

FREE

November/December 2012

New Mexico Kids!

Vol. 21 No. 6

Family Magazine™



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Running Kids!

Run a Mile In Their Shoes

By **CRISTINA OLDS**

Running is one of the most accessible and satisfying sports, while also presenting kids with physical and mental challenges. With simply a pair of kicks and a desire to propel one's body forward — or maybe an inability to be still in one place — people of all ages are grooving on running.

Besides track and cross country teams in the schools, several youth club teams train and compete in New Mexico. And taking it a step further, a few programs present running as a vehicle for youth to become leaders and role models, breaking the chain of obesity and stereotypes.

Wings of America, based in Santa Fe, uses running to teach self-esteem, healthy living and leadership to American Indian youth ages 14 to 19 through training, competition and clinics. In a recent conversation with program director Dustin Quinn Martin, he discussed some benefits of the sport. "The organization (Wings) looks for the best native runners in the country," he said. "They get to travel and to meet their competitors, including college freshmen." Martin credits his own experience as



In 2005 at age 16, Dustin Martin leads the pack but finished second) during an Arizona vs. New Mexico "Border Wars" meet at Albuquerque Academy. Courtesy photo.

a high schooler running for Wings with getting him noticed by college cross country recruiters. "That put me on the radar, and I wouldn't necessarily have had the opportunity to go to Columbia (University) without that recognition."

Martin, now 23, participated in Wings' fitness camps and facilitator training as a youngster. This year the program's 14 camps expanded to include Oklahoma native youth leaders, and the activities included running, stretching, native-tailored field and ball games and nutrition and social responsibility workshops. This September, Wings runners participated in the Global Footprint Youth Relay at Buffalo Thunder Resort, a free event that included a request to participants to "reaffirm their commitment to a healthy body, mind and spirit by working together to complete a 1.5 hour long relay in three teams."

Martin's mother is an avid runner and cross country coach in Albuquerque. Martin says she modeled many benefits the life-long sport of running offers, such as providing discipline and instilling goals. "I had it better than a lot of kids I work with," he said. "Running gave me something to focus on while my parents were going through a divorce and we moved." Furthermore, he said he knew he had to keep his



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Second-grader Edgar Lopez logs more miles at Eubank Elementary School. Courtesy photo.

grades up to stay eligible to run. During the years he raced with the Albuquerque Academy — which he attended with a scholarship — the team won state titles.

"My job here is to give kids the same opportunities so they don't have to think about anything other than running," he said, with Wings paying for kids' travel, finding grants for shoes and offering hands-on support.

"Talking about race strategy," Martin of Wings said, "my lesson is what my mom always told me: it's OK to hurt ... and realize there's so much joy in pushing yourself and testing your limits. That's maybe something our youth don't have instilled in them as much as they should."

The Mighty Milers, a national fitness program started by the non-profit New York Road Runners, targets children in kindergarten through eighth grade at risk for obesity. PE teacher Kathy Anderson brought the regime to Eubank Elementary School in Albuquerque last year, encouraging about 50 kids to run daily, with a goal of reaching a "marathon of miles."

"Running is easy for me now," said Walter Armijo, now a fifth grader. "I don't get as tired as I used to, and it made me happy that I was the first one to get the medal out of the whole school."

Second grader Edgar Lopez said running "makes me strong and healthy and helps me break sticks." Then he took off for a quick lap around the gym.

There was some debate whether Walter or Edgar was first to surpass the 26.2 mile goal, as Edgar said he'd had a dream where he, Walter and Walter's twin brother, Jesse, all won together.

"Just the feeling of running is fun," Jesse said. "And seeing if you were faster than anybody else."

"But your lungs hurt," Walter added. After his race, he said he was sore everywhere. "I never ran three miles in one day before."

Runners will tell you straight up: running hurts. But they push through the pain and the glory is great. Emily and Isabella Schrader race with the **Cougar Track Club** team in west Albuquerque that their parents help coach with Shane Cleveland.

