

## Teterboro runway run was a hot race Airport's tarmac made for a flat, and sweltering, course

By **MARY DIDUCH**  
STAFF WRITER

**TETERBORO** — With jet planes and the New York City skyline in the background, hundreds of runners on Saturday hit the blistering hot runway at Teterboro Airport to run a 5K race to benefit Bergen County's United Way.

The 16th annual race, sponsored by PSE&G, brought in around \$50,000 that will be used toward United Way's 211 system, a 24-hour crisis help line that assists callers with everything from housing, temporary financial needs and mental health. Since the race's inception, \$500,000 has been raised.

The hotline, which receives around 150,000 calls a year, was instrumental in helping people rebuild after Superstorm Sandy in October, said Gina Plotino, director of communications for the United Way. Since Sandy, the hotline received 50,000 more calls, she said.

Tom Toronto, president of

Bergen County's United Way, said the race is a great community event that unites the airport community with local runners. The race also attracts many of the region's top runners because of its flat, unique course — the airport's runway — that also provides views of Manhattan's skyscrapers.

"It's really kind of beautiful," said Toronto, who also runs the race every year.

While the runners didn't have to contend with hills or many turns, they did have to face a tarmac baking under the sun in the middle of a protracted heat wave. The number of runners dropped to around 800 from just under 1,000, likely because of the weather, Plotino said.

The Moonachie First Aid & Rescue Squad, which brought 10 more members this year, had three units out in the fields in the 90-degree heat.

"It's flat, it's fast, but it's hot," said Jessica Palange of Stamford, Conn., participating in the event for her seventh time.

Kevin Burns of Ramsey, part of the North Jersey Masters Track and Field Club, said he and his group train to run in the heat. But on one curved stretch of the tarmac, he estimated that the temperature felt about 120 degrees.

"It feels like a wall," Burns said.

John Puljols of Hackensack blazed past the field in a neon pink shirt to win in 16 minutes and 40 seconds. Puljols, an athlete at La Salle University in Philadelphia, ran with a group of friends who also compete at the collegiate level and train together over the summer by running local races.

Puljols said he was relieved the weather wasn't as hot as it had been over the past week, with temperatures soaring to 100 degrees or higher.

"It was a good race," he said.

And while race organizers expected the blistering heat of the past week to be an issue — as it usually is every year — they also stepped up security in light of the bombings in April at the Boston Marathon, said Cheryl Moses, race director.

While runners and guests always were required to present ID and go through security, all the volunteers had their backgrounds checked again this year instead of sporadically, Moses said.

Moses said when she saw what happened in Boston, she was concerned about what would happen to races moving forward. But three months later, she said the mood has lifted.

"Everybody's out to have fun," Moses said.

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CHRIS PEDOTA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Runners crossing the finish line at the Teterboro Airport 5K race on Saturday.