

# Member Spotlight: Girls On the Run of Northern Virginia

BY EMILY SIMMONDS

Running a 5k isn't an easy task—it requires weeks of preparation, training and hard work. But thanks to Girls on the Run of Northern Virginia, a Fairfax-based nonprofit, thousands of girls from grades three through eight have crossed the finish line and learned valuable lessons in the process.

The mission of the organization is to help girls discover the importance of self-respect and healthy living. In each 10-week session, girls play fun and interactive games, train for the 5k run, and focus on important issues faced by all girls their age. The program curriculum, which is based on academic research, focuses on self-esteem, healthy living and how to work as a team, as well as building positive mental, emotional, social and physical development. These lessons are implemented into the training sessions each week by volunteer coaches (all head coaches are female) who serve as mentors and friends to the participants. Girls on the Run of Northern Virginia (GOTR) strives for each girl to realize that she is perfect just how she is.

**“The girls are the stars of the program, so as an organization we are focusing on providing to any girl.” –Catherine Keightley, Executive Director**

Since its beginning in 2001, the organization has greatly expanded to become available to more girls in more places. It began with two locations involving 27 girls, and now includes more than 200 locations and more than 3,200 girls in each session. This past spring, the 5k event included more than 7,000 participants. Executive Director Catherine Keightley cites such success as organic growth, which is a testament to the power of the program and how the community has embraced it.

Such expansion reflects the organization's focus on and commitment to its participants.

“The girls are the stars of the program, so as an organization we are focusing on providing to any girl,” said Keightley.

All girls are welcome to join the program and no one is turned away for financial reasons. Currently, GOTR of Northern Virginia provides financial assistance to 30 percent of its participants.

As an expanding nonprofit with a new executive director who has a business background (Keightley has led the organization for one year), Girls on the Run of Northern Virginia focuses on being a “benevolent business.” It focuses on creating a profit and putting it back into the organization. Keightley recom-

**continued on page 17**

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## **MAKING CONNECTIONS** from page 16

“The Center for Nonprofit Advancement partnered to host this forum because of our shared commitment to Prince George’s County communities and nonprofits,” said Center CEO Glen O’Gilvie. “We believe that good collaboration is critical to the success of our organization and appreciated modeling that collaboration for our members attending the forum.”

### **Sharing**

Throughout the year, Center members enjoyed opportunities to share their work and best practices in print, online and on TV with other nonprofit leaders, as well as the philanthropic, corporate and government sectors.

In partnership with the Public Access Corporation of the District of Columbia (DCTV), DCTV Focus, a dedicated television channel for nonprofit programming, shared Center member videos with more than 300,000 in the region on Comcast 96, RCN 11 and Verizon FiOS 28.

A production of the Center and DCTV, the weekly 30-minute show Connections shared issues, experts and strategies

## **MEMBER SPOTLIGHT** from page 10

mends that, in the midst of the current economy, all nonprofits should focus on leveraging as a business, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning and creating an infrastructure to manage growth.

A Center member since 2007, GOTR of Northern Virginia most recently utilized the Center’s CEO Leadership Series, which

## **NONPROFIT COMMUNITY** from page 5

dinating two studies on the diversity of nonprofit leadership in the Baltimore-Washington region. According to a 2010 study by the Urban Institute, 22 percent of nonprofits in the



to empower our community. Twelve new episodes in 2010 touched on a variety of nonprofit management issues and included such guests as Accenture Senior Executive Craig Faris, Urban Institute National

Center for Charitable Statistics Program Director Thomas H. Pollak, MMP Associates President Michela M. Perrone, Nonprofit Finance Fund Vice President for National Customized Services Rodney Christopher and George Mason University Professor Dr. Alan J. Abramson.

Electronic and social media helped the Center to share news from Center members with more than 2,500 e-mail subscribers; more than 1,300 Twitter followers; and nearly 300 Facebook fans. ☺

Keightley described as a valuable way to learn the nuances of the nonprofit world and network with other nonprofit professionals.

To learn more about Girls on the Run of Northern Virginia and how to get involved, visit [www.girlsontherunofnova.org](http://www.girlsontherunofnova.org). ☺

Baltimore-Washington region are led by a person of color. Regionally, 27 percent of nonprofit board members are people of color. ☺