

coverstory

Basic training

Students aid police in 911 Fitness Challenge

By JAMIE DUFFY
SPECIAL TO MCW THIS WEEK

Mendham Township Police Chief Steven Crawford is in this to win. He's got a trainer lined up from the 2007 winning team, as well as a sponsor and many township middle schoolers cheering on his team. He has taken his team to Mendham Middle School, where students will compete with the team members in a series of physical challenges, including rock-wall climbing and jumping rope.

"It's my personality, unfortunately. I just like to win," says the fitness fanatic who daily weighs his team's odds against the competition, which could number 300 East Coast and Canadian teams.

Crawford, Detective Joe Wilce, Officer Steve Bittman and former Marine and team trainer Jerry Gallicchio have signed on to the 12-week 911 Fitness Challenge, a national competition that pits four-person teams of police, firefighters, military and civilians against each other to get totally fit, inspiring them to give up their favorite treats, super train five days a week and whittle down to action-figure physiques, busting the powdered-sugar-doughnuts-and-coffee stereotype.

Now all Crawford and the rest of his team have to do is lose about 15 percent of their body fat, which would get them down to a super-trim 6 percent to 10 percent. Most of them already have lost 15 to 20 pounds since the Jan. 4 weigh-in that took place under the eye of Brian Manning, assistant club manager at the Mendham Health & Racquet Club where all the police officers work out.

If the Mendham team wins, it will donate its \$5,000 prize to the Mendham



Staff photo by John Bell

Mendham Township police participate in the 911 challenge with the middle school fifth-graders. Molly Burns, 10, climbs the wall with Detective Joe Wilce.

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Township Middle School. The Miami-based challenge raises money for the Shriner's Children's Hospitals, and the winners will be flown to Miami to meet founder and former Miami-Dade police Lt. Jim Sayih.

Crawford has set up a return engagement at Mendham Middle School, challenging the fifth- to eighth-grade students to raise the bar on personal fitness. The class with the most overall improvement wins a party at the Racquet Club.

In early January, the policemen started turning up at the school's physical education classes, hoping to inspire children to get fit and learn that police officers are the good guys. The team encourages the children as they make their way through an exercise circuit.

For Crawford, the school visits combine his love of keeping fit with mentoring

school children and "getting them off the couch, getting them away from video games" and discouraging the use of drugs and underage drinking.

Physical education teacher Jeff Dillon said the training circuit focuses on upper body strength because over the years that is something that he and his colleague, Cindy Dour, have seen weaken in children.

Baseball and basketball player Noah Davie, 10, said push-ups were difficult for him. His goal is to do five without stopping and to be able to go 90 seconds at the jump rope station. Working out with the team is a "good idea," he said because "it's fun."

Julianna Bernt, also 10, said she "feels it the next day, like you're stronger." The basketball player and track competitor was one of the four girls who went head-to-head with the competition, whizzing around a green froggie.

"I think they're always excited to have the police officers in the schools," said Patrick Ciccone, the school

principal. "It certainly makes them more motivated and more on task when the officers are there working out with them."

Crawford had no trouble getting sponsor Adam Green of Trendz Motors to sign on.

Having law enforcement officers they look up to setting and achieving goals "gives them the motivation to set their own goals," Green said.

Green will spend about \$3,000, he said, supplying the men with supplements and protein shakes purchased at Pro Nutrition in Kenvil, warm-up suits and other necessary items.

The team's training regime is intense.

A 6 a.m., the athletes run three to five miles, followed later in the day with weight training at the racquet club and a two-mile run. The team eats six meals a day, but there is no cheese, pizza, chocolate or ice cream. What they can eat is plenty of peanut butter and oatmeal and veggies.

"I could go for a big steak," sighs Crawford.