

# Duck Fest Derby raises \$185K for charity

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**F**ort Lauderdale's New River was recently filled with 30,000 rubber ducks — all to help a good cause.

The annual KID Duck Fest Derby raised \$185,000 for Kids In Distress. Donors bought ducks that competed in the benefit race with a chance to win the \$10,000 grand prize and other items, including a cruise, jewelry and gift baskets. The event also featured a KID Olympics with athletic contests, raffles, a bounce house, face painting and games, food trucks and a DJ.

"This is my favorite event of the year because everyone can participate. The event is free of charge and allows us to fill the gaps in all our programs," said Mark Dhooge, the group's president and CEO.

Lesli Cartaya Franco, an event organizer for the group, said the derby provides numerous benefits.

"Not only does this event raise funds to help struggling parents from losing their children and provide parenting skills for single mothers and support grandparents raising grandchildren, it also raises awareness and lets people know what services are out there," she said.

KID works to prevent child abuse, preserve families and treat children who have been abused and neglected. The organization also is a large provider of foster homes and operates a family counseling center.

Samantha Gerdes, 10 and a Sunrise resident, fielded a team of her friends to participate and solicited more than \$600 in donations as a way to celebrate her birthday.

"When I gave out invitations, I asked them to send money," she said.

Gerdes said she was inspired to volunteerism after watching a TV program on relief workers distributing food to poor children in an orphanage in Asia.

"They were getting only one meal a day. That made me sad and want to do something about it," she said.

Her mom Christiene said seeing the story about the poor children moved her.

"She's a very loving, giving person, and she couldn't sleep that night after the TV show, and she's decided that every birthday for the rest of her life, instead of getting presents, she's going to raise money to feed hungry children," she said. "She sees a need, and she wants to fill that need. She feels she already has enough."

For more information, call 954-390-7654 or visit [Kidinc.org](http://Kidinc.org).

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