

★ Point Pleasant Beach ★

Volunteers join athlete on run to raise autism awareness

By Daniel Nee

Brian Shea has been running his entire life. A noted triathlete and marathon runner, Mr. Shea has competed all over the world. He has run the New York City Marathon, competed in the Ironman Hawaii World Championship Triathlon and run the JFK 50-mile run in Maryland.

But his longest, and most meaningful, run took place close to home on the Point Pleasant Beach boardwalk last weekend.

Mr. Shea, 31, a graduate of Point Pleasant Beach High School and a current resident of Tinton Falls, took on the challenge of running 150 miles up and down the boardwalk over the course of three days to raise money and awareness for autism by way of the J.T. Foundation, which was founded by Point Pleasant Beach resident John Hughes. Mr. Hughes' 8-year-old son, J.T., has autism.

According to some medical experts, as many as one in 150 children born in the United States will be diagnosed with autism. As a way to draw attention to that staggering statistic, Mr. Shea and the J.T. Foundation decided to set the distance for last week's event at 150 miles.

"We didn't want to do a 5K [run], because everyone does a 5K. We thought, because one in



HOLLY KLEIN, The Ocean Star
Volunteers with the JT Foundation organized a 150 mile run last weekend along the boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach in order to raise funds and awareness about autism.

150 kids is diagnosed with autism, why don't I run 150 miles in three days," Mr. Shea said prior to embarking on his trek up and down the boardwalk.

True to his word, and despite experiencing pain in his calf, Mr. Shea began his run on Friday and kept up the pace the rest of the weekend through Sunday, all

day long up and down the boardwalk.

He was flanked by a group of volunteer runners who paid \$20 each for the chance to run with

him in support of the foundation, which is hoping to raise \$10,000 by April, which is Autism Awareness Month. Though no one else could run

150 miles, there were volunteers running at his side all day long.

By the end of the weekend, over 200 runners had joined Mr. Shea at some point during the run.

"We've had a lot of runners with us, and every hour we have a fresh group here to support him," said Mr. Hughes. Throughout the run, Mr.

Hughes and throngs of well-wishers and volunteers stood watch at an autism information center which was set up on the boardwalk, adjacent to Joey Tomatoes Pizza. Each time Mr. Shea ran by, volunteers hurried to offer him water and get an update on how he felt, given the heat and humidity.

"Our goal was to raise awareness and get people to sign up and run, and it's been a home run so far," Mr. Hughes said, noting that many of the volunteers at the event had signed up as soon as they saw the tent and heard about Mr. Shea.

Mr. Shea, who did not break his stride for interviews, reiterated his dedication to his mission as he jogged down the boardwalk.

"If I'm here 'til midnight, I'm going to make it," he said.

"The event is fantastic. I've had a great run," he said, jogging past the tent.

"In the grand scheme of things, it's not about me doing this event, it's about the foundation and getting exposure for that. That's where it's been a huge success," he added.

"Regardless of how long I'm out here today, it's mission accomplished," he said, picking up his pace and leading his group of runners far down the boardwalk.

J.T., all the while, was smiling brightly and having fun being the center of attention inside the tent. A bit shy, yet delightfully personable, J.T. said he knew everyone had come out to support him and the organization that bears his name.

J.T.'s brother Sean, 13, stood at the tent as well, supporting his brother and Mr. Shea.

"I just hope we can get everything done that we've tried to accomplish," Sean said.

If the amount of miles run this weekend were any indication, the mission was accomplished in a very meaningful way.