

Blue Thongs meet to 'fight frump,' support charities

By Alena Competello

The wintery weather was no match for a group of 20 women who, despite the cold, slipped on their blue flip-flops for a meeting of the Blue Thongs' Toms River/Lavallette Chapter at the Crab's Claw in Lavallette on Monday night.

Nannette Ryan-McKendrick, a resident of Toms River who spent her childhood summers on Virginia Avenue in Lavallette, formed the chapter after reading about the Blue Thong Society's Brick chapter a couple of years ago.

"What appealed to me was the 'fight frump' angle," Ms. Ryan-McKendrick said, explaining that she had just lost 180 pounds and was coming up on her 50th birthday.

"A friend of mine encouraged me to start a chapter so I did and within a day, the Blue Thong Society had us on their Web site. Within three days I had e-mails from 16 people that I didn't know who wanted to join," Ms. Ryan-McKendrick added.

The Toms River/Lavallette chapter of the Blue Thong Society held its first meeting in March 2007 at Ms. Ryan-McKendrick's home. Twenty-three people attended that initial gathering, she said, and since then the chapter's membership has grown to 50 women — the largest chapter in the country right now, according to Ms. Ryan-McKendrick.

The Blue Thong Society was created by California resident Jackie Tushinsky and her group of friends, women of the "rebellious, free love-child era of the

60s," according to the society's official Web site.

The Blue Thong Society motto is to "fight frump" and defy aging. It is a group "to encourage and educate our girlfriends ... on the benefits of staying hip, beautiful and chic forever," according to the Web site.

Members of the Blue Thong Society must be 21 or older. Currently, there are over 150 chapters and 4,000 members nationwide.

The color blue was chosen because it is linked to "emotions such as sympathy, harmony, friendship and loyalty," the Web site states.

Each local Blue Thong Society chapter adopts a local charity and works as a group to support its cause.

The charities supported by the Toms River/Lavallette chapter include Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity Providence House, Toms River Animal Shelter and the Strand Theatre, said Ms. Ryan-McKendrick.

"From time to time, if some other cause touches us, we'll do something for them," Ms. Ryan-McKendrick added.

On Monday night, the blue thongs collected formal dresses for Cinderella's Closet, a group from Manchester High School that collects prom dresses for girls who would otherwise not be attend the prom because they could not afford a dress, Ms. Ryan-McKendrick said.

Eight dresses were collected on Monday night and added to the tree from Ms. Ryan-McKendrick's own closet, a total

of 11 dresses will be donated to Cinderella's Closet, she reported.

Monday night's meeting also featured a presentation by Theresa McCutcheon, of Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey, said Ms. Ryan-McKendrick.

Ms. McCutcheon spoke to the members about the organization, explaining that 23 children die each year in New Jersey alone due to child abuse.

Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey [PCA-NJ] is a statewide, nonprofit organization founded in 1979.

"By establishing local partnerships PCA-NJ builds communities, strengthens families and empowers parents through parenting programs, education and training, advocacy and public awareness activities," the organization's Web site states.

The blue thongs will be supporting Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey, Ms. Ryan-McKendrick said.

"The most important thing is to support the parents, even in little ways," she said.

The blue thongs will be supporting another one of their charities on March 13 when they participate in the Strand Theatre's Girls Night Out, Ms. Ryan-McKendrick said. The women will eat chocolate, sip champagne and shop in the lobby prior to watching a performance of "Little Women." The money raised through ticket prices and sales will be used to support the theater's operating costs, among other things, Ms. Ryan-McKendrick said.

The blue thongs have hosted a



number of charitable events, as they strive to raise money for their chosen charities. "We try to make it fun," Ms. Ryan-McKendrick said.

Ms. Ryan-McKendrick, at Ms. Tushinsky's request, will also be serving as the organizer, or "go-to person," in the tri-state area for More magazine's Half

Marathon in Central Park on April 26, she said.

New members are always welcome to join the chapter and can contact Ms. Ryan-McKendrick via the Blue Thong Society Web site at www.bluethongsociety.com and clicking on the membership link.

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