

New Craze of Hop-Skip-Jump-Run-Walkers

Girls on the Run Take Chrissy Field

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If you're picturing the next sequel of *Charlie's Angels*, guess again, as about 200 girls and their families descended on Chrissy Field recently for the semi-annual, five kilometer Lollipop Run.

Created ten years ago by Ironman tri-athlete Molly Barker, GOTR is an innovative nonprofit that challenges the diminished capacity argument of female adolescence by catching kids early and setting them on a more ambitious tack.

And yes, that's five kilometers. "There are studies that show that when girls participate in sports they just do so much better across the board," explains GOTR's San Francisco coordinator

Kerry Gardner.

That's evidently what Barker had in mind back in 1996 when she founded her new enterprise in Charlotte, North Carolina. A class for 26 girls quickly mushroomed to 75, and pretty soon Barker was fielding calls from around the country. So the group went big-time and in less than a decade, branches had sprung up in 135 cities.

In San Francisco, GOTR served 241 girls in 2006, most of them in the 3rd through 5th grades. A smaller program targets girls in junior high, and the curriculum combines athletic training with age-appropriate discussions of self-esteem, nutrition, appearance, and peer pressure to engage in unhealthy activities.

The public is invited to partici-



Photos by Facchino Photography

No, they're not running to Westfield to take advantage of post-holiday price reductions. Girls, their coaches and families participate in the Lollipop Run at Chrissy Fields December 9th.

pate in the noncompetitive semi-annual runs.

You may recall, it was back in 1994 that psychotherapist Mary Pipher published her groundbreaking *Reviving Ophelia*, the New York times bestseller that exposed the cultural riptides that were fueling an alarming incidence of anorexia, cutting and suicide in teenage girls.

Pipher reported how a whole generation of bright and energetic pre-teens were morphing into sullen mall shoppers who engaged in increasingly high-risk behavior. She blamed a culture of bullying and sexual harassment, along with a almost daily diet of sexualized imagery delivered by the entertainment media.

Pipher's young clients explained to her in their own particular lingo that it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out where the power dynamics had shifted in American society.

According to Gardner, formal studies proving the efficacy of Barker's approach have yet to be completed. Yet there's plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest GOTV may circumvent many of the problems laid out in Pipher's



When it comes to children knocking off five kilometers, Gardner says most of her athletes fall in the category of "hop-skip-jump-run-walkers". But a few do manage to trot the distance. The next Lollipop Run is scheduled for May 19th.

continued



book by building a child's self-discipline, confidence and overall stamina.

At the local level, "We've got at least two or three reports back from girls who are now going out for middle school cross-country or track who have openly said I wouldn't have done it if not for Girls on the Run."

The program consists of a ten-week course in both the spring and fall that culminates in the Lollipop Run in December and May. The goal for each girl is to complete either five kilometers or a less strenuous one-mile trek.

As for youngsters knocking off that kind of distance, Gardner says most of her athletes fall in the category of "hop-skip-jump-run-walkers". But a few do manage to trot the distance.

Started in 2002, the San Fran-

cisco branch recruits most of its kids through the City's public school system. Alternatively, girls can sign up to attend a class at Kezar Stadium on Wednesday nights, or a session at Chrissy Field on Saturday mornings.

Money to fund GOTR has come from AT&T, the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame, the Masi-Hancock Fund, the Olympic Club, Peninsula Community Foundation, Soroptimist International of San Francisco and Team Up for Youth.

For more info about Girls on the Run, or to volunteer, visit their website at gotrsf.org

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