



AND THEY'RE OFF!

Runners commemorate slain athletes and 9/11 victims with LBI's 38th annual 18-mile race

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The wave of a flag and a single gunshot will officially kick off the 38th annual running of LBI's 18-mile race at 10:30 a.m. Sunday. The event is sponsored jointly by the St. Francis Community Center and the Jewish Community Center of LBI.

Nearly 900 registered runners and thousands of cheering fans are expected to participate and line the route, which begins in Holgate, on the south end of the island, and stretches to the finish line at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park. Originally held in commemoration of the 11 Israeli athletes slain by terrorists during the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany, the race has been broadened to honor the thousands who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

According to Mike Thompson, recreation director at St. Francis Community Center and race coordinator, race registrations through September were ahead of their levels the same time last year.

"I think that the strong showing this race receives every year from both registered runners and supporters signifies how people feel about it and how important this event is to the whole community in LBI," Thompson said.

This year, 70 to 80 sponsors are taking part by donating items or providing necessary funds or services, while some 200 to 300 volunteers from the community will be assisting runners and supporting race logistics by providing water and sports drinks, administering ice packs, handing out T-shirts, serving food, marking time and distance, and delivering encouragement and good cheer along the way.

"We're so grateful to have so many sponsors and volunteers helping to



Runners approach a water stop along Long Beach Boulevard in Brant Beach.

power this run all the way through," Thompson said.

"Runners really seem to appreciate the support and services we offer as they cross the finish line, and our team truly enjoys participating in each runner's success and attainment of a goal, so we see it as a win-win for everyone," said Don Myers, head of the LBI Beach Patrol, who will celebrate his 29th year as finish line supervisor with this year's race.

Along with St. Francis Community Center, the Jewish Community Center of LBI has been a co-sponsor of this event since the race's inception.

"We are so thankful to be involved in this unique race and so proud that this event continues to commemorate the Israeli athletes from the 1972 Olympics," JCC President Don Pripstein said. "Too often, other, older tragedies are soon forgotten, but this race helps perpetuate and keep alive the memory of those athletes as well

as the unfortunate victims of 9/11 and other terrorist acts."

LBI's 18-mile race is an official USA TF (Track & Field)-sanctioned event for which runners can receive points qualifying them to participate in other prominent races.

"This race is a great tuneup for those runners gearing up for an event such as the New York Marathon in November," Thompson said. "If you're on LBI long enough, the 18-mile race becomes something you put on your 'life' list to do — it's a great tradition on the island that brings everyone in the community together in a very positive way," said Myers, who was part of the original group of lifeguards who first conceived of the race.

Runner registration fees are \$45, and registration and race packet pick-up will be held from 2 to 8 p.m. Saturday and from 7 to 9:30 a.m. on race day. For more information, visit www.lbisaintfrancis.org or call 609-494-8813.