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Appreciation shown at Miles for Matheny

Miles for Matheny thrives at new locale

By CHARLES PISANO Contributing Writer Jun 12, 2019



Peapack resident Bianca Chaparro throws a ball to stilt walker Fred Collins at the 22nd annual Miles for Ma
Photo by Debbie Weisman

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FAR HILLS – Despite moving two miles down the road from Peapack-Gladstone to downtown Far Hills, Miles for Matheny, which benefits the Matheny Medical and Educational Center, drew a large crowd on a sunny day Sunday for a successful 22nd iteration of the local charity event.

The Peapack-based facility’s work in serving children and adults with medically complex developmental disabilities was celebrated by students past and present, their parents and community volunteers.

Perhaps the best description of the event was given by former Matheny student Raven Bennett of West Orange, who just last year moved to a new group home but was still thrilled to come back for her 11th Miles for Matheny.



Bennett described the event as “family friendly. Everybody’s together as a family.” She was excited to see the community turn out in such force for the Matheny School because she “loved Matheny. That was [her] home.”

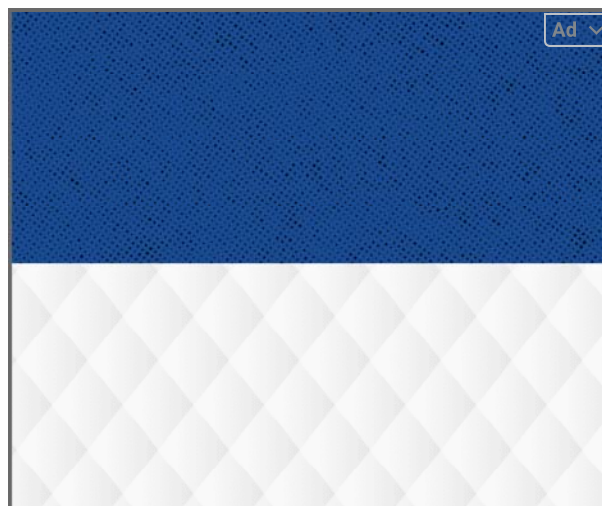
This year’s Miles for Matheny was held from 11:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. at the Far Hills Fairgrounds on Sunday, June 9. With more than 300 people registered to participate in events or as volunteers, turnout was likely higher with community members consistently coming out to cheer on racers and Matheny students/clients.

Importantly, the popular 5k race was back this year after not happening last year. —

Despite the move away from Peapack-Gladstone, members of the Matheny Board of Trustees were optimistic about the new location. Chairman Bill Kraus of Maplewood stated that the Far Hills Fairgrounds was good because “it’s nice to be centrally located. I liked it when we were in town where we could integrate with the community, but I think this is very convenient.”

David Szott, who resides in Morristown, noted there were multiple changes to the event this year when compared to previous years.

“We’ve moved it [from April when] it always seemed to be raining and cold... and we’ve been much more successful with the weather cooperating.” Szott said. “I kind of like this — I loved being in [Peapack-Gladstone], because we’d walk through town and a lot of the neighbors really support us ... so I miss that component.



“We are Peapack, that’s where we’ve been since Matheny started the organization started 75 years ago, but [here it] is kind of nice that it’s all in one spot,” he added. “From one location you can see the whole event. So there’s positive and negatives to each.”

Other participants were happy about the ease of access and onsite parking at the new location, despite not being able to engage directly with Matheny’s beloved hometown this year.

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Community Support

One of the best things about Miles for Matheny's consistent popularity is how much the clients of Matheny, and their parents, seem to appreciate the support that is shown for them.

Right before starting the 5k, Mike Geraghty of Cranford credited Matheny with keeping his son Bo alive, stating that "if it wasn't for Matheny, then there wouldn't have been a Bo."