"It feels like you're testing yourself. I really like it," 8-year-old third-grader Emily said. "It's like your brain will be telling you to stop but you can't stop because then you'll lose." One technique she uses for overcoming the agony is thinking about how happy she'll be when she's finished.

Emily's sister, 10-year-old fifth-grader Isabella was inspired to start running because her little sis and her mom were running. "I saw Emily win a ribbon and said, 'I could do that, too,'" Isabella said. After about three years of running, Isabella says she's pretty good at the 1,500-meter and 3,000-meter competitions.

"I don't think I'm that fast, but I can keep a good pace for a long time," she said. "I just like being able to go out there and run with friends cheering for me." When asked if it was all about fun, friends and winning medals, Isabella said, "Sometimes you just want to sit down and not finish. You have to tell yourself to push through the pain. Coach says pain is weakness leaving the body."

The Cougars and other club teams will send their qualifying runners to the USA Track and Field National Junior Olympic Cross Country Championships on Dec. 8 being held this year at Albuquerque's Balloon Fiesta Park. About 3,000 kids are expected to participate.



Isabella Schrader's mom/coach Elena cheers her daughter on during a 3K race at a cross country meet in Cuba, N.M. Courtesy photo.

Pictures of Hope

Photographer Brings Cameras to N.M. Homeless Children

By **CRISTINA OLDS**

"We were living in a car," Josette said, speaking about her 8-year-old son, Reynaldo, 10-year-old daughter, Jerrae, and herself. "I'd never been homeless before." Josette talked about her life recently as Reynaldo snapped a picture of his friend with a camera he'd just been given as part of "Pictures of Hope," a program for homeless children started by nationally acclaimed photojournalist Linda Solomon. While sharing her love of photography, she aims to show the kids one way to visualize their dreams. "Photography is something we can all do," Solomon said. "It encourages children to express their feelings, which is sometimes difficult verbally and easier accomplished through photography."



Rey checks out a photo he just snapped of Braison, in the ball cap, and Shawn with photojournalist Linda Solomon's digital camera. Photo by Cristina Olds.

Josette and her children are currently living at the Barrett House Shelter in northeast Albuquerque. The shelter provides meals, skills training and case management to help women live independently and lead productive lives.

Solomon chose Albuquerque's Barrett House as one of 12 locations across the United States to present her Pictures of Hope program. Her usual gigs include shooting movie stars strutting up the red carpet at the Oscar Awards.

On a recent day, Solomon handed her heavy digital camera with a zoom lens to several of the 17 kids – who practiced portraiture photography on their friends and moms – as she demonstrated some tips on taking pictures. The group viewed a slide show of other children using donated cameras and noted errors. "His finger is over the hole!" they shouted, and, "They're too close!"

The children then composed lists of hopes and dreams that they used as a base for photographing the concepts. "My hope is that all kids have shoes to wear," said Kami, reading from her list. "And how can we take a picture showing that dream?" Solomon asked the 12-year-old. Several of Kami's contemporaries pulled off their sneakers and sandals and Solomon helped them compose a still life on a corner of the table.

"My hope is to have a house for me and my mom," read another child from his list. After the presentation, the kids and some volunteer mentors headed outside to practice their new photojournalism skills across the city.

Ranging from big dreams ("I hope for world peace" and "I hope for the human race to be more positive and to express yourself freely without discrimination") to simpler ones ("I hope to walk outside and see kids playing" and "I hope to help my family"), many children simply said they dreamed of food, shelter and water for themselves and others.

A November celebration will showcase the young photographers' pictures at the local sponsor's dealership, Galles Chevrolet, and holiday cards featuring their images will be for sale with all proceeds supporting the Barrett House.

Living within the security of the Barrett Shelter, Josette said her kids were thriving now. "I hope that someday everyone's dreams come true," read Reynaldo, "even mine."



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