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Run for the Arts draws sizable crowd to Crystal Lake

CRYSTAL LAKE – The 15th annual Bob Blazier Run for the Arts brought a near-record number of racers to downtown Crystal Lake on Sunday.

Organizers estimated that more than 450 people took part in the 5-kilometer race and 1-mile walk, which raises money for the nonprofit Raue Center for the Arts.

Groups large and small brought scores of participants. Eisenmann Corp., an international company based in Crystal Lake, had a team of 48. Other organizations such as Girls on the Run of Northwest Illinois, a nonprofit prevention program for girls, fielded smaller teams.

The results of the communitywide effort pushed the fundraiser past its goal of \$25,000 to about \$26,200, said Richard Kuranda, the Raue Center's executive director.

In light of the recent recession, the strong turnout and donations were a positive sign for the Raue Center.

"It was better than the last couple of years," Kuranda said. "We're really thrilled with the community involvement."

Runners got to enjoy the course, which begins at the Raue Center and runs through the older parts of Crystal Lake, on a nearly perfect spring morning.

A thunderstorm drenched much of McHenry County after the race, forcing the cancellation of other events, including opening day for the Challenger Little League baseball program in Woodstock.

In its early years, the race was held at a local park. It was later moved to the Raue Center and follows a course known to generations of Crystal Lake residents. Mayor Aaron Shepley ran the course for a morning workout when he was in high school and helped get the course measured and certified for the Run for the Arts.

The 5-kilometer race was named for longtime arts supporter Bob Blazier. Sixteen years ago, when the Crystal Lake Chamber of Commerce wanted to create a race for Blazier, it let him pick the charity the race would benefit. He picked the Raue, which was just getting started at the time. The event also included Rosie's Walk, a 1-mile walk named for Blazier's wife.

"It was great to see the community support this," Blazier said Sunday afternoon. "I'm very proud of what has taken place at the Raue over the last 15 years."

All proceeds from the event go to Raue Center programs such as Williams Street Repertory, its in-house production company; Mission Imagination, an educational performing arts program for children; and Sage Studio, which offers theater, film, and improvisation classes.

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