



MESSENGER PHOTO BY NORA JAARA

Nanda Filkin collects rubber ducks in the derby held on the Hocking River Saturday.

Rubber ducks race to help eliminate food waste

BY NORA JAARA
SPECIAL TO THE MESSENGER

The Hocking River was flooded on Saturday. Flooded with ducks. No, not those ducks ... rubber ducks. And it was all in an effort to help eliminate food waste in Athens. Confused? Don't be. Saturday's Rubber Duck Derby and Family Fun Olympics held at West State Street Park was all about fun for a good cause.

Athens Food Rescue hosted the first annual Rubber Duck Derby and Family Fun Olympics to raise money for operational costs. About 25 people attended the event, which included a silent auction and family relay such as balloon stomping and a Tick-Tac-Toe relay.

"I think I liked the balloon stomping... because it was pretty much the only event I won for my team," Alexander

Wotschka, who attended with his parents and sister, said.

The food rescue's founder and chair, Teresa Curtiss, said the money raised will be used to purchase pans needed for the organization, which can cost thousands. Prior to and during the event, people could purchase tickets to participate in the relay for the chance to win a prize by "adopting" a duck, which accounted for most of the fundraising aside from the event's silent auction.

Curtiss said about 650 ducks were sold prior to the event, with the remaining 23 sold during the event. The first place winner in the derby was Betty Blackford, followed by Gigi Kast and Bree Madigan.

"We kind of had to teach people who we were as we were selling the ducks," Curtiss said.

Athens Food Rescue was officially formed and given non-

profit status last year. In the year since the Athens Food Rescue formed, the organization has collected about 11,000 pounds of food, Curtiss said. The group has also raised \$865 through their Go Fund Me page. Curtiss said the biggest challenge over the past year was getting people to donate due to their concerns about liability. Although the food rescue has collected thousands of pounds of food, Curtiss said there's definitely more work to be done.

Sophia McCartney, a member of AmeriCorps currently serving as a coordinator of the Friends, Allies and Neighbors program under the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said she had encouraged people participating in the program to attend the event. The program aims to promote integration by connecting those with disabilities to others in the community.

"I really want to invest in events like this," McCartney said.

Not only are parks accessible, but McCartney said such events allow those with disabilities to be involved so others can see them for their abilities rather than their disabilities. McCartney added that the program currently has about 100 people who have taken a survey that helps determine partner matches in their database.

Curtiss said she enjoyed having kids involved in the event and that their continued involvement could help instill the message about food waste in their heads.

"We're so new, we're still learning all of this," Curtiss said, adding that preparing next year's event would likely be much easier. "This was our first big hurdle."