

Guest view: Breaking records to empower women

By Carol Holzgrafe

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Sunnyvale's Ann Marie Cody continues on her Guinness Book of World Record pace during Sunday's 36th annual Wildflower Run. Cody was crowned the "Fastest 10K Pushing a Triple Pram (Female)" titleholder with a time of 47:10. Photo by Susan Brazelton

It took 36 years for AAUW's Wildflower Run to make it into the Guinness Book of Records. Ann Marie Cody made it happen.

Cody is a NASA astronomer, mother of triplets, and already a Guinness World Record holder for the "fastest marathon pushing a triple pram (female)." But she had yet to break the same record for the 10K distance. To do so, she had to find the right course and organization because, for Cody, the runs are also a chance to fundraise for a good cause. Enter AAUW Morgan Hill and their famous run.

“With its flat, USATF-certified course, the Wildflower 10K is the perfect place to get that personal record. I shaved nearly two minutes off mine... with a triple stroller,” Cody said later. “While the Wildflower Run does live up to its name—it’s a beautiful country route—don’t mistake this race for a frolic in the fields. It is a seriously fast course.”

Almost unique among AAUW branches nationwide, Morgan Hill’s 10K/5K/2K Run is the organization’s only fundraiser. It earns enough to support eight scholarships to send local eighth-graders to the Tech Trek STEM camp for girls and several college scholarships for young women. It provides Community Action grants and a Leadership Morgan Hill scholarship and funds other leadership programs; and it’s always in the top 10 in California for donating to AAUW’s national fund providing fellowships and grants for graduate women—all the while keeping a small, family-friendly focus.

Compared to other local fundraisers that continue for days, the 2019 Wildflower Run raised about \$60,000 in three short hours. Cody’s Guinness efforts added more than \$1,000 to that amount.

“The generosity of the Morgan Hill community has enabled us to add annually to our fundraising with corporate sponsorships and individual donations,” said Elizabeth Mandel, a former run director.

Of course, preparation is everything, and the run committee plans for months. With a ready-made and experienced workforce—every member is expected to do something to help—most runs go off smoothly. Many scholarship winners and past and present Tech Trek girls also help out on race day.

Starting in 1984 with 235 runners, the Wildflower Run has expanded every year, reaching as many as 1,250 runners and walkers. Since that first race, the run added a 5K run/walk, a 2K for kids and another for seniors, plus another 5K for toddlers in strollers (and a hard-running parent).

The original route, through Paradise Valley and the hills, was interrupted one year when a neighbor brandished a rifle. He didn’t like so much Sunday morning company. Since that time, the events begin and end at Live Oak High School, with some on the track and others on scenic back roads. No one even seems to mind the entertainment on the route, which includes Morgan Hill Taiko.

Thanks to AAUW Morgan Hill’s members, local business sponsors, and our runners—especially the accomplished and committed Ann Marie Cody—our community, near and far, will enjoy the benefits of this year’s successful event.

Carol Holzgrafe lived in Morgan Hill for 18 years and was the city reporter for the Morgan Hill Times for five. She now lives in Butte County. For more information about the AAUW Morgan Hill chapter, visit aauwmh.org.