

## The Healthy Kids Series

# Ten Years and Still Growing: Healthy Kids Fun Run

| BY TAMI FARAM |

Ten years and still growing. The Marine Corps Marathon's Healthy Kids Fun Run has become a popular Northern Virginia event for children ages 6 to 13. The one-mile fun run, held in the Pentagon parking lot each October, offers kids from Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia and beyond the opportunity to run, play and learn more about physical fitness and overall well being. The Marine Corps Marathon has organized the Healthy Kids Fun Run since 1999 and holds the kids race the day before its marathon.

"For some kids, just participating in physical activity is a challenge," says Rick Nealis, Marine Corps Marathon Director. "The mission of the kids run is to inspire the next generation of runners and maybe excite a few parents as well."

### Catching the Running Bug

Last year's Healthy Kids Fun Run turnout was the biggest yet, with 3,000 participants.

"Running the Healthy Kids Fun Run is very fun," says 10-year-old James Groce of Greensboro, N.C. "I like the big rush of adrenaline you get when running it feels really cool."

Groce says he couldn't wait to return to school to tell his friends about the event.

"I would come in on Monday morning and tell my friends what I did at the race, and what my time was at the finish. It was very exciting." Groce's interest in running has developed quickly and he's begun competing in other running events with distances as long as half marathons. At the time of this article, Groce will have participated in a local ten miler, the Marine Corps Marathon 10K, the Cooper River Bridge 10K and in the Marine Corps Historic Half marathon – his longest distance to date.

Other Healthy Kids Fun Run participants also have caught the running bug.

"I ran the Healthy Kids Fun Run a couple of times," says Abi Albers of Leonardtown, MD.

Now 12 and running 10K events, Albers says the Healthy Kids Fun Run was the reason she got interested in running.

"It was the first time I had run in an event with other kids, and people on the sides were cheering us on and everyone was having fun running," she says. "It [the Healthy Kids Fun Run] was a very big motivator for me."

For 11-year-old D'erika Arboleda of Fairfax, VA, the Healthy Kids Fun Run provided an opportunity to set new goals.

"The first time I ran in the Healthy Kids Fun Run, I wanted to meet my goal of running a 10-minute mile," Arboleda says. Now as a three-year veteran of the Healthy Kids Fun Run, Arboleda continues to improve on her time by participating in "Girls on the Run," and other sports like soccer and basketball.

Registration for the 2009 Healthy Kids Fun Run opened in May on the Marine Corps Marathon's website at [www.marinemarathon.com](http://www.marinemarathon.com).

Kids who participate in the annual event are treated to a full day of activities. Every runner receives a finisher's medal. The young runners also receive commemorative T-shirts, goodie bags, healthy snacks and entry into Camp Miles – an interactive health and fitness festival created just for families.

Schools in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., bring hundreds of student runners to the race each year. To honor their efforts, the Marine Corps Marathon and FAMILY Magazine annually give awards to the top three schools with the greatest participation. In 2008, three schools from Fairfax County – Lynbrook Elementary, Eagle View Elementary and Hollin Meadows Science and Focus School - received the Healthy Schools Award.

Debra Lane, a Hollin Meadows parent of two girls, organized a running club at her school to



encourage students to keep active throughout the school year. As a result of her efforts, 178 students are involved in the school's running club. The Hollin Meadows running club has even made the Healthy Kids Fun Run the event that completes their fall running season.

"It's a great event that all of the kids really enjoy participating in, and it's a great chance for us to showcase our school spirit," she says.

In February and March 2008, Marine Corps Marathon staff, U.S. Marines stationed at Marine Corps Base Quantico and Fun Run mascots Miles and Molly presented each of the three top schools with the 2008 Healthy Schools Award.

In addition, to the Healthy Schools Award, each school also received a financial donation from FAMILY Magazine, and their students enjoyed exciting programs presented by Healthy Kids Fun Run partner, the National Children's Museum.

The 2009 Healthy Kids Fun Run, held on Saturday, October 24, in Arlington, VA, is expected to have even more school participation. Come be a part of the action and become a running family. **wFm**

Articles in the Healthy Kids Series are presented by the Marine Corps Marathon's Healthy Kids Fun Run. Learn more about the Healthy Kids Fun Run and other family-friendly running events at [www.marinemarathon.com](http://www.marinemarathon.com). Tami Faram is the Marine Corps Marathon's Community Relations Coordinator. No federal or Marine Corps endorsement is implied.

