

## HOPE appoints a fiery new leader

Cydney Baron / Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, April 14, 2015 9:30 am

Jessica Long is the spark that lit the fire under Mayes County HOPE Coalition.

She took over the executive director position this year and sparked new energy and commitment from the coalition members.

When vice-chairman Jeremy Cantrell approached her about take the executive director position, Long said it “was a no-brainer.”

HOPE is a coalition dedicated to bring together resources for the improvement of the health and wellness of the community—something Long was already passionate about.

“This is my eighth year doing the Pryor Mud Run,” she said, one of Pryor’s biggest annual fundraising events.

Long is also the creative brain, and driving force, behind Adair’s Jog-a-Thon which has been running for four year.

“It is also a fundraising event. The first year we raised \$8,000, then \$9,000 then we jumped to \$18,000 and last year we raised, \$23,000,” she said.

The money raised in each event benefits the physical education program of each school, but Long said it’s not really about the money to her.

“It’s amazing that we’re able to put that money back into the schools, for PE equipment and things like that. But what I’m passionate about is making exercise fun for kids, I want them to fall in love with fitness,” Long said.

Since it’s an initiative HOPE embraces, Long was a perfect fit, and she’s excited to be a part of the coalition.

“Sitting around the table seeing the coalition members I can’t help but be excited. They’re all doing so much already. We’re bringing their passions together to do amazing things,” she said. “And I’m excited to see other people excited.”

Her enthusiasm is contagious and isn’t in short supply. Soon the coalition will be celebrating the receipt of two large grants.

“we’re waiting on two huge grants that would bring \$425,000 a year back into Mayes County. After that I think we’re going to see HOPE’s effort skyrocket,” she said.

She’s been on the Pryor Creek Recreation Center board since 2008 and is looking forward to working with PCRC on an upcoming project: HOPE Fit Kids.

“This will be Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m., for June and July for Pryor kids age 8 to 14,” Long said. “It’s going to be a place for kids to do cardio and strength training in a fun environment.”

She said she is looking forward to providing Pryor kids with a healthy pastime for the summer months.

“If we can get kids to fall in love with fitness when they are young, they are more likely to carry those habits with them



into adulthood, but we have to teach them now. I want to show them that exercise doesn't mean work," Long said.

The other HOPE members are fired up about having Long filling the executive director role.

"Jessica is very organized and motivated. She is intensely passionate about making our community a better place, which is exactly what is needed in that position," said HOPE Chairman Paula Cantrell.

Cantrell said Long takes the initiative and is passionate about the coalition's success.

"She want to see it be a true coalition of people and resources coming together to accomplish great things. She truly cares about this community," Cantrell said.

HOPE secretary/treasurer Yolanda Thompson said the coalition is lucky to have Long.

"Jessica has been a great asset to the HOPE Coalition, our monthly meeting attendance has increased. She has worked very hard in the short time she has been here. WE have applied for two grants and she has worked day and night to make sure we had everything needed to complete these applications," Thompson said. "Jessica has been the head of some great and successful events and fundraisers throughout our community and we are very lucky and blessed to have her on our team. I see great things coming not only for HOPE but for our community as well as having her on board."