza and works with a small team of massage therapists taking care of elite athletes from 9am until 9pm until the runners depart for Hopkinton. Once the runners finish, she is back at work for recovery.

Though professional confidentiality prevents Gammal from naming specific athletes she has massaged, she said, "All the athletes that you see, most likely I will have put my hands on."

All of the elite athletes Gammal works with are accustomed to regular massage so they tell her exactly what type of treatment they would like. "They're very in-tune with their bodies. They know exactly what they want and what they don't want," she said.

The massages she gives in the days leading up to the marathon are relaxing and often incorporate heat. "If there is an injury at that point, we can't fix it," she said. It's more to allow the muscles to continue feeling loose and to help with psychological preparation." To add to the relaxing atmosphere, the massage area does not allow media, agents or even coaches. Eight people-four massage therapists and four athletes-occupy the dark, quiet area. Athletes often fall asleep while Gammal massages them.

That calm atmosphere changes on the morning of The Boston Marathon as Gammal and the other massage therapists and members of the athlete support crew line the stairway and cheer as the athletes head for the buses to take them to Hopkinton.

Of the elite runners' experience during the marathon, Gammal assures other runners that the elite runners just make it look easy.

"They're hurting equally during the marathon," she said. They're still human, well maybe a little super-human, but they still feel the pain during the marathon." The big difference is that the elite athletes generally recover from the marathon much faster, which she attribute to their high level of training and partly to the way they care for their bodies with diet, sleep and regular massage. On the evening of the marathon she sees elite athletes dancing and even wearing high heels. The Tuesday after the Boston Marathon, Gammal gives a few more post-event massages then heads back to Hopkinton to her family and regular clients, many of whom run Boston. A poster on the stairway leading to Gammal's Wood street office has an image of the Boston Marathon and says across the top, "Some finish lines just mean more than others."

In honor of all those who have crossed the finish line, Gammal will give all runners \$10 off massages during the month of April.