

# Bumpin' on the beach



Photos by Eric Dunetz/Herald

**THE BEACH** was packed during last Saturday's volleyball tournament, which benefits the Michelle O'Neill Foundation.

## Annual Michelle O' Neill volleyball tournament takes over the beach

By **ALEXANDRA SPYCHALSKY**  
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Thousands of volleyball players and spectators packed the beach on Saturday for the 18th annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament.

The money raised from the tournament benefits the Michelle O'Neill Foundation. Carol O'Neill founded the organization in memory of her daughter, Michelle, who died of cancer in 1996 at age 24. The foundation helps families of children who are undergoing treatment for catastrophic diseases and special needs by providing financial assistance for the costs that insurance does not cover.

The day kicked off at 9 a.m., with the opening ceremony. Families that the foundation has helped were invited on stage, and were able to witness just how much support the Long Beach community has for them. Though thunderstorms threatened to put a damper on the afternoon, the rain held off for the tournament. A total of 316 teams competed, the largest amount in the history of the tournament, and thousands came out just to watch. For the second year in the row, Long Trunks won the 4-man competitive division, and Hit That! won the 6-man competitive division. "99 Problems but the Beach Ain't One" won the prize for best team name.



**CAROL O'NEILL**, founder of the Michelle O'Neill Foundation and mother to Michelle, welcomed the crowd during the opening ceremony.



**JILL PICKUS** of Fossils ready to bump.



**GABI CHERNER**, of team Inside Spike, dove for the ball.

**MOLLY O'NEILL**, 10, sang "God Bless America" to open the tournament.



**THOUSANDS OF PLAYERS** and spectators turned out for the annual event.



# Michelle O'Neill tourney returns to the beach <sup>7</sup>

## 18th annual volleyball event to be held this Saturday

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"Michelle was a very fun-loving, happy person, and this does bring a smile to a lot of people's faces; it's representative of her personality," said Carol O'Neill, founder of the Michelle O'Neill Foundation and the volleyball tournament that bears her late daughter's name.

The Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament will be held this Saturday, Sept. 6, at Laurelton Boulevard beach. The rain date is set for Sunday. The event was traditionally held at the West End of the boardwalk, but organizers were forced to relocate it last year during the boardwalk reconstruction. The new location worked out so well, that O'Neill said that they decided to return to Laurelton. The opening ceremony is at 9 a.m., with the tournament immediately following.

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**MEMBERS** of the O'Neill family, Rich O'Neil, far left, Jackie O'Neil Walsh, Kristina O'Neill, Mike Walsh, Carol Ann Niven and Carol O'Neill, at last year's tournament.

insurance does not cover.

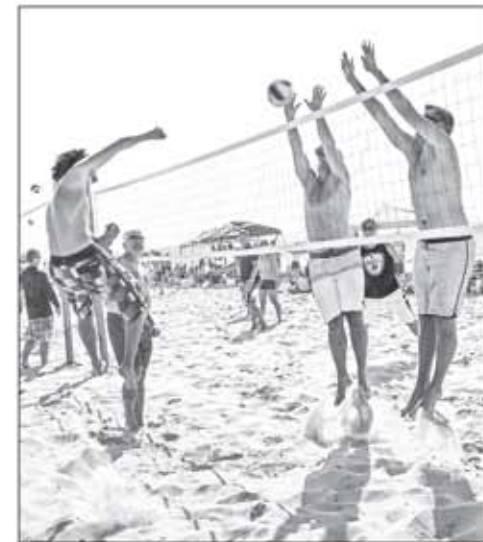
O'Neill said that putting on an event of this scale is exhausting, but when she gets word that the foundation can help another family in need, those are the moments that spur her on and help her keep going. Four of the families that the foundation has helped will be on stage during the opening ceremony, and seeing them on the beach is one of O'Neill's favorite parts of the day.

The tournament has become a marquee event in Long Beach, and in its 18th year, O'Neill said it's amazing to look back at how it's grown. She said that in the first year, the tournament used 11 volleyball nets, and she

ordered 200 shirts for the participants' and spectators. Last year, they used 55 nets and had to order thousands of shirts. Last summer's event had 307 teams, 1,800 participants and thousands of spectators throughout the day.

"People tell me all the time that they look forward to it; it's their favorite day on the beach," O'Neill said. "It's not just an opportunity to help these children, but to get together with neighbors and end the summer on a very high, positive note."

O'Neill described Long Beach as a "close-knit, caring and generous" community, and she is glad that community members have



Photos by Kristie Arden/Herald

**BOB BUTLER** from the team the G.O.P. (Grumpy Old Players) hit a shot over the net to Joe Whelan and James Whelan of the team The Whalers.

helped her daughter's spirit live on.

"Her wish was to help others and she is, through the foundation, she is fulfilling her wish."

On Thursday, Sept. 4, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the Long Beach Catholic Regional School gym, there will be a team bag pick up for those who pre-registered, and last-minute team registration. For more information on the tournament and the Michelle O'Neill Foundation, visit [www.monfoundation.org](http://www.monfoundation.org).



Eric Dunetz/Herald

## BUMP, SET, SPIKE

Laura Romicka, of the team Fossils, spiked a ball, and Ryan Schulz, of the Bearded Clams, kept one in play during the 18th annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament last Saturday. **Story, more photos, page 3.**