

Wichita Realtors Give Back to Medical Non-Profit

Three-year-old Corbin Morris doesn't chat like other kids his age, but the fundraising efforts he has unknowingly inspired for children with communication deficiencies are speaking loud and clear.

Corbin has an unknown condition that slowed his physical development, including his walking and talking. But the quest for a cure—and the quest for better health—led his grandfather and parents to take up the cause of all kids with communications challenges.

"I was looking at Christmas pictures of Corbin and myself from a year ago," says Dave Neal, Corbin's grandfather and an agent at the Wichita East market center. "I was frightened by what I saw—a picture of me at age 54 weighing 240 pounds. I decided to make a complete lifestyle change—not just a diet—so I started running."

When Neal started running, he couldn't go one step further than a city block. But a determined Neal kept pressing on. Eventually, he started running in local competitions with his daughter Shawna Morris and son-in-law Buck, also a Keller Williams realtor. Now, Neal is down to his high school football weight of 177 pounds. But the weight loss victory lead to a new challenge: running for kids like Corbin.

"I started thinking about the financial need of ERIN IS HOPE, the non-profit clinic that has helped Corbin so much. They take anybody, regardless of their ability to pay," Neal says. "So we decided to put on an upscale running event on the waterfront to raise money for the ERIN IS HOPE Foundation."

Neal and the Morrises worked to build a base of corporate sponsors to offset the event expenses. Dave Neal and

Associates took the lead corporate sponsorship, then the trio started marketing the 8k competitive run with a web site, posters, brochures, and handouts.

Neal garnered support from waterfront restaurants like PF Chang, as well as his real estate connections. The corporate sponsorships raised \$10,000, which covered the expenses of holding the first annual charity run. For an entry fee of \$35, participants joined the run and later enjoyed dinner on the waterfront, live music from a local band, and emceeing from Wichita's most popular DJ.

"We only had 60 days to pull this together. But we hosted 519 runners—and the overall winner is trying out for our U.S. Olympic team now," Neal beams. "We had approximately 1,000 people attend the dinner. And we raised more than \$16,000 for the ERIN IS HOPE Foundation, while also raising awareness of the non-profit in our community."

Shawna served as the campaign coordinator for the event. She felt raising funds for ERIN IS HOPE was the least she could do after the therapists there invested so much in Corbin. With dated equipment and compassionate hearts that are unwilling to turn any child away, the non-profit was in sore need of financial support. ERIN IS HOPE used the money in a scholarship fund to provide services to families that can't afford treatment.

"There are so many kids who came to ERIN IS HOPE with no ability to say a word—and today they are off in college doing wonderful things," Shawna says. "Because of our event, the parents of non-verbal kids that need therapy became aware of ERIN IS HOPE and are getting help for their kids."