

Caitlin McGuire's friends won't let her memory die

"Cait's Quest" benefits will help pay off murdered woman's student loans.

By SARAH HITE
shite@mydallaspost.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The "Cait's Quest" 5K Walk/Run will be held at 10 a.m. today at the Dallas High School track. Cost is \$25 per person and registration will begin at 8 a.m. Checks can be made payable to Cait's Quest. For more information about Cait's Quest, visit www.caitsquest.com.

"Cait's Quest," a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about domestic violence, arose through tragedy this year.

The organization honors the memory of Caitlin McGuire, 24, a Dallas High School graduate who was murdered in February by her boyfriend before he took his own life.

Four of McGuire's friends – Jodi Feldmann, Nikki Gelso, Holly Gumble and Cory Patton – are now working hard to preserve the memory of their friend's life and help other women in need.

The group will celebrate the end of a series of fundraising events with a 5K walk/run at 10 a.m. today at the Dallas High School track.

Gelso, a Dallas native now living in Philadelphia, said just a month after McGuire's passing the group decided to rally together in her honor.

"Initially, we wanted to donate all the money to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, but then we decided to also help out her family," Gelso said.

She said the group wanted to help McGuire's family pay back student loans in addition to promoting awareness to the women's cause.

McGuire had attended Bloomsburg University and was in the process of attaining a graduate degree in psychology from Marywood University.

"When you keep getting bills in the mail after something like that, that's like another slap in the face," said Gelso.

Once the amount of money needed to pay off the loans is met, the group will donate the excess to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

"We began to talk in February about it, but we didn't open an account until May 2," said Patton, of Dallas. "We were collecting money but we really didn't know what we were going to do at that point. It's been a slow rolling process."

Since June, the women have or-

ganized three fundraisers this year for "Cait's Quest," including running a concession stand at a 4-H horse show and a raffle at the Luzerne County Fair.

The success of the organization came as a surprise to all the women – it was the first experience any of them had with organizing a nonprofit.

"It's been chaos," said Gumble, of Dallas. "...But it's not all about raising money; it's more about raising awareness and remembering her not for what happened, but for who she was. Anyone can tell you she was absolutely one-of-a-kind."

Through all the work, the women said the organization has helped them with their personal grieving processes as well.

"It's great to see how many people are responding and how many people cared about Cait," said Gelso.

Gumble said the project has also made the women closer to McGuire's family and has opened



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Cory Patton, Holly Gumble and Jodi Feldmann look at photos of their friend Cait McGuire, who was murdered by her boyfriend in February. The three women, as well as their friend, Nikki Gelso, will hold a 5K race in McGuire's memory today at Dallas High School as part of the organization Cait's Quest to raise awareness of domestic violence.

them up to a network of friends and family the women didn't even know McGuire had.

"Even through all of this, we've met Cait's extended family and people we didn't even know she knew, like her friends at college

... and they all cared so much about her," she said.

Feldmann, Gelso, Gumble and Patton also agreed that, while losing a best friend has been a difficult experience, the contact with other women in similar sit-

uations has been a great reward.

"One thing I've noticed at the smaller fundraisers is that women came up to us and told us their stories," said Gumble. "They gave us special thanks for bringing awareness to this issue."

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