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## 'Strike Out ALS' donors pitch in \$207,000 in Neptune

**Foundation uses proceeds to help  
people with nerve cell disease**

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A dollar here and there, given at the Saker ShopRite registers during the annual October "Strike Out ALS" fundraising campaign, has resulted in immeasurable support for Thomas Porcello of Long Branch.

"We are so grateful," Porcello, 43, said Thursday at the ceremonial check presentation in Neptune to the Joan Dancy and PALS Foundation, which works to help Monmouth and Ocean counties' residents manage not only the disease but other aspects of their lives.

"They show such concern and care for all of us with ALS," Porcello said.

Assistance comes in the form of home visits, telephone calls and e-mails as well as help organizing finances, paperwork and insurance claims and mental health support, said Porcello, who was diagnosed with the disease in 2008. Before then, he had spent five years searching for a source of symptoms that included difficulty walking, a slight limp and weakness.

"They help us understand what to expect and encourage us to live the best life we can," Porcello said.

ALS, or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease for the baseball Hall of Famer, is a rare debilitating disease affecting nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain.

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**Thomas Porcello (left) of Long Branch, an ALS patient, walks with Richard Saker, chairman of the Joan Dancy and PALS Foundation, after Thursday's presentation of a \$207,000 check to the foundation. The money was raised from contributions at 27 ShopRite stores owned by the Saker family. (STAFF PHOTO: THOMAS P. COSTELLO)**

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The foundation – the PALS in the name stands for People with ALS – was created by Middletown resident Joan Dancy, diagnosed with the disease at age 50. Along with fiance Terry Magovern, Dancy worked to establish a local support mechanism that could help fill the gaps in patient support the medical community could not fill.

Before Dancy died at age 54 in 2006, she left the responsibility to continue on in Magovern's hands, but when he died unexpectedly in July 2007, the legacy was passed onto his son, Sean.

"We are trying to take that level of stress off their shoulders," Sean Magovern said. "In turn that improves their quality of life."

Founding foundation trustee and board Chairman Richard Saker said the annual fundraising campaign is held throughout his family's 27 central New Jersey supermarkets during Major League Baseball's postseason play, to help spread awareness. This year the campaign raised \$207,000.

"People who are giving money know it's not leaving their neighborhood," Saker said. "We are working to not only get those diagnosed with the disease the help they need, but also to get their families to understand what is available to them through state and federal programs as well as through nonprofit programs."

Among efforts is the foundation's partnering with the staytough.fightHARD Foundation, created in memory of Tim O'Neill, who died at 46 after fighting the disease for more than three years.

"This disease affects every single person we meet differently," said O'Neill's brother Jim. "We touch, we feel, we hug, we cry, we laugh with them. They have all become family."

The two groups' annual Valentine Plunge will begin at noon Feb. 13 at the main beach in Manasquan. For more information, visit [www.joandancyandpals.com](http://www.joandancyandpals.com).