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Running in the Rain

Elementary students brave wet weather in annual Pyramid Challenge.

By [Tiffany Daniel](#)
Thursday, October 22, 2009

Running in the rain, what's better than that? Nearly 700 elementary school students ranging from kindergarten through sixth grade from the West Springfield High School Pyramid ran a cross-country race on Saturday Oct. 17 in the fourth annual Pyramid Challenge. Cardinal Forest, Hunt Valley, Keene Mill, Orange Hunt, Rolling Valley, Sangster and West Springfield elementary schools participated in the event at Washington Irving Middle School.

Kindergarten through third grade students ran a half-mile, while fourth through sixth graders ran a full mile. Bob Briggs and Peter Steinberg started this idea in 2006 while running on the field at Irving Middle. At the time, Steinberg was PTA president at Keene Mill Elementary School.

"We're running buddies, and we decided that this spot would be amazing for a cross-country race, and I like cross country," Briggs said, a T-shirt printer. Although Briggs and Steinberg no longer have elementary-age children, they continue to put on and largely underwrite the event, which also receives support from The West Springfield Community Coalition for Safe and Drug-free Kids, Metro Run & Walk, local PTAs, Wegmans and a platoon of volunteers.

Participants did not have to pay an entry fee but had to bring four cans for the Food for Others, a local food bank. Each student who attended received a color T-shirt to represent their school in the race. Each school received points based on participation and the fastest finishers. The Pyramid Cup, a traveling trophy, was awarded to the winning school. Metro Run & Walk supplied students with numbers to wear as they ran, and food and hot chocolate were being sold outside of the registration.

For the fourth year in a row, Rolling Valley won the Pyramid Cup. "Each year, Rolling Valley has won because their gym teachers are really into the idea of it, and they have a big student population," Briggs said.

A remarkable 237 of Rolling Valley's 552 students (43 percent) showed up to run in the rain this year. Joshua Travan (first place, kindergarten boy), Lizzie Dickens (first place, first grade girl), Julia Vaughn and Kelsey Simmons (second and fourth place, 4-6 girls), and Rodrigo Aviles (third place, 4-6 boys) also added nine place points to Rolling Valley's commanding 52-point victory.

Anna Kyle of Orange Hunt won the 4-6 girls 1-mile race in 7:04, and Robert Perkins of Keene Mill won the 4-6 boys mile race in 6:31. Their names will be engraved on the Pyramid Challenge plaque that hangs at Irving Middle School. The traveling Pyramid Challenge trophy will remain at Rolling Valley for another year.

Runners in the kindergarten through third grade race were led around the track by runner Samia Akbar, a member of the USA National Track & Field Team. "I run distance, so I'm used to this kind of weather, and I love doing anything to help people, and especially children," said Akbar. "I'd like to get them interested in running distance, as opposed to sprints. If I did it today, I'd do it any day."

Despite the rainy weather, 1,000 children registered for the event and 662 of them showed up. "We had three perfect years, and this would be our fourth, the rain kind of makes it bad, but we're still here," Briggs said.

The rain didn't stop many of the children and their parents from coming out to run either. "We had about 150 students from Cardinal Forest show up, and around 10 of my students, the best part is seeing their faces grinning when they finish, and seeing how proud they are of themselves," said Marcia Bassler, first grade teacher at Cardinal Forest.

Parents crowded the sidelines to support their children as they came in through the finishing stretch.

"I think it's a good event because it brings everyone together but it's still wet and cold," said Helen Mayberry whose two children attend Rolling Valley.

The runners weren't the only ones who benefited from the race, Food For Others collected 2,237 pounds of food.

"I think it's a fantastic event because of the recession and at a time where people just don't have enough food, people come together to help them out," said Don Wallace, Food For Others board chairman.



Photo by [Allen Brandt](#)
Samia Akbar, a member of the USA National Track & Field Team, leads the first grade start.



Photo by [Allen Brandt](#)
Anna Kyle of Orange Hunt won the 4-6 girls 1-mile race in 7:04.



Photo by [Allen Brandt](#)
Kindergartners race around the track during the Oct. 17 Pyramid Challenge.



Photo by [Allen Brandt](#)
Robert Perkins of Keene Mill won the 4-6 boys 1-mile race in 6:31.



Photo by [Tiffany Daniel](#)
Two runners race across the mud at Washington Irving Middle School Saturday morning, Oct. 17.

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