

The Miami Herald

Posted on Sat, Dec. 01, 2012

Davie team wins the brain-twisting Herald Hunt

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EILEEN SOLER / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Peter Berg, Caren Berg, Debbie Cole, Julie Cole, 17, and Jamie Cole, all of Davie and the Herald Hunt team Fiscal Cliff Hangers, glow in their first place win Saturday of the brain busting 20th annual fun event Saturday at Peacock Park in Coconut Grove.

Green was the common thread, and ingenuity the key that led the five members of the “Fiscal Cliff Hangers” team to crack the brain-wracking puzzle that was the 20th annual Herald Hunt on Saturday in Coconut Grove.

Hundreds turned out for the Miami Herald’s riddle-meets-scavenger-hunt in Peacock Park – all competing for the grand prize of four state rooms on Carnival’s newest ship, the Breeze.

But it took the team of two sets of parents and one high school senior to solve the series of brain twisters that first led them to a common thread, which in turn led them to a set of phrases, which they then deciphered for a telephone number, which only led them to more clues, and finally, thankfully, agonizingly, a victory.

“We’re psyched,” said Jamie Cole, who along with his wife, Debbie, daughter Julie, 17, and friends and longtime Hunt partners Peter and Caren Berg, all of them from Davie, make up the team that solved the puzzle.

“It was really a team effort,” said Peter Berg.

“That green thing just clicked” said Caren Berg, referring to the common thread that ultimately led the Cliff Hangers to a field full of sign posts directing contestants to “follow the HEAT to victory,” though most Hunters were overheard expressing utter bewilderment.

That final clue, once solved, instructed the team to hand their phone number to a woman playing catch on a baseball diamond in Peacock Park.

The Cliff Hangers completed the puzzle about 15 minutes before the final clue was offered to all contestants at 3 p.m., and a good half hour before the second-place winners, a team calling themselves “2008 Champions” because they won the Hunt that year.

The 2008 Champions, a group of alumni from Miami Sunset High School, said they were “shocked” to have finished in the money once again.

“There’s tons of people here we feel are really smart,” said Frank Estadt. “We beat the odds.”

Other members of the team included Joe Del Toro, Beesham A. Seecharan, David Jones, Stephanie Woolley, Greg Nguyen and Antonio Ginatta.

Throughout the Hunt, teams of contestants twisted their brains in knots solving puzzles such as a pair of dice stacked atop each other and placed next to a measuring stick at the end of a dock at the Barnacle historic park.

Aaron Fager of Kendall explained how his team solved the puzzle: they figured the pair of dice meant paradise, and the measuring stick was a reference to length.

They looked in the printed map, and found a promotion touting Carnival’s newest ships, including the Paradise, which

measures 855-feet-long.

Fager and his team then turned to a list of numbered riddles. One of them was the number 855, and it contained references to the words sod and green.

“It’s a wonderful challenge being able to twist your brain like that,” said Fager, who was joined on the hunt by his wife, Oslaida, and his two sons, Daniel, 12, and David, 14, and friends Rick Hernandez, and Julio Perez and his daughter Eliza, 14.

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