

Triathlon raises money for St. John's Home

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Over 100 athletes gathered at Bostwick Lake in the early morning hours of June 28 to take part in the third annual Bostwick Lake Triathlon to benefit St. John's Home in Grand Rapids.

Starting at the southeast corner of the lake, participants swam for ½ mile, bicycled 14 miles and ran for 2.8 miles around the lakeshore.

When the last runner crossed the finish line, the event had raised about \$3,000.

Sara Maher, who orchestrated the event, said she was more than pleased with this year's turnout.

"Last year we had about 65 participants," Maher said. "This year we had 112, so it's grown quite a bit, especially considering this is just our third year doing it."

Maher said that next year's event will probably be limited to 100 participants, in order to keep the "small, welcoming feel" to the race.

"We want it to be welcoming to new triathletes," she said.

Maher, a member of a triathlete team, came up with the idea for the benefit event after talking to a friend and fellow runner about St. John's Home a few years ago. St. John's Home serves the area as a sort of way station for abused and neglected children awaiting placement in a foster home.

"After meeting with the people at St. John's, I knew I wanted to do something to help," Maher said. "Some of the stories the kids there could tell you really break your heart. The people at St. John's are doing a great mission in the community."

Maher planned the first and subsequent events with the help of friends Greta Huizenga and Rudy Malmquist. Working with other community members, the three lined up event sponsors Gazelle Sports, Chiron's Sports, Old Orchard, Heeren Brothers and the Bostwick Lake Bakery, among others.

"They've been really supportive," Maher said. "Between our sponsors, the triathletes' sponsors and the registration fee, all the money goes right to St. John's."

St. John's administrators use the additional funding to pay for youth camps, wilderness hikes and other outings to help build interpersonal skills and foster cooperation between residents there.

Following the adult triathlon, a second event is held just for children.

"The kids' triathlon is free and all the kids get a medal," Maher said. "It makes it more of a family friendly event."

As the event has grown in popularity, athletes from across the country--some from as far away as Colorado--have taken part.

"We had some people coming in from out of state who planned their family vacations around the triathlon," Maher said. "It's great."

With participation next year likely limited to 100 athletes, Maher is encouraging early registration. More information about the triathlon is available online at www.bostwicklaketri.com or by calling Maher at (616) 821-9862.

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