

Diehards run through the heat

NORWALK

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Calf Pasture Beach holds a bittersweet significance for anti-drug crusader Ginger Katz and the Ian James Eaccarino 9-Mile Memorial Road Race and 5k Health Walk -- an event dedicated to her son -- seems to bring out the best ones.

While waiting for the first runner to cross the finish line Saturday morning in the beach's parking lot, Katz reminisced about the time she spent running at the beach and visiting her son, who worked at Calf Pasture.

"Sometimes I'd just sit on the bench and hope he'd come by," she said. "There's a lot of memories for me at this beach."

Ian died on Sept. 10, 1996, of a drug overdose. Since then, Katz has dedicated her life to keeping other children from suffering the same fate through her Courage to Speak Foundation.

The race, which is held by the Lightfoot Running Club, has been dedicated to Ian for the past 12 years.

About 400 people registered for this year's race but only 122 participated in the event -- down from the 210 people who ran and walked in the event in 2009.

Katz said the registrants probably opted to stay indoors and avoid the extremely hot temperatures on Saturday.

Still, the event raised about \$5,500 for Katz's Courage to Speak Foundation, a nonprofit organization that aims to teach young people and parents about the dangers of drugs.

Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia, U.S. Rep. Jim Himes, D-4, and other area politicians were in attendance to kick off the event.

"As you run today, please keep Ian and all those precious children we've lost to drug abuse in your heart," Katz told attendees in a speech prior to the race.

After slogging through the nine-mile race route in the scorching sun, runners were drenched in sweat as they arrived at the finish line in the Calf Pasture Beach parking lot.

Jane Maxwell was the first female runner to finish second overall in the race -- crossing the finish line with a time of 56:53. Shannon Gombos, a 19-year-old Norwalk High School graduate, finished third.

Tim Milenkevich, a 28-year-old Ansonia resident, finished first, crossing the finish line more than one minute ahead of Maxwell.

"It was tough," said Milenkevich, a runner since the age of 14. "The second loop was hard but I'm happy with my time."