



Corbell PTA's Wild Walk Fundraiser Cultivates Community

By Michelle Cassano

When Corbell Elementary's newly formed PTA faced the challenge of implementing a fundraiser to get the school off to a great start, the new board chose to focus its efforts on a single fundraiser, rather than a series of smaller ones. Corbell's Wild Walk fundraiser promotes healthy competition and healthy lifestyles for a worthy cause.

When Corbell Elementary opened its doors in 2006 in Frisco, Texas, its newly formed PTA faced the challenge of implementing a productive fundraiser to get the school off to a great start. The new board chose to focus its efforts on a single fundraiser, rather than a series of smaller ones. They wanted to avoid having our children selling any kind of product, but still wanted to make the students an integral part of the event. A Corbell mom came to the board with the idea of hosting a fun run whereby the students obtain flat-fee or per-lap pledges from friends and family, then participate in a festive event full of running, walking, and school spirit. Our fun run was named the Wild Walk, as the school theme that first year was "Wild About Learning." School themes have changed over the years, but the name "Wild Walk" stuck!

Signing up sponsors

Instead of hiring a company to stage the event, which could have reduced the amount of money raised for the school by as much as 50 percent, Corbell PTA decided to tackle this event on our own. The board's goal was to solicit sponsorships from businesses in our community to offset the cost of this event. In this way, we ensure that every penny raised by the students stays at Corbell.

For their donation, each sponsor gets its logo on the official Wild Walk t-shirts and on a banner that hangs in front of our school for about six weeks. Sponsors also receive a full-page ad in the school directory and an item in the goody bags that go out to every student and teacher. One of the best perks of being a Wild Walk sponsor is the opportunity to come to the event and act as an official starter of one of our races; each grade has a separate race.

Publicizing the event

To get everyone ready and excited for the Wild Walk, the PTA holds an assembly about two weeks before the event. We explain to the students how the Wild Walk works, why we do this every year, and what we are trying to purchase for the school. The Wild Walk chair walks the students through the process of getting pledges. In addition, because the Wild Walk is such a community event, we invite Frisco city council members and Frisco Independent School District board members to speak at the assembly. The mayor of Frisco loves the event so much that he shows up on the big day, says some encouraging words to the children, and starts one of our races.



Race day

The day before the Wild Walk, PTA volunteers hand out goody bags and the official Wild Walk t-shirts to every student. On the day of the event, more volunteers begin the set-up process shortly after sunrise. They erect tents, fly flags, inflate balloons, take care of other details, and eagerly wait for the crowds to arrive. Each grade comes marching out to music as parents, friends, and volunteers hold up signs, blow horns, wave pom poms, and scream encouraging words. Our veteran emcee, a Corbell mom who dresses up according to our theme, explains the rules, and then our coaches lead the participants in warm-up exercises. With a countdown of “ready, set, go,” the kids are off!

For 25 minutes, they run or walk as many laps as they can in front of our school. We provide water and first-aid stations, and play energetic music to keep the participants motivated. Volunteers stand at the starting line and mark a sticker on the back of each participant’s shirt to track every lap that is completed. The PTA conducts the Wild Walk on a level, concrete surface so that Corbell’s special education classes are able to participate in the fundraiser and be a part of our fun day outside. It is very special to see our students in wheelchairs receiving cheers and high-fives from classmates as they complete their laps. It’s not just students who run, either. Teachers, staff members, and parents put in their laps, too, just for the fun of it.

Collecting pledges and celebrating

Yes, it’s a fun run, but there is definitely lots of healthy competition going on among students and teachers. We allow the students about two weeks after the event to collect their pledge money, and then we have a final assembly to announce our grand total and our prize winners. Every year we change up the prize categories, and award everything from the most laps run per grade to the most money brought in by a student. We also bestow the coveted Golden Shoe Award to the boy and girl who ran the most laps overall. Classes are awarded a popcorn party for 100 percent participation, and the class that brings in the most money gets to sit anywhere they want during lunch. Every child who brings in money gets a prize, which is donated by businesses or purchased with sponsor money.

Last year we raised more money per child than we ever have and were able to purchase a much-needed sunshade to cover our playground. Every year, our students look forward to the day and enjoy spending it outside while raising money for their school. I can’t imagine doing anything else as a fundraiser.

Michelle Cassano is president of Corbell Elementary PTA, Frisco, Texas.