

# Greater Huntsville Launches the Shuttle for Charity

by

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Images by Lisa Philippart

The temperature was in the 50s with nary a snowflake in sight but members of the Greater Huntsville Section raced in Huntsville's version of the famed Iditarod on February 11 to help those less fortunate. Greater Huntsville fielded a team in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Carts4Hearts 5K race to raise money and solicit donations for the Downtown Rescue Mission (DRM). DRM is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that provides food, clothing, shelter and other services to the homeless in the Huntsville area. The race involved teams of six costumed "mushers" pushing and pulling a themed shopping cart for five kilometers through the streets of downtown

Huntsville in a timed race. The teams collected donations of money, food and clothing for DRM prior to and during the race and competed for various awards.



Tammy Statham wielding duct tape.

DRM's Director of Events and Business Partnerships, Ms. Tonia Beverly, contacted former section chair Ken Philippart to encourage AIAA to enter a team. Current Chair Brandon Stiltner and Vice Chair Dr. Naveen Vetcha gave a green light for the activity and invited Ms. Beverly to attend the next section luncheon to explain the race and how it benefited the Huntsville community.

Each team was required to select a theme for their cart and mushers and to decorate accordingly. Young Professional Director Tammy Statham and Kathryn

Crowe created Greater Huntsville's theme. The duo settled upon a Space Shuttle theme to represent both the aeronautics and astronautics sides of the industry, symbolizing the blending of aeronautics and astronautics. Racers would dress as Shuttle astronauts in flight suits or engineers and technicians in lab coats and hard hats.

Section webmaster and AIAA Emeritus Dr. Arloe Mayne retrieved a shopping cart from the DRM thrift store and the team went to work.

Tammy and Kat met over two successive weekends in Ken Philippart's garage to "bend metal" or more accurately, fashion floral foam and foam board while liberally applying duct tape, to construct the Space Shuttle cart. Clever



Ken Philippart, Lauren Badia and Tammy Statham assemble the Shuttle before the race.



*(L-R) Tammy Statham, Naveen Vetcha, Ken Philippart, Brandon Stiltner, Kyle Knox, Nathaniel Long. Alan Lowrey, Lauren Badia, Kathryn Crowe, Michael King, Theresa and Alex Jehle mug for the camera.*

engineering went into designing the cart to be transportable and then assembled on site while also making the design rugged to survive the rigors of being pushed over three miles on the streets of Huntsville. Attaching the Shuttle nose was a particularly challenging feat overcome with wood dowels, homemade hooks and, of course, duct tape. University of Alabama – Huntsville student member Nathaniel Long joined Tammy, Kat, Ken and Lisa Philippart for the final stages of construction and a well-deserved pizza party the night before the race.

Other section members collected donations and procured the costumes. Tom Giel contacted his employer, ERC, for help. ERC's Gilda Battista personally donated almost 100 lbs. of food to the cause as well as lending two lab coats. Tony Miller lent a hard hat. Kyle Knox and Lauren Badia located more lab coats and Brittani Searcy borrowed flight suits from the US Space and Rocket Center. Ken Philippart rounded up the final hard hats to complete the costumes. In a last-minute push for donations, Kat Crowe collected \$100 to add to the team's total.



*Tammy Statham, Naveen Vetcha, Brandon Stiltner, Nathaniel Long, Kyle Knox, Lauren Badia*



*Launch of the AIAA Shuttle.*

Race day dawned cloudy and overcast with a chance of rain. The team readied the Shuttle for flight, hoping the rain would hold off. It did. Runners Brandon Stiltner, Naveen Vetcha, Tammy Statham, Lauren Badia, Nathaniel Long, and Kyle Knox donned flight suits to represent Shuttle pilots and lab coats with hard hats to represent engineers and technicians. Per the rules, the racers were tethered to the Shuttle via umbilicals. Section members Michelle Knox, Alex and Theresa Jehle, Ken and Lisa Philippart and Dr. Kurt Polzin assisted with final assembly and brought donations, as did

other members. Michelle alone brought over 60 pounds of food. Former Region 2 Director Alan Lowrey and Lisa Philippart readied their cameras as the section's photographers.

With the blast of a horn, the AIAA Shuttle launched into the streets of Huntsville. Alan Lowrey paced the team for a while but they eventually pulled away, leaving the rest of the section to await the results at the finish line. At 45 minutes, 36 seconds the Shuttle completed its mission and crossed the finish line. While the team was not first to finish, the runners all survived reentry while the orbiter suffered no major malfunctions and will fly again.



*Entering the home stretch.*



*Brandon, Kyle, Tammy, Lauren, Naveen and Nathaniel with their Tin Can Medals*

The awards ceremony followed. AIAA had the fifth fastest time to finish. The team placed second for the amount of food collected and team members were awarded the coveted Tin Can Medal. The team also placed second for Best Theme behind a team dressed as nuns pushing a cart decorated as a church. Appealing to a higher power was evidently permitted in the rules. Following the awards, section members adjourned to a nearby restaurant to enjoy a hearty brunch and some camaraderie.

In total, the Greater Huntsville Section collected \$300 in cash, 186 lbs. of food and several big bags of clothing to help Huntsville's less fortunate. Markers were laid down to beat for next year's race. The team is already discussing adding boosters and an external tank to evolve the design.

The Carts4Hearts Race was a meaningful way for section members to come together to use their engineering talents, promote AIAA and have a good time while helping the needy within the Huntsville community. It was a true team effort. Well done Greater Huntsville!



*The team relaxes after the race.*