

Race promotes social diversity, equality

YWCA of Knoxville holds event to start movement

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Staff Writer

As over 300 runners took off from the starting line Saturday afternoon at the YWCA Phyllis Wheatley Center, all knew that what they were participating in was so much more than just a race. They were starting a movement.

YWCA Knoxville held its annual Race Against Racism Jan. 14, advocating the spread of diversity and the fight against racism throughout Knoxville and beyond.

Hundreds of men, women and children from various ages and ethnic backgrounds joined together at the Phyllis Wheatley Center in East Knoxville to participate in the event that for over 15 years has raised awareness for the racism still prominent in today's society.

"This is a record-breaking turnout," Race Against Racism co-chair Janet Jungclaus said Saturday. "We are absolutely thrilled. We lost a major group that historically gave us usually about a hundred racers, and we lost them this year, and we are still over what we did last year. So we are absolutely thrilled ... I think this says a lot about the community and their support of the YWCA."

In addition to holding a 5K race for the more competitive runners, the YWCA also offered a one-mile walk for the race's older participants and for those with infants.

"We are thrilled this year that we are having strollers and that the younger ones are joining us and starting to learn about this fight against racism, this awareness against racism," Jungclaus said.

The race also proved to be a very popular family and organizational event.

The Thompson family, consisting of wife Marlene, husband Tim, daughter Lauren and son Aaron, were all present to support the cause.

"This is the first time (Tim) has run this race ... TVA actually provided a team and wanted people to run," Marlene said. "And we believe in fighting against racism."

Roberta Brock and her family were also eager to participate in the race, not only as a devoted running family, but as an advocate of combating racism.

"This is the first time we've run this race," Brock said. "I think it's a good thing for kids to learn, especially with Martin Luther King (Day) coming up Monday."

A silent auction, a group performance by community choir Praise, Honor and Glory and a Zumba pre-race warm up routine were also available to all participants.

John Johnson, another Praise, Honor and Glory member who has repeatedly performed at the event, also commented on the significance of the cause.

"(It's important) because it still exists — racism," Johnson said. "And I think it helps bring more awareness."

The sunny, clear-skied atmosphere on race day was reflected further by the camaraderie among the runners. No matter the size, gender, age or ethnicity of any individual runner, everyone cheered each other on as fervently as the next person, knowing that they moved for so much more than just themselves.

Twenty-five teams participated in the race this year, as well as quite a few UT teams — including LGBT and Vols

Against Racism.

Joel Kramer of LGBT emphasized the importance of other groups joining the fight against racism.

"Well, I think it's important that different groups that are oppressed and different minority groups all work together for the same goals," Kramer said. "So when one group has an event, it's important for other groups to come out and show support and to see that support reciprocated."

Co-workers Ken Brown and Dave Asmaus from the UT-Battelle National Laboratory also saw an opportunity to become a part of a cause bigger than themselves.

"I saw an opportunity to participate in a community event that sends a strong message," Brown said. "Never going to solve the problem if people don't portray or have an effort, or participate in efforts to solve the problem. People who don't want to change got to see that as a movement for people who want to change. So I just want to be a part of that change vehicle. Always have been, always will be."

Asmaus also expressed his enthusiasm for the race's message.

"It's a great cause and community awareness of the issue," Asmaus said. "It's a huge problem in this country. People don't pay enough attention to it or do enough about it. Ken and I are co-workers. He said, 'Let's go do it,' so we're here."

Young and old alike, the hundreds of runners who participated in Saturday's race were joined together by three common goals — to combat racism, to spread equality and to inspire change.



Tara Sripunvoraskul • The Daily Beacon

Participants run through Circle Park during a race Saturday, Nov. 12. The YWCA hosted Race Against Racism, which drew over 300 runners on Saturday, Jan. 14, helping to raise both money for many YWCA programs and awareness of the ongoing issue of racism in the community.

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