



Everything Jersey

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Ab-solutely a good cause for kids

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BY MARY ANN TARR

HAMILTON -- The months of rehearsals paid off for Captain Crunch and the Crunchettes.

One of the top performers closed her eyes and listened to the music. The Crunchette worked so hard that she said her elbows hurt.

The result of Kathy Russo's performance? More than 8,000 abdominal crunches.

Russo was one of 18 area women who took part in the 2008 Lady of America/St. Jude Ab Crunch Challenge yesterday. The Ab Crunch Challenge, which originated in Hamilton, is a national philanthropic competition in which more than 4,000 women -- including members of the Hamilton and Lawrence Lades Express locations -- will try to set a world record and raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

The brainchild of Tony "Captain Crunch" Parziale, the second annual Ab Crunch Challenge surpassed his expectations. Parziale, of Hamilton, who has established Guinness World Records for individual conventional sit-ups done in one- and two-hour periods, is the owner of the Ladies Workout Express on Kuser Road, the site of yesterday's fundraiser for which the club temporarily relaxed its policy and allowed men in the facility.

"We had 18 (participants) crunching today and we were trying to hit 75,000," said Parziale, whose group easily surpassed that with 112,304 documented ab crunches. "We were trying to raise \$10,000 and we went over that today."

Russo, who was raised in Hamilton and now lives in Bordentown, raised \$828 through sponsors from the Bordentown Yacht Club and her hair salon.

"I have to go back to work, I have a client at 1 o'clock," said Russo, 53, whose busy day continued as she styled at Hair Works.

For one hour straight she styled to the music provided to pump up the crowd and participants at the Ladies Workout Express.

"I closed my eyes and tried to block out everybody," Russo said. "I was just listening to the beat of the music."

She crunched her way to a number she couldn't seem to fathom.

"My best was 4,600 in trials," said Russo, who smashed that with 8,010. "My elbows hurt from holding my head up."

Each Crunchette had a friend or family member count the number of crunches done in the one-hour span.

Stephanie Pappas of Hamilton was thrilled with her first-time experience as a Crunchette.

"This has exceeded my expectations," said Pappas, 25, who relied on husband Michael to count each and every one of her 6,297 ab crunches. "It's so much fun. I just wanted to do as much as I could. It felt so good being a part of it, doing some good for the little ones and for me, too, it was a good, fun personal goal."

According to Parziale, the amount of money raised nationwide for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital won't be official until after April 11, when the donation period closes. The goal was \$1 million.

Gathering the number of ab crunches completed from the 220 Lady of America locations throughout the country is expected to conclude this week.

Documented information will be presented for consideration as a Guinness World Record.

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