



## Ottawa, Allegan counties Girls on the Run program offers wellness courses to students from 35 area schools

Posted by Erin Albanese | The Grand Rapids Press May 24, 2009 03:00AM

HOLLAND -- Harrington Elementary School's Girls on the Run team linked hands and danced in a circle to Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun."

Nearby, Allegan's Dawson Elementary School team got down to air guitar.

The sea of green T-shirt clad third- through fifth-grade girls, representing 35 schools, warmed up to Lauper and the Cha-Cha Slide on May 16 at Holland Municipal Stadium before running five kilometers through Holland.

The run was the finale of the 10-week Girls on the Run program, a national non-profit wellness program.

Rain didn't put a damper on the event, with spectators toting umbrellas and packing in to cheer on the 800 girls and 150 coaches.

"I have two words: It's awesome," said Chloe Kimber, a Quincy Elementary School third-grader, after running up and down a grassy hill with her friends just for fun prior to the 5k.

Girls on the Run of Ottawa & Allegan Counties has grown from 200 girls in 2001 to 1,500, said Ashley Rea, council director and program coordinator.

Participating in the South Ottawa event were schools from Allegan, Fennville, Hamilton, Holland, Hopkins, Saugatuck, Wayland, West Ottawa and Zeeland. Schools participating in the North Ottawa run, May 17 in Grand Haven, included Allendale, Coopersville, Grand Haven, Hudsonville, Jenison and Spring Lake.

"This is the biggest season ever," Rea said.

Participating girls practiced two days a week for an hour and a half of running, lessons on life choices, confidence-building and friendship.

"It's such an amazing thing for girls this age especially to start working on these healthy habits at an early age," she said.

Vanderbilt Academy fourth-grader Kennedy Houtman said she enjoyed the experience.

"I've learned everyone runs at their own pace, and I've made a lot of friends," she said.

Quincy coach Tonya Kimber said it was delightful working with her group.

"It's been enlightening getting to know the girls and teaching them some of the things the kids have a hard time talking about," she said.

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