Bo has Cornelia De Lange Syndrome, a rare and challenging diagnosis. Geraghty described his son's move to the hospital as "the best thing," with his quality of life improving dramatically since he has resided there. For the two of them, Miles for Matheny has always been a "fantastic [event for the community] to show support for the hospital and the kids."



"It's such a special moment," Edana Desatnick of Basking Ridge said, when parents and other people affiliated with Matheny see the community "cheering them on, pushing the wheelchairs" at the end of the day.

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Desatnick described a meeting with the Junior Friends of Matheny organization where she “asked them why they did it, and they said ‘these children, these people, teach them so much. They give them so much.’ The volunteering and everything from the community has been very, very special.”

Szott, who also has a son that resides at Matheny, said that Miles for Matheny as a whole “checks a lot of boxes” for the Matheny School.

“This is a great community awareness [event], where the community and extended community get to see what Matheny’s about and meet some of our clients and students ... It’s also great fundraising. It’s one of our major fundraisers for the year,” he said. Last year the event raised over \$120,000 for the school.

But Szott said that “what I have the most joy [in seeing], and obviously we need the resources to help accomplish our mission, but to see all the kids out here, all of our students and clients really enjoying themselves, that’s what brings the most joy to me.”

Szott finished his description of the event by saying “We’re very supportive of Far Hills opening this venue for us when we didn’t have the opportunity in Peapack, so I’m very thankful to the city council and town, all the neighbors and citizens that support us through the years.



“And they benefit, really, some kids and some clients that need support,” he said. “These are some of the people in our population that need an incredible amount of support and we’re thankful that they put an arm around them as well to support our cause.”

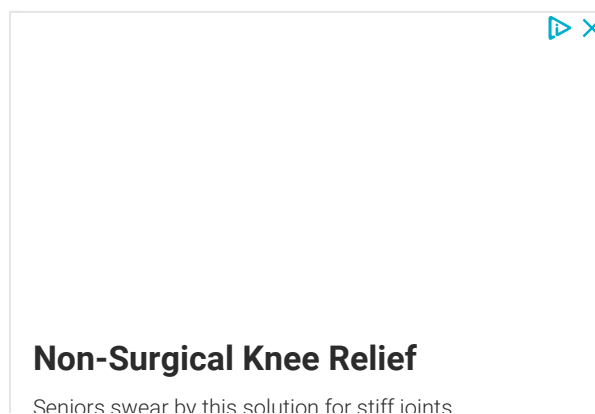
Enjoying the Day

Miles for Matheny is typically full of volunteers, and this year was no different. Friends of Matheny provided their usual Breakfast of Champions for “all the runners, for all the bikers, for all the volunteers” and everyone else at the event.

Volunteer Kathy Sisto of Bernardsville described Friends of Matheny as “a group of local residents and parents of ... clients of Matheny who fundraise and run the Second Chance thrift shop in Peapack, and all of our proceeds we donate to Matheny. It’s more like a little auxiliary.”

Bridgewater resident Nancy Crusc explained further that “[As an auxiliary we] raise funds to provide equipment, trips, things that they cannot fund ... they decide what items will meet the broadest group of individuals’ needs and we provide the funds. We bought a wheelchair van for them one year. It’s a whole bunch of different items that we purchase to enrich their lives.”

Volunteers also acknowledged the change of venue and its pros and cons. While the on-site parking and large, open space for activities was a definite advantage of the Far Hills Fairgrounds, many of them missed the community feeling that previous years had.



“It was nice when we were in town because that’s where we are, and then you get the whole feel — you get the community, you have the town behind you, supporting you, embracing their residents ... These individuals live in the town. That is their town and they like to have pride in their town” Crusc explained.

