

QUICK TAKES

Fundraiser for Chessie's BIG Backyard Leads to Children's Challenge

From the first time he saw the Tiki Village play area at Chessie's BIG Backyard, Rohil Bhinge was impressed. The fully accessible family recreation area at Lee District Park is being built in phases as funding becomes available, and Rohil, an active runner, loved the idea of having a place where children with and without disabilities could play together.

"Children with disabilities don't really get a chance to participate in things, and that's why I found this park really special," said the 9-year-old honor student from Fairfax Villa Elementary School. "I saw they (the Fairfax County Park Foundation) needed \$1 million, and I thought maybe I can make a fun run and raise money for the park and encourage kids to be really fit."

Rohil started with a hand-written business plan detailing where the event would be, how to collect donations and whom to invite. He started making lists of things to do and recruited his 7-year-old brother, Samik, his mother, Meena, and his father, Deepak, to help get the word out to friends, neighbors, running club members, fellow students at his school and VIPs, including U.S. President Barack Obama, U.S. Sen. Mark Warner and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova.

"I get a lot of letters and a lot of e-mails, but the best one I think I've ever gotten was from Rohil," said Bulova, who participated in the fun run and praised Rohil, Samik and their friends for their fundraising efforts. "It was hand-written, and I was very impressed. A lot of people talk about things, but not that many people actually follow through to do something about it, and I congratulate you."

Like any good CEO, Rohil used his connections to recruit expert help to support

Rohil and former Olympian Moise Joseph motivate the runners.



Rohil Bhinge



Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova congratulates Rohil for his efforts.



Rohil rallies his friends.



Rohil's brother, Samik, helped make the fun run a success.

the fitness goal of his fun run. Who better to lead the warm-up exercises than one of his running club coaches, Olympic middle distance runner Moise Joseph? A total of 35 children and 23 adults participated in the fun run. "A few kids who couldn't come were mad when they heard that they missed an Olympian," Rohil said. "It was a really great event. We raised around \$1,300, which is a massive amount of money, and even though some people ran a minimum amount of laps, they still got into running. I was really glad of how it happened."

There's still a long way to go before the Park Foundation reaches its fundraising goal for the next phase of Chessie's BIG Backyard, and Rohil is prepared to go the distance. He's planning to do another fundraising fun run next year and hopes his story inspires students in other schools across Fairfax County to do the same.

"I hope that more kids will start making fun runs too, so they can get the same recognition and Chessie's BIG Backyard can get finished faster," he said.

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To learn more about supporting Chessie's BIG Backyard through the Fairfax County Park Foundation, call 703-324-8582 or visit www.FairfaxParkFoundation.org.

