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Life on the run is full of fun Up Close & Down Home

By Lizann Lutz Fort Mill Times
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Girls on the Run is not just about young ladies running around the track - it's so much more.

The international program started in Charlotte by Molly Barker and several elementary schools in the Fort Mill School District take part in the after-school program.

During last weekend's Community Health and Fitness Expo at Gold Hill Middle School, Girls on the Run programs garnered the spotlight with a 5K run, and an inspirational talk by the founder. Almost 200 people participated in the race and fun run, munched on healthy snacks of oranges, water, bananas and popcorn balls, and visited the vendors in the school's gym.

"We found out that another local group was planning a run the same day we were planning our event," says Leah Abraham, president of the Gold Hill Middle PTA. "We combined our events and invited other groups to join us. All I can say is that the community really turned out, there were so much information at the expo, it was such a great day."

The hour-long after-school program meets twice a week for a lesson emphasizing self-esteem, warm-up exercises, and a jog of up to one and one-half miles. Over the 12-week program for girls in the third through fifth grades, the dozen or so participants work up to three miles or 5K. At the end of the school year, all the participants will run in a 5K on May 15.

The Fort Mill School District has Girls on the Run programs at Riverview, Springfield and Gold Hill elementary schools and Fort Mill Elementary is joining in next year. A program for older girls, Girls on Track, is in place at Fort Mill and Gold Hill middle schools.

Two students from Ebinport Elementary School in Rock Hill gathered around Molly Barker and Girls on the Run York County Director Lindy Morris. Sometimes girls feel they have to be like someone else or do certain things to fit in, says Barker, who calls that "the girl box." Her program, which has grown to 100 chapters in the United States and Canada, helps girls celebrate the wonders of the body, celebrates the voice, and "celebrates being beautiful self with a wonderful, exciting, and amazing spirit," Barker said.

"I like not getting into the 'girl box'," says fourth-grader Rebekah Allan. "I didn't know what I could accomplish."

Brooke Brabham, also a fourth-grader, said "I like looking for good things about me, about learning about making good choices and having my coach that I can trust if I have doubts."

The girls and Barker and Morris topped hands and shouted - enthusiastically - "Fantabulous!"

Barker now is piloting a "Boys on the Run," but conceded that "Boys are very different."

One exercise in Girls on the Run is participants sit in a circle and take turns saying their names and a positive adjective to describe how they are feeling, such as "awesome," or "happy."

"As I said, boys are different," Barker notes. "In the circle boys tend to say what they want to do, which might include bathroom humor. Let me just say the Boys on the Run program needs a little tweaking."

- *Lizann Lutz writes about the people, places and events around Fort Mill and Tega Cay. Please share your ideas with her by calling the Fort Mill Times, 547-2353, or by e-mailing Lizann at lutz@infoave.net.*

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