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The Amazing Race, Lafayette-Style

By Cathy Tyson



Contestants ready for adventure on the first LPIE Amazing Race. Photo Warren Lane

in this case Lafayette, and complete unusual tasks; when each task is completed, teams get their next clue and so on to the finish line. Thanks to the deep pockets of network television - winners crossing the line first on TV receive \$1 million. In Lafayette, winners - spoiler alert, mentioned at the end of this story - get to "enjoy the glory of it all," says one of the organizers, Suzy Pak, and of course bragging rights.

Gundacker spelled out the information teams received in each envelope, route information, detours the team had to participate in and road blocks which are only done by one team member. Conveniently there were four road blocks, one per team member. Similar to the television show, despite specific instructions, some folks neglected to fully grasp what was being requested and had to repeat portions of a challenge or take a time penalty.

Teams with names like "What Was I Thinking?" and "Let's Get it Done" paid to play with all the proceeds benefitting LPIE. Teams that were completely stuck could phone an organizer who would sell them a clue for an additional \$50 donation to LPIE.

The Amazing Race fundraiser event started out four years ago at Springhill Elementary School, growing in popularity, and this year spreading to include all Lafayette schools. Organizers spent months planning, carefully wording instructions and rustling up support from generous merchants. LPIE is run by parent volunteers to expand educational opportunities for students from kindergarten through senior year at Acalanes. The educational foundation consistently supports and enriches the education of kids in Lafayette with funds going to science, math, music, art, technology, foreign language and more. Some residents may be more familiar with the group's prior name, LASF or Lafayette Art and Science Foundation which changed in 2010 to LPIE.

Once T-shirts were found, competitors had to complete a three-legged style walk (actually five-legged walk) that linked all four team members around the track, with the T-shirts tied around ankles - definitely a learning curve there - then on to kick field goals, apparently a job many middle-aged parents weren't familiar with. At this point, team teal T-shirt was off to an early lead.

In what turned out to be a very full afternoon, teams had tasks all over town; one task cleverly had them look for a message somewhere on Golden Gate Way. Participants literally had to look up the answer, as it was posted on the Park Theater marquee that read, "Have you made time to paint today," which could mean any number of things - heading to a paint store, perhaps.

With a can-do attitude, comfortable sneakers, smartphones and a list of supplies that included water, a first aid kit, a football and a variety of crazy items just to throw off participants, 32 brave souls, eight teams of four people each, got started on the Amazing Race, a fundraiser for the Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE). As contestants were poised and ready to run, the race officially began with a welcome and review of specific instructions by Mark Gundacker at the Acalanes High School flag pole. What followed was a chaotic search for the first clue, leading participants on a mad dash to find four T-shirts of the same color to designate their team. However, there were a total of 32 shirts spread out randomly and hidden all over the Acalanes High School football stadium - a not so subtle heads-up about the remainder of the event.

The premise of both the TV show and the fundraiser is for teams to race around the world, or

Actually, teams were meant to head to the shop Color Me Mine to paint a tile.

While taking a break to enjoy an adult beverage would have been refreshing, the teams labored on at The Cooperage. The newish restaurant donated all the booze and ingredients to whip up one of their signature gin and tonic cocktails, which includes flowers, mint and fruit. Teams had to make a "perfect" - or nearly perfect - LPIE G&T. "We're putting them right to work," said co-owner Merilee McCormick. The drink was checked, and if it didn't pass muster, teams had to try again.

Another brainy task includes completing bingo - yes, the classic game - but in Mandarin at Stanley Middle School. A word was given out in English, which a team member had to look up in a Mandarin/English dictionary and see if it was on their particular bingo card. While at the school, different team members had to complete an art and a science project. LPIE helps fund Mandarin language class as well as some of the art and science offerings at the school.

Rolling in exhausted for dinner at Mangia restaurant, the winning team - which included Liz and Zach Radding, and Lisa and Gary Roth - all had to jump on the official Amazing Race mat to win.



Bit of a learning curve on the five-legged walk around the Acalanes High School track.



On the El Curtola Bridge, participants had to find the next clue with binoculars; it was at the Vespa dealership. Photos Warren Lane

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