



## Girls on the Run is really moving

Lynchburg News & Advance  
Friday, November 17, 2006

'Don't run when you can walk' is a phrase echoed by parents everywhere.

But in some Central Virginia households, it's decidedly not the norm. In those homes, parents not only encourage their girls to run, but others, too. They are the proud parents of girls age 8 to 13 who belong to the group Girls on the Run of Greater Lynchburg.

GOTR, which will complete its second season with a 5K walk/run along Blackwater Creek Trail on Saturday, is a 12-week program, during which members train for the 5K and participate in lessons that encourage healthy decision making and body image.

Serving about 60 girls, the area chapter of GOTR fills a valuable niche, as evidenced by its growth.

Last year, the local chapter had 28 girls and one venue, Holy Cross Regional Catholic School. This year, about 60 girls have joined, and the program is being offered at four sites - Holy Cross, R.S. Payne Elementary School, Bedford YMCA and James River Day School. And for the spring of 2007, organizers say five more potential sites may serve as many as 200 girls. The group - always looking for financial support - uses a sliding scale for registration fees and offers scholarships to girls who cannot pay or can only pay a portion of the fee. No girls are turned away because of inability to pay.

"There are athletic programs for pre-adolescent girls through school and community organizations in Lynchburg, but none of them integrate athletics with training in social and personal skills," says Erin Parkhurst, a coach who is also in charge of development and public relations for the group.

"One lesson plan, for example, teaches the importance of expressing emotions by getting the girls to answer questions like 'What do you do when you're really angry?' and 'What happens to you if you do not express how you are feeling?' Girls learn to talk about emotions in healthy ways while completing a challenging, but fun and manageable physical workout."

The not-for-profit program, offered in about 100 locations around the country, consists of 24 lessons that are presented in an innovative, 12-week program.

The lessons are delivered by certified coaches to the girls in three, four-week parts: "All About Me," "Building My Team" and "Community Begins With Me."

Each meeting starts with the girls getting into a circle to learn about the day's lesson. Then there is warm-up time that centers around the lesson and a discussion, a workout wrapped into activity - one week it is running bingo, another it is a scavenger hunt, another it is a run along Blackwater Creek Trail - then the girls meet back in the circle for more discussion.

When someone's performed well, she'll get a reward - nothing material - "an energy award," in the form of a dance or a cheer.

Anecdotally, the lessons work. Just ask any of the participants. It's academically sound also: Rita DiGioacchino DeBate, a Ph.D. at the UNC-Charlotte Department of Health Behavior, determined girls in the program showed a significant improvement in self-esteem and attitude.

It's not a mistake that pre-teen girls are targeted; they're approaching an age when self-image will battle peer and societal influences - teen pregnancy, substance abuse, eating disorders and depression.

The point, in essence, is to celebrate girls and women, and spread positive energy.

And who could argue with success?

**This story can be found at:**

[http://newsadvance.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=LNA/MGArticle/LNA\\_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1149191736432&path](http://newsadvance.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=LNA/MGArticle/LNA_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1149191736432&path)

[Go Back](#)