



Coach Lori wins 'Community Starts With Me' Award

"She embodies what GOTR stands for"



On May 15, when thousands of Girls on the Run runners in Northern Virginia stepped on the line at George Mason University, 650 runners stepped on the line at Camp Victory in Baghdad.

Coach Lori Walowsky, the architect behind the Shadow Race in Iraq, has served as Head Coach for Lees Corner Elementary School for three seasons, putting in over 120 hours since 2010. During her tenure, she has revived the program at Lees Corner, spread the word on and off American soil, and positively influenced over 60 girls. Her dedication and energy make her the perfect candidate for GOTR's first ever "Community Starts With Me" award.

"The award is given to someone who demonstrates what giving back is all about," said Kathy Washa, Program Director. "[Walowsky] does it because she thinks it is the right thing to do and others will benefit from it."

Walowsky was presented the award before the gun went off at the Fall GOTR 5K. When GOTR informed her of the award, she was surprised, but accepted it on behalf of her team.

"It was very humbling," said Walowsky. "I am very fortunate to be part of such a great team."

Walowsky first discovered GOTR while she was at the Texas Women's Conference in Austin, Texas. When she moved to Virginia in 2009, she wanted to ensure that she enrolled her daughters at a school that offered GOTR. Lees Corner was actually holding a team for the first time that year. After a successful year of GOTR, however, it appeared that the school's program was about to crumble. The current coach was unable to volunteer in the spring, and without a coach, the team couldn't go on.

"I couldn't let that happen," said Walowsky. "I believe that the program is so important to our girls."

A few phone calls later and Walowsky was head coach. Aware that her commitment as a full time active duty officer in the Air Force may interfere with practice schedules, she made sure that she had an assistant coach as well.

“We had a blast!” said Walowsky. “We are looking forward to growing our team at Lees Corner and eventually starting a team at Franklin Middle School.”

Expanding the team certainly will not be a problem for Walowsky. After returning from her deployment to Iraq, so many girls signed up that the school is now adding a second team for the spring.

Like most GOTR coaches, Walowsky does much more than lead practices and plan snacks. She serves as a mentor and as a positive role model. By working with the girls, she is able to help both their confidence and their bodies grow stronger. Additionally, she helps them to be who they want to be.

“I remember the day one girl recognized that she was acting like a bully and never realized it before,” said Walowsky. “That was huge! She immediately changed her behavior and is happier for it.”

Then Walowsky was deployed to Iraq in 2010. Although she had very short notice, she was quick to make sure that her team was in good hands.

“When Lori called me...she [had] such a calm voice,” said Margaret D’Esposito, GOTR Program Manager. “[She added] ‘oh, and don’t worry about my GOTR team, I have already told my coaches and the team will continue on without me.’”

When Walowsky left for Iraq, she stayed in contact with her team. She ran at the same time and day as her team would as a promise to them. She even asked people to take pictures of her running to show to her team back home.

“I think they thought I was nuts, but it was fun!” said Walowsky. By keeping up with their training even though she was away, Walowsky also provided a good example of how to maintain GOTR values even when the program isn’t going on, something all of the girls can emulate.

Walowsky then decided to organize a race for the same day as the 5K in Northern Virginia. This called for a large amount of preparation. She needed to obtain water, snacks and medical support. Additionally she had to map out a course. Over 30 volunteers chipped in to make the event happen. John Braun, Chairman of the Board of Dynamis stepped up and generously offered to cover expenses for t-shirts. A “true ambassador” of the program, Walowsky used the race as an opportunity to get the word out about GOTR, especially its mission to help girls grow to be happy, independent women.

“So many servicemen walked away with great excitement and planned on getting involved in different ways once returning to the states,” said Walowsky. “It was inspiring!”

Hopefully, GOTR will soon expand overseas to help girls in different countries learn to set goals and build a strong sense of self. Though it currently spans across the United States, it is not ready for that leap just yet. By creating a Shadow Race, however, Walowsky made enormous progress in spreading the word.

“More than 600 people ran in Lori’s Shadow Race,” said D’Esposito. “Many of them have contacted family at home to see if GOTR was in their community and how their daughters, nieces, friends could be part of GOTR.” Whether expanding the program abroad, or working with the girls at Lees Corner, Walowsky is making a positive influence. Both the girls and fellow adults can look at Walowsky’s calm approach to obstacles, her sharp determination and her energy for inspiration.

“She embodies what Girls on the Run stands for,” said Washa.



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