



93 Main Street, West Sayville, N.Y. 11796  
www.syntaxcom.com

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**For Immediate Release**

**Contact: Rosemary Leonetti**  
**Tel: 516-897-9761**  
[rleonetti@syntaxcom.com](mailto:rleonetti@syntaxcom.com)

## **LBMS Athletes Take Part in Free Heart Screening Program**

Thirty-five eighth graders at Long Beach Middle School took advantage of a free heart screening for students participating in district sports programs. The initiative was brought to their school through a cooperative arrangement with the Jason F. Gruen Research Foundation and Schneider Children's Hospital. The purpose of the screening is to identify cardiac abnormalities that can be detected by means of an echocardiogram. Funding for the program was provided by the Gruen Foundation. The Long Beach School District is one of four school districts in Nassau County selected to participate in this program.

This type of ultrasound exam evaluates the size and function of the left pumping chamber of the heart (left ventricle) and the size of the main artery of the body (aorta) as well as the function of its valve (aortic valve) to identify abnormalities that may not be apparent from a customary preparticipation physical examination. Abnormal left ventricular size (cardiomyopathy) or abnormal aorta size or function may result in abnormalities of heart function when an individual with such an abnormality participates in organized, competitive sports.

The program was introduced to Long Beach Middle School through the efforts of Neil Sterrer and Joe Sinnona, directors of the Long Island Board of Realtors, as part of its "We're More than Realtors" community outreach program. Dr. Fred Bierman, Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Schneider Children's Hospital performed the screenings. Arnold Epstein, District Director of Athletics, Physical Education and Health and Director of Pupil Personnel Services Dr. Mary Tatem facilitated the program with Barbara Young, the district's Nurse Coordinator. School nurses Mary Beth Thurston, Lori Field and Liz Lebowitz assisted Ms. Young.

Susan Gruen Helsinger founded the Jason F. Gruen Research Foundation in honor of her son Jason, who died from an undiagnosed heart condition when he was a sophomore at Manhasset High School. Since that tragic event, Ms. Gruen Helsinger has been working tirelessly with cardiac specialists at Schneider Children's Hospital to help diagnose life-threatening heart conditions in other children. The program, which was first introduced in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District, has screened over 1,100 students so far, and has referred approximately one dozen students for further evaluations.

Long Beach Middle School eighth grader Ben Steinberg, who plays football, lacrosse and volleyball, was one of the students who participated in the screening. When asked about the procedure, he said, "It was quick and painless."

Ben's father Cliff Steinberg, whose older son Mason took part in the program last year, said, "It's a wonderful program. Other parents should really take advantage of it."

*Photo 1:*

*Long Beach Middle School eighth grader Sinclair Mason and her mother Susan Brooks discuss the results of her heart screening with Dr. Fred Bierman, Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Schneider Children's Hospital, who performed the test.*

*Photo 2:*

*School nurse Mary Beth Thurston weighs Long Beach Middle School eighth grader Ben Steinberg before he participates in a free heart screening at his school. After his screening was complete, he described the procedure as "quick and painless."*

*Photo 3:*

*Through a cooperative agreement with the Jason F. Gruen Foundation, the Long Beach School District offered free heart screenings to 35 eighth graders. On hand at the screening were Neil Sterrer, co-director of the Long Island Board of Realtors; Dr. Fred Bierman, chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Schneider Children's Hospital; school nurse Liz Lebowitz, Nassau County Legislator Denise Ford, school nurses Mary Beth Thurston and Lori Field; District Director of Athletics, Physical Education and Health Arnold Epstein; District Nurse Coordinator Barbara Young; State Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg and his wife Ellen; and Joe Sinnona, co-director of the Long Island Board of Realtors.*

PHOTOS: Rosemary Leonetti, Syntax