

'Kortney's Challenge' raises money for kid's playground, brain tumor research

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OCEANPORT — It was a different kind of pet parade.

These animals weren't on leashes.

They were being carried, many of them by friends of Kortney Rose Gillette.

Many of the animals were Kortney's own beloved stuffed animals, given away to her friends after the 9-year-old's death in April as a result of a brain tumor.

Leading the parade Saturday was Kortney's mother, Kristen, carrying Kortney's Build-A-Bear monkey.

Kortney loved animals, real and stuffed, said her mother. She also loved to play, especially on the swings at the playground at Wolf Hill School, where she was a third-grader.

So, accompanying the pet parade Saturday at Blackberry Bay Park was a 2-mile walk-run to raise money for new playground equipment at Wolf Hill School. The event was called Kortney's Challenge.

"Kortney loved to play and she loved to swing," Kristen Gillette said.

But at the school playground, there aren't enough swings for all of the children, so they must wait in line, sometimes until their recess period is over, Gillette said.

And, she said, some of the play equipment was vandalized



Participants take off at the start of Kortney's Challenge, a 2-mile fun run in honor of Kortney Rose Gillette, who died in April from a brain tumor at the age of 9.

(STAFF PHOTO:
BRADLEY J.
PENNER)

recently.

"We're going to solve that problem," by raising money in Kortney's name to purchase new swings, Gillette said.

"She'll be remembered by all of her friends who played with her at the playground," she said.

Saturday's walk-run was the kickoff for the Kortney Rose Foundation and the first of what Kristen Gillette hopes will be an annual event. The girl's mother said she needs to raise about \$20,000 for the playground equipment. Once that goal is met, proceeds to the foundation will benefit pediatric brain tumor research, Kristen Gillette said.

A fundraising dinner will be planned for March, she said.

The girl's mother said proceeds from registration fees for Saturday's event have not yet been totaled, but participation was higher than expected.

"It was so much more successful than we anticipated," Gillette said. "We thought we'd be lucky to get 200 (people participating). We got 511."

That number included 161 who registered at the last minute, she said. That could have had something to do with the weather. With the exception of a strong gust of wind at the start of the event, the weather was picture-perfect. Kristen Gillette expected no different.

"Kortney is our weather angel, so we had no doubt," she said.