

active kids



Team M3, MGRF's Mentoring Marathon

By Christine Palmquist

It's Saturday morning at the lakefront. Some determined teenagers and their adult mentors have been bused in for their weekly long run. For many of these kids, these runs with Team M3 are their first chance to see Lake Michigan and meet Chicago's vibrant running community. "I met new people and new friends," says student and participant Adam. "Overall it has made me a better person who is determined to do better for myself and for others."

These runs may be this group's only chance for regular physical activity, yet all of these kids will attempt a half marathon and most of them will attempt the Bank of America Chicago Marathon.

In addition to the children's tremendous dedication, the key to this program is the fantastic effort that the program's mentors put forth. The mentors run with the kids during every practice and race. Some mentors are training for their first marathon as well. Training for a marathon is a tough challenge by itself without having to worry about guiding a teenager with you. For the more experienced mentors, this may be their thirtieth marathon, but it will likely be the most memorable. (A whole 80 percent of last year's mentors came back for another year.) "I did not know that kids could be so passionate about something," says mentor Teresa Gach. "I understand these students better now."

The program is headed by the Marilyn G. Rabb (MGR) Foundation to supply direct service to the community. "Truthfully, it kept me out of trouble," says Isela a high school sophomore. Three years ago, the program started with about 20 students and one school. This year, the program involves approxi-



mately 66 students and serves three schools — Carver Military Academy, Edwin G. Foreman and North-Grand high schools.

The students commit to running at least three days a week — one run on their own, one together at their schools and a long run Saturday at the Lakefront Path. At first, the program doesn't seem too difficult. "Adults fear the marathon distance, but kids don't in the beginning," says Team M3 Program Director Cathy Braund. "But after a couple of longer runs, they really start to listen. We teach them to set a goal and to accomplish it one step at a time. We break this training up into steps and build on what we did last week."

As the weeks and runs progress, the increasing challenge forges deep bonds between mentors and students. The mentors share information about their careers and hobbies with these kids, possibly helping them find a career path that inspires them. All of these valuable experiences and conversations lead to accomplishing Team M3's mission: "To change lives

and perspectives, inspiring both young runners and mentors alike."

The marathon finish line is the icing on the cake. "It was really fun, really challenging and something to feel proud of," says sophomore Danny.

Along with the MGR Foundation, Nike and other sponsors have stepped up to provide everything for the kids, including shoes, buses, training snacks, racing singlets and entry fees. Team M3 hopes to expand the program to at least 15 Chicago high schools by 2009.

For more information, visit m3.mgrf.org.