

PRESS RELEASE

College Drive • P.O. Box 2001 • Toms River, NJ 08754-2001
732.255.0326 • www.ocean.edu



OCC Women's Cross Country Team Takes National Title



2009 Women's Cross Country Team

TOMS RIVER – Ocean County College's **Women's Cross Country Team** is number one in the nation after the Lady Vikings finished first in the team competition for the Division III **National Junior College Athletic Association's (NJCAA) National Championship** held on Saturday, November 7 at Finger Lakes Community College in Canandaigua, NY. The Vikings took the title as they competed with 17 other teams, beating out defending champion Mohawk Valley Community College by 23 points.

It is a particularly sweet victory. Not only is this the first time that an OCC cross country team brought home a national title, but cross country was re-introduced to the campus this season after a 13-year hiatus. The Lady Vikings accomplished what looked like an impossible task for a first-year team!

"This may have taken a little longer than expected, but we brought back a national championship! It is also my first national championship as the athletic director. It feels just as exciting as it did when I was a player," exclaimed **Ilene Cohen**, OCC Athletic Director.

"I was making my way to the finish line for photos and the official of the meet read my jacket and said, 'Ocean, huh – you're the talk of the tournament.' It was such a proud feeling to see the athletes' faces when they received the trophy. It is something I will never forget," added Cohen.

Under the guidance of Head Coach **Ed Baynes**, the Women's Cross Country Team was lead by **Jen Nelson** (Barnegat), who also won OCC's first-ever individual cross country title with a time of 19:48 on the tough 5k course. She was supported by **Erine O'Connor** and **Alyssa Collier** (both Toms River) who finished in 12th and 13th place, respectively, in the 115 runner field. The three athletes were among the top 15 runners who earned **All-American Honors** for their efforts.

Priscilla Robinson (Lakewood) finished in 17th place and **Lauren Ashman** (Toms River) finished 30th to seal the victory for OCC.

Taylor Madden (Toms River) and **Elaine Josefowski** (Manahawkin) finished 42nd and 68th, respectively. **Brittany Nycz** (Toms River) sustained injures and was unable to run at nationals.



OCC's Jen Nelson

“Jen ran a tough race. She's a tremendous athlete, a real competitor. She was up with the leaders from the gun, and made a huge move with about a half mile to go. It was a great day for the women. They hung in there and fought all the way through the finish line, which is what has to be done at a national championship,” said Baynes, who was honored with NJCAA “**Women's Coach of the Meet**” and “**Coach of the Year**” awards for his team's efforts.

In addition, the OCC Men's Team had a strong showing when two athletes set personal bests over the 8k distance. **Mike Neigel** (Brick) came in 35th and **Jarryd Novin** (Jackson) finished 55th. **Mike Romano** (Toms River) battled the hilly course on a bad knee to finish 105th.

“The men set the stage for a good day by getting out there and mixing it up,” said Baynes. “All three are new to the sport, and have made tremendous improvements in just two months. We are hopeful that 2010 will bring us the same success on the men's side as we had on the women's side. It's a first-year program, and we feel that with a little help from the local high school programs, we can start a tradition of excellence against some well-established junior colleges.”

Cohen added, “I am always proud of all the athletes in each and every sport we have here at Ocean County College. I do my best to get to know each athlete and after spending time with this cross country team, they showed me the true meaning of team work. They supported each other and worked hard together on and off the course.”