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Children race off at the start of Saturday's Team Dude Walk at Heritage Park in Absecon.

Sue Brutchewsky

Making strides in the fight against autism

By STEVE PRISAMENT
Staff Writer

"We're hoping to reach \$38 million next year."

ABSECON — An officer for Autism Speaks called the local walk for Team Dude the biggest walk "wraparound" contributing to her organization.

Delivering more than \$17,000 last September, Team Dude — Bridget and Daren Dooley, their daughter Delaney Rose, son Patrick, parents and siblings, extended family and friends — ranked in the top five organizations donating to a regional walk in Philadelphia last fall.

Patrick Dooley, 7, has an autistic spectrum disorder. He's "The Dude" — a nickname his father gave him as an infant.

"We raised \$30 million this year," according to Christina Carty, the Greater Delaware Valley regional walk director.

Team Dude is on track to repeat its performance of a year ago.

"We have a preliminary account through Saturday of \$15,000," Bridget Dooley said Tuesday, June 10. "We had about 250 registered walkers and between 30 and 40 volunteers."

Meanwhile, Patrick, she said, has been improving.

"He's doing great," she said. "He's absolutely made a lot of progress in the past year. He said 'Go Team Dude.' He started the walk."

Dooley said Team Dude was ranked first in fundraising by Autism Speaks after the 5K event at Heritage Park Satur-

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Curtain falls on Blessed Sacrament dance program

Teacher Leslie Bakaric of Pleasantville is seeking a place to continue classes

By SUZANNE MARINO
Staff Writer

MARGATE — It was an emotional curtain call Sunday, June 8 as students in Miss Leslie's dance program at Blessed Sacrament Regional School took the stage one last time for their final recital.

"I have been doing this for the past 19 years," said Leslie Bakaric of Pleasantville. She admitted to having butterflies on Sunday.

"Knowing that you have to stop this program that you love and you have to walk out of this hall never to teach here again was emotional for me. I have always loved what I have been doing and always felt



Dance instructor Leslie Bakaric says a prayer with her students before they begin practice for the June 8 recital.

Submitted

pointe and acrobatics to her students.

Early on, Bakaric was teaching dance while her daughters Marilu and Sarah Bakaric were students at Blessed Sacrament. Now are helping their mother teach.

"Dancing is what we do," said Leslie Bakaric said, noting that

Bakaric is on the board of directors of the Rockettes Alumni Association.

"It is a way for all of us to stay in contact with one another. I danced from 1972 to 1979, and it was absolutely the best time. It was more than a job, it was a passion."

31 years of fighting crime is enough for Absecon chief

By STEVE PRISAMENT
Staff Writer

ABSECON — Police Chief Charles Smith is retiring June 30 after 31 years with the Absecon Police Department.

The chief's plan became public at the City Council meeting Thursday, June 5 after council members went into closed session early in the regular meeting to discuss the chief's contract.

"I could not have asked for a more rewarding career than the one I have had," Smith said in an interview Wednesday, June 11. "While retirement was a difficult decision, and while I will miss my colleagues, this opportunity will afford me more time to travel with my wife and visit with my children more often. I am very much looking forward to beginning this next step in my life."

"I was promoted to detective in 1988, sergeant in 1990, lieutenant in 1998, and chief in 2001," he said. "Prior to being named chief, I was the patrol bureau commander of the police department for three years. Mayor Peter C. Elco officially promoted me to the rank of chief on June 6, 2001."

Smith has also commanded the Patrol Division, traffic, safety, school programs and crime prevention.

In February 2000, he took over the Administrative Services Bureau, which oversees the department's training, communications, planning and research, professional standards, and personnel and records.

"I feel that community outreach beyond our department's walls is an essential component of this job," the chief said. "As a result, I have worked hard to reach out to local, state, and federal organizations that provide in-

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day, June 7.

Participants heard about the good work they were contributing toward just before the walk started.

"The doctors and clinicians are doing really great at research," Carty said. "There are so many questions to be answered. There are clusters and environmental factors to be assessed."

With its national office in Princeton, Autism Speaks maintains a large presence in New Jersey and the Northeast.

Ken Singleton, regional executive director, said Autism Speaks gave more than \$1 million for research in the area where New Jersey's autism rate ranks highest in the world.

"New Jersey probably does a great job of providing services to diagnose autism," Singleton said. "The awareness level is very high in this state and this part of the country."

Everyone seemed to be contributing something Saturday.

Seven-year-old Tynan Hand, the son of Georgina and William Hand and an H. Ashton Marsh School second grader, had his hair cut in the park.

"It was his idea," according to his mother who paid \$5 for the buzz. "He actually wanted a Mohawk."

The youngster said he was glad to shed his locks.



Sue Brutsche

Tynan Hand, 7, of Absecon has his hair cut for a donation to Autism Speaks at Heritage Park in Absecon Saturday afternoon.

"I'm happy with the haircut," he said. "I'm glad I did it. Now I want to go to the dunk tank."

Victoria Hunter put in more than three hours buzzing hair – raising more than \$100 to fight autism.

"I have Victoria's Hair Design – the little old barber shop on Station Avenue," she said. "This is a great way to be a part of the community. People are really lining up to get buzzed."

Anthony, 8, and Austin, 5, sons of Jenna and Ceasic Alcantara were ready to walk.

"We're going all three laps," Anthony said. "We're going to do it together."

"I'm going to run," Austin said. "I liked getting my face painted. Now I'm ready to go."

"We did it last year," Anthony said. "I like doing something for a good cause."

Marisa Lemmetti-Fane, a cheerleading coach at Absecon High School in Galloway Township was there with a group of students. The cheerleaders spent the day divided between the autism walk and a coin drop for another organization.

"We like to keep them involved in the community," Lemmetti-Fane said. "We want them to realize how fortunate they are and lucky to be able to have a positive impact on others. We have lots of honor students among our cheerleaders."

Holy Spirit High School cheerleaders worked a booth raising money for Team Dude.

Capt. Andy Matthews manned a Heart of Sailing booth – one of a number of resource tables set up to provide aid and information for youngsters with developmental problems.

"We sail out of Tuckerton Sea-port and Surf City Yacht Club," he said. "The program's purpose is to get them involved with the activity of sailing. It's very therapeutic for them. You can see the kids getting rummy on land, but they calm down on the water by and large. It's the motion ... a combination of things."

Each child has to be accompanied by a caregiver, Matthews said.

"We let the kids – if they're comfortable – help us put up the sail," he said. "And of course we let them steer. Kids just love it."

Matthews said Heart of Sailing is always looking for more sailors.

"Trying to get people to volunteer is really difficult," he said. "The children's parents find out about us pretty well. They network, so we get a lot of repeat visitors and their friends."

The number of special needs children served has increased from around 150 in 2005 to more than 1,500 in 2007. With 20 United States locations, the number of volunteers has grown from around 15 in 2005 to more than 230 in 2007. For information visit www.heartofsailing.com.

Team Dude fundraising will continue throughout the summer and end in September with participation in the "Walk Now for Autism" in Philadelphia Sept. 20. Last year About 30 people walked there for Team Dude.

Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 7, Absecon, NJ 08201.

For information visit team-dude.net.



Absecon High School cheerleaders and coaches from Galloway Township line up at the registration booth prior to Saturday's Team Dude Walk. From left are Briana Taylor, Gayle Taylor, Taylor Warriner, Farren Wheatley, April Tamburo, Jesse Thacker, Victoria Carrers, Jackie Nolan and Rachelle Fane.



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