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## Plungers have a heart for ALS patients

BY MATTHEW McGRATH, STAFF WRITER

As a digital clock ticked down on the beach at the end of Main Street, a throng of people – some dressed only in Speedos, others in elaborate costumes – bounced up and down trying to fight a damp sea breeze.

As the clock hit zero, more than 300 people rushed the crashing waves of the Atlantic Ocean. As quick as they ran into the 39-degree waters, they ran out to huddle under blankets, bathrobes and anything they could use to dry off and warm up.

People dressed as pirates, cats, cops and robbers, and Mexican wrestlers.

“I did this last year, and it was horrible then and it’s probably going to be even worse now,” Daniel Liseno said. “Sure, we’re crazy, but it’s for a good cause.”

Not all the swimmers rushed out of the water. Scott Visnic of Hillsborough, who was dressed like a pirate, stayed in the water for several minutes, much to the awe of bystanders and first responders.

“You just have to enjoy the moment,” Visnic said. “Once you’re in, you’re in, and it’s not that bad.”

The swimmers, participating in the second Valentine’s Plunge, were raising money to support ALS patients and their families. ALS, known as Lou Gehrig’s disease, leaves people paralyzed.

More than \$100,000 was raised by the swimmers for staytoughfightHARD and Joan Dancy & PALS, two organizations that support 52 area patients.

Each plunger made a \$25 registration donation, and they were asked to garner pledges that could be collected individually or in teams.

Berto Rivera, 10, of Point Pleasant Beach, collected \$1,300 in pledges.

“I have a lot of good friends who watch my back,” Berto said. “We stick together like family.”

The Broadway Bar and Grill Team, Manasquan, led by owners/brothers Brad and Scott DeDrux, raised \$2,500 in pledges. DeDrux said he was happy to raise the money, and because he surfs all winter, the frigid waters did not bother him.

“None of this money will go to research,” plunge founder Timothy O’Neill Jr. said. “This will all go to support patients and their families right here.”