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Police sweating it out for a national challenge

By PHIL GARBER
MANAGING EDITOR

MENDHAM TWP. - For Joseph Wilce, the hard part hasn't been exercising five times a week since January on top of workouts twice a week at the Mendham Township Middle School.

The really tough part has been staying away from the cookies and the beer, not necessarily together or in that order.

But Wilce, 32, a township police detective, along with Chief Steven Crawford, 42, Sgt. Steven Bittman, 31, and retired Marine Jerry Gallicchio, 43, are committed to continuing their strenuous fitness routines in hopes of winning the nationwide 911 Fitness Challenge.

The group will compete against about 200 teams in the eastern region of the country, stretching from Texas to New Jersey.

In addition to competing, Gallicchio is also coaching his fellow challengers. He knows the challenge well, having won the eastern competition in 2007 and 2008 as a member of the Monmouth County Sheriff's Depart-

ment team. Gallicchio joined the Monmouth County team because a cousin is with the department.

Gallicchio said the current team has a real good chance of winning.

"We're doing better than the two years when we won," said Gallicchio, a township resident.

So far, the sweat and abstinence from fattening foods have paid off for the three officers. They've each slimmed down to about 6.5 percent body fat after weighing in at 16 percent body fat.

Gallicchio, a Marine from 1985-89, said he expects to slim down to the 190s after starting at a weight of 225 pounds. In his past competitions, he dropped more than 20 pounds, going from 230 pounds down to 183 pounds.

An estimated 300 teams from the East Coast and Canada are competing in the program started in Miami, Fla., by former Miami Dade police lieutenant, Jim Sayih. Competition is open to anyone involved in the 911 response system, including police, firefighters, emergency medical workers and military members.

The winners will be on the teams that have cut the most cumulative body fat and increased the most cumulative muscle over the four month period ending on April 1. The contestants must submit before and after photos and have their body fat loss and muscle gain certified by a licensed trainer.

Going To Disneyworld

Winners will be flown to the Shriners International headquarters in Tampa, Fla. After visiting the Shriners Children's Hospital, the group will be bused to Disneyworld.

In addition to their transportation and housing payments, the winners also will receive \$5,000, which Wilce said would be donated to the middle school.

The challenge raises money for the 22 Shriners Children's Hospitals around the nation for research, therapy and equipment for burned and physically challenged children. It also is an incentive for emergency workers to get fit.

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Three Mendham Township police officers have been training for the national, 911 Fitness Challenge. Working out at the Mendham Health and Racket Club are, in front, Sgt. Steven Bittman, left, and Detective Joseph Wilce and, in rear, Chief Steven Crawford.

POLICE: Getting fit

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Sayih, the challenge founder, said more than \$100,000 has been raised for Shriners hospitals since he started the challenge in 1998.

Each competitor in three to five man teams pays a fee of \$50 which goes to the Shriners Hospital.

And in the township, the trio of fitness officers hope their example will spur the fifth through eighth grade students to trim down and eat healthy.

Since January, Wilce, Crawford and Bittman have been helping out and trying to motivate children in physical education classes at the middle school. The kids exercises include push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups and various cardio exercise.

The children who make the most progress will win a lunch with the police at the Mendham Health & Racquet Club on East Main Street.

Wilce said he's been pleasantly surprised at the fitness of many of the students. They can

typically do 10 to 20 push-ups in 30 seconds; not bad compared with the 30 push-ups the officers can squeeze out in the same time.

Pull-ups are tougher for the kids. If a student can do eight, it's exceptional, Wilce said.

"Our goal is to motivate the kids and get them off the couch," he said.

The officers have been training at the Mendham Health & Racquet Club for two hours a day, five or six days for every week.

The club is offering its facilities free of charge while Trend Motors is a major sponsor and bought warm-up gear and high protein foods for the officers.

Wilce is fit and used to working out. Dieting is another story, with lots of protein, grilled chicken and eggs.

It doesn't help that it's that time of the year when Girl Scout cookies are being sold.

"Diet is 95 percent of our success," he said. "Getting to the gym is the easy part. We're all craving chicken wings."