

'Girls on the Run' teaches healthy living, self-respect

BY BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

As the parents of a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Versailles family physician Brian Smith and his wife, Laura, have become ardent supporters of Girls on the Run.

They want their own daughter to have a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle so they are supporting the nonprofit prevention program, which combines an upcoming 5K (3.1-mile) running event with healthy living education for young girls, third- through eighth-graders.

"I want to do everything I can do to help the program be a success so hopefully someday (our daughter Alexa) can participate in it," said Laura.

In addition to training for a race and being mentored, Girls on the Run participants attend a 12-week, after-school program where they learn healthy eating habits and how to resist the many negative influences that may affect their self-esteem.

"So it's teaching a whole person concept," said Laura. "It values not only the physical appearance, but every aspect of a person (by promoting) a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle."

As a family doctor, her husband encourages his patients — both young and old — to embrace healthy living. He hopes Versailles Family Medicine's sponsorship of Girls on the Run will open more eyes to the importance of exercise and living healthier.

Laura first learned about Girls on the Run when she and Brian still lived in Chicago. She ran in a race benefiting the program there, but did not know about its mission to educate and prepare young girls for a lifetime of healthy living.

"I was inspired to find out more after I watched all these girls cross

the finish line and saw the sense of accomplishment on their faces," said Laura. Having been a runner herself since elementary school, she was naturally drawn to Girls on the Run. But she did not have an opportunity to get involved until she and her husband moved to Central Kentucky.

"So I was really excited when I found out that they had just started a chapter in Lexington," said Laura, who serves on the local chapter's Girls on the Run race committee and hopes to become more involved in the coming years.

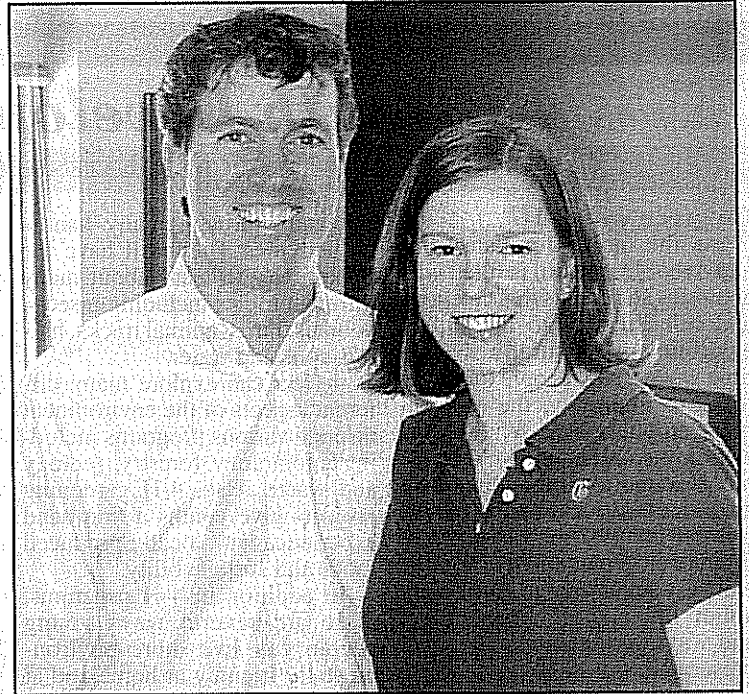
Only schools in Lexington are currently offering Girls on the Run programs, but young girls from neighboring counties may participate. Sixty-three girls participated in the chapter's spring session.

Girls on the Run's curriculum seeks to empower young girls living in a society where they are told that their value comes from their appearance and that they need to look and act like the celebrities they see on television and magazines.

"That's why I think Girls on the Run is such a great program because it helps the girls feel good about themselves and employs some of the tools to face all of the challenges that come during those preteen and teenage years," said Laura.

Central Kentucky's inaugural "Girls on the Run" 5K Race will be held at Coldstream Research Park in Lexington on Saturday, May 9, at 8:30 a.m. Program participants as well as supporters of the nonprofit organization are invited to run.

For additional information about Girls on the Run and the upcoming 5K Race access the local chapter's Web site (gotrlexington.org). Proceeds from the event (\$15 to participate and \$250 to sponsor the race) support the nonprofit prevention program.



DR. BRIAN SMITH and his wife, Laura, say having a young daughter of their own gives them one reason to support Girls on the Run. But their support has a much broader purpose. They know the program has the potential to help many other young children. Girls on the Run "helps the girls feel good about themselves and employs some of the tools to face all of the challenges that come during those preteen and teenage years," said Laura. (Photo by Bob Vlach)