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Running helps girls escape ‘pressures of adolescence’

By Lisa McClung, Staff Writer

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In an age where childhood obesity is a dangerous and escalating trend, Monongalia County’s own chapter of Girls on the Run aspires to not only train young, elementary school girls for a 5k running event but to give them an everlasting idea of self-respect and healthy living.

Locally sponsored by Mon General Hospital, MedExpress and various physical therapy and rehabilitation clinics in the area, Girls on the Run is an afterschool program held at Brookhaven Elementary School and is limited to girls in grades three-to-five, but it’s not only for Brookhaven students.

“The program instills confidence and encourages girls to celebrate their strengths,” said Laurie Abildso, council director of Girls on the Run. “They learn how to address the pressures of adolescence in a healthy way.”

Sarah Perry, Student Government Association governor and sophomore marketing major, said she volunteered as a running buddy for the 5k race last semester.

The running buddies are necessary to encourage the girls, run beside them and keep them going, according to Perry.

“During the program, very rarely during the 10 weeks do the girls run three miles consecutively,” she said. “So, even though they’ve been training, they haven’t done it all at once.”

Girls on the Run was founded in 1996 by four-time Hawaii Ironman Triathlete Molly Barker. As a nonprofit, service and education organization, Girls on the Run became internationally known by the turn of the century.

It was started to teach young girls that they do not need to adhere to the “girl box” in order to be happy and healthy.

Barker coined the term from the idea that only girls who were a certain size with a certain beauty were popular, according to the local chapter Web site.

She wanted to offer a haven for young girls to let them learn how unnecessary it is to feel the need to mold their personalities and bodies to fit the “girl box” requirements.

“When you hear about a girl you have coached (who) asked for a treadmill for Christmas, it’s pretty exciting,” said Meghan Durst, head coach of the program. “Nothing is better than knowing you’ve helped these girls become strong individuals ... Especially as they head into the turbulence of their teen years.”

The girls will be competing in the Albert Gallatin 5k Run/Walk on Sunday, May 25, in Point Marion, Pa.

The program welcomes volunteers to help find snack donations, be a running buddy or even be a mentor.

“You really do need a mentor at that age,” Perry said. “I can’t think of a better way to encourage girls and teach them how to live a healthy life and to stay in shape.”

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