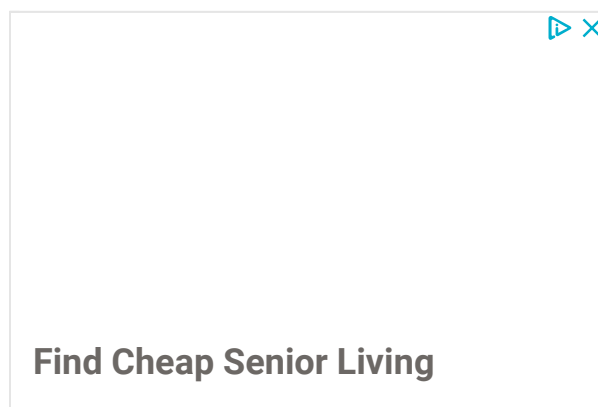
In the end, Crusc echoed the sentiments of other people at Miles for Matheny and what it meant for the community: “It’s a wonderful event because it brings everyone together ... [People are] coming for the kids. They’re not just coming for the event they signed up for. So that’s what it’s all about.”

Participants like Mitch Wrapp from Parsippany also enjoys the event because “Matheny does phenomenal work. So anything we can do to support their efforts, we are happy to do, even if it means riding 50 miles on a bicycle.”

Other participants spoke of their increasing involvement over the years. 5k racer Maddalena Minardi of Parsippany was one who began volunteering through work and ended up joining the Matheny Board of Trustees five years ago.

Matheny staff member Ashley Silva of Flemington described this year’s Miles for Matheny as “beautiful.”

She stated that “I just think it’s amazing that we have so much support, that some companies are here with their [equipment] and they’re willing to give their time for everyone. And that we have so many volunteers here today. It’s so beautiful to see that and to see how the community is really reaching out and how we have so much support for everyone.”



Fun for Everyone

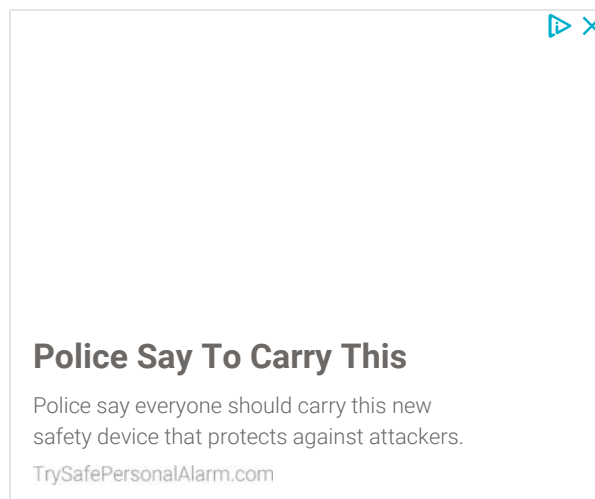
This year's Miles for Matheny had events for participants of all ages and abilities.

In addition to five different bicycle rides throughout the community, there was a 5k run, a bounce house, ice cream, popcorn, cotton candy, a petting zoo, jugglers and acrobats, and roaming comic book characters (all free). There were also food trucks available around the venue.

Many of the Matheny residents enjoyed these stations alongside local residents in addition to enjoying stations the like adaptive music therapy tent, where anyone could play music and try to harmonize with the live music provided by DNA's Music Entertainment. Al Skop from SiriusXM radio was a special guest MC this year.

The event that most everyone looks forward to, however, is the Wheelchair Walk, which Kraus described as "so inspiring, to see the aqua blue shirts come down at the end of the event, followed by our bag piper ... you get chills up your spine."

The many community volunteers, sponsors, and participants was a heartening thing to see, as was the fun that they had alongside the Matheny clients and students. Another interesting aspect of Miles for Matheny was the amount of volunteers and participants from outside of the immediate area who made an effort to attend the event, despite some having to travel considerable distances.



The spirit of Miles for Matheny was perhaps best summed up by first year volunteer Avinaash Kantamneni of Bedminster, who stated that the best part of the event for Matheny residents was how it helps them “know that they’re appreciated, know that they matter in the world, that even though they may have a disability of some sort people still care about them.”

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