

Good news for a healthy you

Screening gets to the heart of the matter

by Erin Donohue

Merrick Avenue Middle School played host to the Jason F. Gruen Research Foundation's echocardiogram screening on two Saturdays this month.

Hundreds of students from both MAMS and Grand Avenue Middle School took advantage of the free screening spearheaded by Merokian Susan Gruen Helsinger, a local Realtor, Kiwanian and member of the Merrick Chamber of Commerce.

Mrs. Helsinger lost her son Jason Gruen to an abnormality of the heart, when he was just a 10th-grade student in Manhasset. This experience has led her to crusade against heart disease in young children and teens.

The program, run in cooperation with Schneider Children's Hospital, looks for cardiac abnormalities. Dr. Fredrick Bierman, MD, Schneider Children's Hospital Chairman of Pediatrics, is closely involved in the setup and implementation of the heart screening. It is offered to all eighth-grade boys and girls, not just those on sports teams. This program has found potential problems in over 20 teenagers.

"Merrick Avenue Middle School Principal Caryn Blum has been integral in bringing this program here," said Mrs. Helsinger. At the heart screening program the Bellmore-Merrick Central

High School District's Athletic Director Saul Lerner was among the volunteers who donated their time to organize and administer this program.

He expressed his appreciation for Mrs. Helsinger's generous endeavor and concern as to why so many school districts have not taken advantage of this free event.

So far, only four districts on Long Island have considered hosting this program. Long Beach recently completed a screening and similar events in Valley Stream and Great Neck are planned to take place in the fall. For information on the Jason F. Gruen Research Foundation and on the echocardiogram program, call 378-9756.

A letter from Mrs. Helsinger:

The Echocardiogram Screening for our eighth-graders was held this year on two Saturdays in May and we screened 240 students. It is a huge undertaking for the Bellmore-Merrick school district and our children reap the rewards.

Keeping our children safe and healthy are of our utmost priority. The Jason Gruen Foundation has now screened over 900 students and the findings are extraordinary and eye-opening - with over 20 eighth-graders found to have some sort of a cardiac

abnormality or issue.

This project would not be as successful as it is if it did not have so many wonderful volunteers. I must say a special "thank you" to the staff of our middle schools who give their own time to come in on Saturdays and volunteer their time.

Thank you to Alberta Miller who works countless hours on coordinating all the screening appointments and makes sure all the children are checked in.

Thank you to Beverly Heigh and Pat Kuhn; thank you science teacher Marc Bieler. Thank you to our school nurse Kathy Unger, who makes sure our children are weighed and measured and to scustodian Richard Cincotta, who comes in to open MAMS at 7:30 a.m. and does not leave until everything is done and complete. How lucky we are to have such wonderful people taking care of our children at school.

Thank you to all of you for helping to give meaning to the memory of my late son, Jason Gruen.

Susan Gruen Helsinger, Founder
The Jason Gruen Foundation

HEARTY LAD: An eighth-grade student gets his echocardiogram.

