

Hitting the water to fight Alzheimer's

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Eight years ago Bryan Proctor watched helplessly as his grandfather, Albert Rivoire, suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Determined to help in some way, the Northport resident turned to an unending Long Island resource to drum up support -- the water.

In 2003 Proctor made his first Distant Memories Swim -- a 4-mile trip across Northport Bay from Asharoken Beach to Knollwood Beach -- on his own to raise Alzheimer's awareness. In 2004 he was joined by his brother and some friends. The event has steadily grown each year, and on Thursday 31 swimmers and an assortment of kayakers joined him in an effort to raise \$15,000 for the Ronkonkoma-based Long Island chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

"In college I was life-guarding for the Town of Huntington, and I thought, 'I wonder if I could swim across here,' " the 27-year-old Northport High School physical education teacher said. "Then I started wondering if I could generate some publicity [for Alzheimer's], so I decided to swim across the bay."

Thursday's swimmers, whose ages ranged from the teens to the 50s, waded into the water at 10:20 a.m., moving against an incoming tide. Kayaks, paddle boards and Centerport and Northport Fire Department boats were on the water to cheer on swimmers, and lend a helping hand if anyone got stuck. Each year the swim is dedicated to an Alzheimer's victim, and this year it was Northport's Hal Daly.

Since 2008 Daly's son, Jim, a 45-year-old Huntington resident, has participated in the Distant Memories Swim, donning a temporary tattoo bearing his father's name and "'33 - '03" -- the span of his life. Jim broke his collarbone last week, relegating him to the sand, but he brought his brother, Patrick, 41, out from Rego Park, Queens, to swim for him.

"When we saw this event we thought, 'What a great way to honor his memory,'" said Jim Daly, whose dad was a veteran lifeguard.

Syosset attorney Erik Zaratini, 32, finished the swim first in 45 minutes, setting a record time. He brought in donations from Oyster Bay's Harbor House -- an assisted living facility for people going through declines in cognitive function -- and Sahn Ward Coschignano & Baker, the Uniondale law firm he works at.

Proctor said this year's race brought in \$6,000 from entry fees and early donations, but added that most of the donations come on the day of the race and for several days after.

"It [completing the swim] is a feeling of accomplishment," said Proctor, whose grandfather died in 2009 at age 88. "Alzheimer's is one of those diseases you don't really have control over. There's no cure right now so I think it makes people feel that they are fighting back against the disease. It gives them a little bit of hope."