



Photo by R. A. Schnoor

Legally blind Cyril Charles, left, stands with his doctor, Richard Koplín, after finishing 10K race

# *His End Is in Sight*

By John Hanc

Cyril Charles is about to see the light.

Charles, a runner from Trinidad, has been partially blind since the age of nine — the result of a degenerative cornea disease. But next month, he'll undergo a corneal transplant that will enable him to see again.

"It's the best thing that ever happened in my life," exclaimed Charles, 25, who was in Central Park yesterday to participate in the Achilles Handicap 10K — a race in which nearly 1,000 ablebodied and disabled athletes competed together. "I'd always told myself that I'd never have the money to pay for this operation."

Money ceased to be an issue last summer, after Achilles Track Club coach Dick Traum recommended Charles as the first candidate for the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary's challenge grant — a new program in which the infirmary

Those abilities were evident in the Rochester Marathon last October, where Charles got his marathon time down to 3:22, and yesterday, as well, when he finished in 32:55. That's a fine time for an ablebodied runner; it is a superb performance for a runner whose vision is so impaired that he has to be guided along the course by a partner.

Soon, Charles may be able to find his own path. Dr. Richard Koplín, the surgeon who will perform the transplant — a fairly common procedure in this country — gives him a 90 percent chance of recovering his vision fully. When he heard that, Charles said, "I thought I was dreaming — and just hoped I wouldn't wake up."

He's still wide awake and ready to open his eyes to a world he only dimly remembers. "I'll see a lot of things I've never seen," he said. Like New York City in winter or, even better, Barcelona in the summer of 1992. With his sight restored.