# Thousands gather for the Michelle O'Neill Tourney

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Thousands packed Laurelton Boulevard beach for the 23rd annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament on Sept. 7.
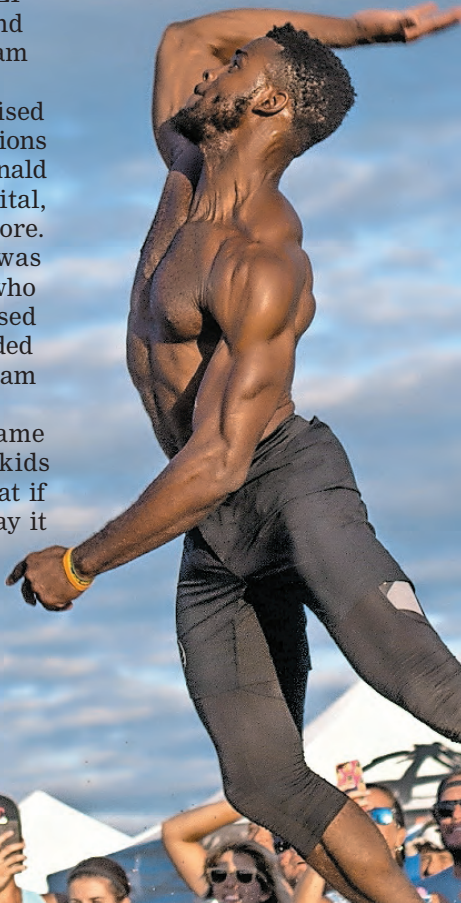
The event is considered one of the largest in Long Beach and draws people from all over the country. Carol O'Neill, mother of Michelle O'Neill and president of the Michelle O'Neill Foundation, organizes the event every year in honor of her late daughter Michelle, who died in 1996 at age 24.

"I say it every year, and I hope I can keep saying it: This was the best event ever," O'Neill said.

This year, 440 teams and 2,776 players competed in the volleyball tournament, O'Neill said. The event had 69 nets compared with 11 nets when the tournament first started. The winners of the tournaments included Old Paltz VC for the four-man competitive division, VBLI O.G. for the six-man competitive division and Benny and the Sets won the title for best team name.

O'Neill estimated that the foundation raised between $250,000 to $275,000 to help organizations such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the Ronald McDonald House, St. Jude's Research Hospital, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and more. She said her favorite moment of the day was when Danny Marquino, one of her "kids" who has benefitted from the foundation, addressed the crowd with a short message that coincided with the theme of the event, which was "Dream Big."

"Just for today, we could all have the same dream. We could dream of a world where kids don't get cancer," Marquino said. "I know that if we all keep that in our hearts, maybe someday it will come true."







Photos by Brianna Casey/Herald

**NICK SMITH FROM** the Old Paltz VC spiked the ball over his opponent.

**CAROL O'NEILL PRESENTED** Old Paltz VC with a winning trophy after the finals game.

**THE O'NEILL FAMILY:** Caryl Ann Niven, far left, founder Carol O'Neill, Kristina O'Neill, Keira O'Neill, Jackie O'Neill and Rick O'Neill.

**CROWD MEMBERS CHEERED** on and performed the wave in the middle of a game.

**KEVIN COOK FROM** the team Blackman Gets Paid slammed a serve during a volleyball game at the annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament.