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PERSON OF THE YEAR '09

CAROL O'NEILL

Enriching the lives of children with cancer and wounded veterans

By ARIELLA MONTI

Carol O'Neill's youngest daughter, Michelle, died of brain cancer in 1996. O'Neill honored her memory the following year by organizing the first Michelle O'Neill Foundation volleyball charity event, held on Kentucky Beach, and a handful of people took part.

Now in its 14th year, the event has grown into the largest volleyball tournament on the East Coast, annually raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for children with cancer. In honor of this success and her other volunteer work, the Herald is proud to name O'Neill its 2009 Person of the Year.

Michelle was just 17 when she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She died seven years later, and shortly afterward her mother established a foundation in her name. Last summer, 276 teams entered the volleyball tournament honoring her, which attracted thousands of spectators and raised more than \$100,000.

The money is given to families with children who have cancer, to help with expenses, as well as to charities such as the Make A Wish Foundation, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the Big Sky Kids camp in Montana and the Ronald McDonald House.

"She's very dedicated," Mary Giambalvo said of O'Neill. Giambalvo, the City of Long Beach's public information officer, acts as a liaison between O'Neill

and city departments during the planning of the event.

When the city-sponsored Waterfront Warriors Foundation began operating last year, O'Neill's experience with organizing large-scale events and fundraising made her the perfect person to ask for advice. "We were looking for people that we knew that could help us," said Giambalvo. "My first thought was Carol O'Neill."

Waterfront Warriors raises money and plans events for wounded veterans such as the Waterfront Warrior Week, during which the city hosted vets and their families for four days in late August and early September. More

recently, the group gathered and shipped holiday care packages to soldiers overseas.

O'Neill attended the organization's weekly meetings and volunteered her time despite the many hours she devotes to her own cause. "You can call her anytime for anything and she's always there," Giambalvo said.

Gerald Snell, co-chair of the Waterfront War-

riors, who worked closely with O'Neill for both organizations, said he has always been touched by O'Neill's generosity. "She's very generous with the children and people who are suffering," Snell said.

He recalled watching O'Neill at a tournament as she walked along the beach with some children who were receiving financial assistance from the foundation. "It was just beautiful," Snell said of that



moment. He added that O'Neill not only helps families in need, but gets to know them.

Born and raised in Woodside, Queens, O'Neill, 65, graduated from Bishop McDonnell Memorial High School in Brooklyn in 1959, and went on to study at Grace

Institute in Manhattan. "She's still in touch with many of her elementary-school friends," said Caryll Ann Niven, her oldest daughter.

An avid painter who also loves to crochet, O'Neill, who is divorced, has another daughter,

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