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Special kids will have their best day ever at the beach
 Best Day Foundation promotes outdoor events for special-needs children
BY KENNY WALTER Staff Writer



ANDIE MONICK A young girl catches a wave with the help of surfer Johnny Bowling during a day at the beach sponsored by The Best Day Foundation.

LONG BRANCH — A California-based nonprofit will host the "Best Day at the Beach" series of events for special-needs kids at beaches along the Jersey Shore.

The Best Day Foundation will sponsor events at Seven Presidents Park in Long Branch on June 13-14 and July 11-12, as well as at Brick Beach II in Brick Township on July 25-26.

The Best Day New Jersey events are free for kids with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, blindness, cancer, spinal cord injuries and other physical and developmental challenges.

Brooks Lambert, an entrepreneur who founded three multimillion-dollar companies, and Max Montgomery, a writer, publisher and software developer, founded the foundation in March 2008.

The Best Day currently has two chapters, a local chapter based in Sea Bright and the original chapter based in Ventura, Calif.

According to its mission statement, the Best Day Foundation enables kids with special needs to build self-esteem and confidence through safe, fun, outdoor adventure activities that stretch their limits, expand their true potential, reinforce their achievements, and connect them with diverse populations in their communities.

Current activities include surfing, body boarding, kayaking and snow tubing.

According to the website, the foundation accomplishes these goals by enabling communities to offer special days at the beach and in the snow for children with special needs.

Best Day provides support, training, and business resources to ensure that safe, self-sufficient programs are created. The program is funded through donations, grants and sponsorships and is currently run entirely by volunteers.



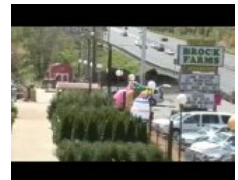
Lambert said he is an avid surfer, which is why a lot of the events are based around surfing.

Another member of the surfing community, Long Branch Councilman Brian Unger, agreed that the impact of Best Day is very positive for the children involved.

"It's just wonderful to have Best Day Foundation back in Long Branch," said Unger, a member of Surfers' Environmental Alliance (SEA). "The sheer fun and joy these kids have in the water is amazing."

According to Lambert, one of the challenges involved in running the foundation is securing funding.

"Finding funding is definitely one of the hardest parts of this," Lambert said. "Our money strictly has come from donations."



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"We have applied to a number of grants," Lambert added. "We haven't heard about them yet, but we have applied to a lot of them."

Lambert also said that the foundation has received a Google Grant, which allots a \$10,000 credit per month for advertising, as long as the money is used responsibly.

"For example, when someone types into Google 'special needs children,' a pop-up of Best Day Foundation may come up," Lambert said.

Another way the organization receives funds, according to Lambert, is when a donor works at a large firm like Merrill Lynch, the company will sometimes make a donation as well.

According to Lambert, Merrill Lynch has donated \$3,000 and Merck donated \$800 to the foundation.

The Best Day beach event in Long Branch will include a wide range of activities for special-needs kids, including surfing, body boarding and kayaking.

According to Lambert, most of the children arrive on the beach around 9:30 a.m. They do some warm-up exercises with people dressed as superheroes.

"The warm-up exercises are followed by a Coast Guard search and rescue presentation," Lambert said, "usually where someone like Spiderman saves a swimmer.

"There are also presentations on ocean safety and the environment," Lambert added. "Then we usually go to our activities, where kids tandem surf with a trained volunteer as well as body board and kayak in the ocean.

"The day concludes with a hot lunch and an awards ceremony where the kids get a medal and a picture taken."

According to Lambert, there is a waiting list for children who want to participate in the Best Day events, and there is a need for volunteers.

"Most of our days hold just under 40 kids," Lambert said. "Typically we have one volunteer to every three or four kids, and have about 10 volunteers working behind the scenes."

Lambert also said that the foundation is looking to expand some of the activities to include river rafting and mountain biking.

He said the benefits of the "Best Day at the Beach" go beyond the positive experiences the children have during their day at the shore.

"The benefits of these events go way beyond the benefit it gives the kids," Lambert said. "It also benefits the parents and volunteers greatly.

"The volunteers used to say it was one of their best days ever, which is where we came up with the name 'Best Day at the Beach.' "

To find out more about the "Best Day at the Beach," visit the website at <http://www.bestdayfoundation.org/> or call 1-800-309-2815.

Contact Kenny Walter at

kwalter@gmnews.com.