

Michelle O'Neill volleyball tourney draws thousands

By Anthony Rifulato

On Saturday, Sept. 11, the 14th Annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament took place on the Grand Boulevard beach, an event that drew more than 4,000 participants and spectators and featured 283 teams and 1,700 players. The annual fundraiser is considered one of the biggest events of the year, and features live music, raffles, food and more.

Long Beach resident Carol O'Neill and her family started the event in memory of her daughter Michelle, who died of cancer in 1996. Proceeds from the tournament go to the Michelle O'Neill Foundation, which supports families with children who are undergoing cancer treatment.

Last year, the foundation raised roughly \$130,000 through the tournament, Carol O'Neill said, adding that the event gets bigger and bigger each year.

Fourteen years ago, what began as a modest tournament with 11 volleyball nets has expanded to a competition which now boasts 50 nets, along with food and services donated by Outback Steakhouse.

"It really was our best event ever," O'Neill said. "Many people say it's their favorite day of the year. It's like a big beach party."

The tournament consists of three divisions: recreational, a four-man competitive division, and a six-man competitive division. Competitive divisions advance to the finals and are awarded trophies. This year, the team that clinched the four-man division title was Number One Seed Cause We Got Bombs, while the Neptunes earned six-man division honors.

O'Neill said volleyball was an obvious choice when they first decided on a vehicle for a fundraiser.

"Because we live in Long Beach — and what better way to bring people together and have fun," she said.

All along the boardwalk last weekend, thousands of American flags were on display, and participants held more than 400 flags during the pledge of allegiance and opening ceremony, which featured a bag pipe group from the Carpenters Local 608. This year, O'Neill introduced 14-year-old Danny Mulvey, who was diagnosed with cancer when he was 4.



Arthur Findlay/Herald

THE CASEY FAMILY were among the thousands of participants at this year's Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament.

The foundation sponsored a trip for Danny to Big Sky Kids camp in Montana, which is geared toward helping children with cancer.

"He called me and asked if he could come and thank everybody," O'Neill said. "This little boy took the microphone, said a few words and sang a song with his father. There was not a dry eye in the house."

O'Neill said she expects the tournament to grow over the coming years, saying that the event embodies the spirit of her daughter, Michelle, who believed in helping others.

"What we did through the foundation was carry out her wish," O'Neill said. "She was a very upbeat young woman that everyone wanted to be with. She was just a really wonderful daughter, a great sister and a wonderful friend."

Comments about this story? Arifulato@liherald.com or (516) 569-4000 ext. 213.



DREW ADDONIZIO gets leverage during the game.



RICK O'NEILL, left, Kristina O'Neill, Carol Ann O'Neill-Niven, John Niven, Carol O'Neill, Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg and his wife, Ellen, Mike Walsh and Jackie O'Neill Walsh at the event.



PETER FERRANTE, Ryan Gallagher and Sean Sullivan enjoyed the festivities during the tournament.