

Thursday, July 21, 2011

Keiki Paddle Kids Kick up Considerable Cash

Paddling for Ashley, Six Years Old and Fighting Leukemia

Stop. Stop and look around – it’s a perfect Sunday. The fog has lifted, the mountains are spectacular. Look to the ocean, the boats are starting to fill their sails.

What is that, just offshore? It’s a flotilla of boats and 100 kids paddling down the coast!

Prepare yourself, here we come. We are the Keiki Paddle, a non-profit group organized by kids, for kids, to help very special kids in need.

The Keiki Paddle (‘keiki’ means ‘child’ in Hawaiian) is an annual event that is planned and carried out by children aged seven to seventeen, designed, according to [our website](#), to instill the fundamental concept of giving back to our community and having a little fun while doing it.”

This isn’t a jogathon. It’s not on a track or at a school or on any street. No cookies will be sold.

This is a nine-mile open-ocean relay paddle from Campus Point to Ledbetter Beach on high-tech paddleboards and stand-up paddleboards, although there may be a few of us on inflatable crocodiles.

This year more than 100 kids will paddle for Ashley Vasquez. Six-year old Ashley is fighting leukemia with all she has. Ashley lives with her mom Marta, and her three sisters (Marisol, 9 years old; Kimberly, 10; and Mayra, 17).

Our paddle will also benefit the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara's "I Count Too" program, which helps support siblings of children fighting cancer. These children often need extra support while the parents are focusing on the sibling fighting cancer.

“This is an event of the heart,” says Tavis Boise, 17, a senior at Dos Pueblos High School and president of the Keiki Board. “We all have salt water in our blood, and there are a whole lot of us. Yeah we have a ton of fun, but the best part is knowing we’re helping out Ashley and her family. This is why we paddle—we paddle for Ashley. There really isn’t anything else like this.”

“You know what’s crazy?” pitches Baylor Randolph, 13, of Crane School. “Every penny we raise goes to Ashley and to the Cancer Center. We pay for our own shirts and food, but every donation, big and small, goes straight to the beneficiaries.” Last year, through the pleas and requests from these paddlers, more than \$25,000 was raised. In these hard times the Keiki Paddle kids hope to top that this year.

Just to be fair we let some parents help out. The Keiki Paddle is an offshoot of the larger Friendship Paddle, a “hard-core paddle, usually across the channel from the (Channel) Islands” says Chase McFadden, 14, a freshman at San Marcos High. Chase has been one of the few teenagers to participate in the Friendship Paddle, a truly rigorous and challenging endeavor. The Friendship Paddle Board of Directors offers support to the Keiki Paddle Board of Youth Advisors, but we kids make the decisions; from selecting the beneficiary to planning the route, to the tee-shirt design, to the after-paddle food.

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So when you're walking the beach on the afternoon of Sunday, July 24, and you see an invasion of kids and boats coming your way, give us a thumbs-up, drop a few dollars for Ashley into the Keiki bucket, look around you, and smile. We are the Keiki Paddle. What a great community. Aren't we the lucky ones?—**Sabina Boise** (age 13) on behalf of the Keiki Paddle Board