

Surfing

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Ditch Plains.

"It's the first time for him to ever touch a surfboard," his father remarked. "We haven't even tried him on a boogie board yet."

Dylan's opportunity to hang ten came thanks to Surfers Healing, a foundation that "seeks to enrich the lives of children with autism and their families by exposing them to the unique experience of surfing." Israel Paskowitz founded the California-based organization when he came upon the idea of surfing with his own autistic child, Isaiah.

East End Disability Associates contacted Paskowitz after a couple of parents in the organization mentioned Surfer's Healing at a meeting. The organization happened to be doing an event in Long Beach in Nassau County, where they have done events before, and agreed to come to the East End.

"It fits in perfectly with what we're trying to do," said EEDA Information Manager Deirdre Severson. "These families have a lot of struggles throughout their life and it's nice for them to have a place to go where they're automatically accepted."

Dylan's mother Kim Covell said she's known about the event at Long

Beach for years but that it has never come as far east as Montauk.

"When I heard about it at an EEDA meeting I was like 'No way!'" said Covell. "I was totally excited and signed Dylan up immediately."

Dylan's father said he and his wife have had a hard time finding something he really likes to do.

"It's usually a pretty good bet that if it involves water, he'll enjoy it," said Motz. "We have a pool and he spends most of his time in the pool or in the ocean."

His mother said when the family bought their home in Water Mill they had a five-point plan. The last point was putting a swimming pool in the backyard. Once they realized the effect the water had on their son, the fifth point became the first.

"We put the pool in right away," said Covell.

She said the one reason the event was so special was because it combined something the kids love, the water, and something they would probably never be able to do on their own, surfing.

Dylan was among 80 kids who attended the event on Friday. There were hundreds of spectators lining the beach, cheering and applauding the children as they surfed. On occasion a round of applause would erupt simply because a child had worked up enough courage to enter the water on his or her own.

As the children entered the water a surfer would help them on to the surfboard. Some of the kids didn't hesitate and jumped right on. The surfer would then climb on behind them and paddle out into the ocean. Other kids preferred a piggy-back method and climbed on the surfers' backs.

Waiting for the Wave

Like any surfer, the tandem would sit and wait for the perfect wave. And on Friday there were a lot of them. The surfer would begin paddling and once they were able to stand they would bend down and lift the kids up, all the while balancing on the board. Once the kid was standing, the surfer would lightly hold on to them and steer them to the beach. The kids were surfing with a little help from their new friends.

"You help the kid up and sometimes forcefully, by his life jacket," said local surfer Stevie White. "Helping a large eighty-year-old via the loop on his jacket isn't easy."

White said Dylan absolutely loved the water, he would jump off the board and just swim around.

"I heard a parent say 'it was like a normal day for the whole family and we don't have a lot of those,'" said White. "Everybody was surprised to get kids out on the water who aren't always open to new behavior and how quickly they adapted and loved it."

Local surfers and Ross School stu-

dents Tom Stelle, Taylor Wilson and Grant Monahan were allowed to skip school and help with the event. They said it was "school approved hooky."

"One kid was afraid to even get in the water," said Wilson. "But when he finally got up and caught a wave, he didn't want to come back in."

Monahan was moved by one child in particular.

"This kid Carlos was awesome," said Monahan. "I took him out and I was like 'lie down,' but all he wanted to do was stand up. He had such determination. It's unbelievable seeing what these kids are doing."

"I was expecting just a small beach gathering," said Stelle. "But then I got here and there were these four big tents and all of the people and like 80 kids."

Stelle, who lives in Sag Harbor, said he spent most of the morning just standing in the water grabbing kids as they came in and that it "felt good" seeing the expressions on their faces and "knowing how happy they were."

As Dylan was catching waves with different surfers, his mother Kim was scrambling to take photographs. His father Tim was standing on the rocks of Ditch Plains that jut out into the water and the smile on his face was almost as big, if not bigger, than Dylan's.

"He's going out for his third time," said the ecstatic father.

"The surfing didn't really register," said Dylan's father Tim. "But autistic kids have a natural affinity to the water so as soon as he got to the beach he was really excited."

It didn't take long for the surfing to "register" for Dylan. Within minutes he was on a surfboard riding the waves at the historic Montauk surf spot

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SURFER STEVIE WHITE gives a lesson to Dylan Motz at Ditch Plains Friday

john bayles photo

Surfing For Smiles

Helping autistic kids hang ten

BY JOHN BAYLES

Eight-year-old Water Mill resident Dylan Motz woke up last Friday morning and he knew he was going to the ocean so he was happy. His parents had told him they were taking him surfing, but because Dylan is autistic, his sense of time and the future is abstract, so surfing wasn't on his mind, but the water was.

Tim Motz used to surf when he was a kid. He said it's been years though since he's been on a board.

"If this is something he [Dylan] likes to do, then I see us doing it all the time," Motz said.

It was clearly something Dylan enjoyed, as did the other kids. As the surfers rode the kids in to the beach it was all ear-to-ear grins. Some of the kids refused to get off the surf board and begged to go out for one more wave.

Severson told the story of one woman who brought her child to the event. The child wasn't signed up to surf and the mother just wanted to see what it was all about, perhaps deciding whether or not to sign up her son next year. Surfers Healing, though, was generous enough to take the child out on Friday.

"I just happened to be standing by the mother in the water when they brought her son in," said Severson. "He was a little hesitant at first. But when he came in and she saw the expression, the huge smile, tears started running down her face."

Severson said the event was a huge success and that EEDA is definitely planning on making it an annual event.

"Sometimes we have resistance in certain areas where we work and it was very pleasant to see this reaction and response to us," remarked Severson. "Montauk definitely embraced us."



DYLAN MOTZ gets a hand up from surfer Stevie White bayles photo