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Monday, March 19, 2007

Shonda Schilling visits Portsmouth: Hosts local Boston Marathon auction for melanoma foundation

By **THOMAS R. KRESSLER**
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PORTSMOUTH — In 2005, Shonda Schilling, wife of Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling, laced up her running shoes and hit the streets of Beantown for the Boston Marathon.

Following a successful bout with malignant melanoma, running the grueling race was a way to reclaim her life, Schilling said during Saturday's fundraiser at The Ballroom at the Rockingham, in Portsmouth.

"Running a marathon was like taking my life back," Schilling said. "I didn't have to be scared of the outdoors anymore."

Schilling's diagnosis was in 2001, and a year later she founded the SHADE Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness of issues related to skin cancer. Since 2005, running the Boston Marathon has been a way to raise money for the organization, which also sponsors a nationwide poster contest in schools, among other projects.

Saturday's event at the downtown hot spot was a fundraiser for three local marathon runners, who are among 15 SHADE is sponsoring and was St. Patrick's Day themed. Green Red Sox hats and jerseys abounded while about 75 party goers ate food donated by Shaw's, sipped wine and bid on numerous items in a silent and live auction, including autographed Red Sox memorabilia.

The goal was to raise \$10,000 for the team, and ultimately \$80,000 by April 16, the day of the 26.2-mile marathon.



Shonda Schilling, wife of Red Sox ace Curt Schilling and SHADE founder announces to attendees at a Saturday event in The Ballroom at the Rockingham the names of those running the Boston Marathon for the foundation. These include her brother Michael Brewer, left, and Rachel and Luke Martin, right. (John Huff/Staff photographer)

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Schilling's brother, Michael Brewer, of Dover, was one of the three runners sponsoring the event. Like Schilling, this will be his third year running with the team.

"I keep saying the last, but she (Schilling) keeps saying no," Brewer joked. "I don't look forward to the training."

For less experienced runners, training typically begins four months before the marathon. The two other local runners are Luke and Rachel Martin, of South Berwick, Maine, who are brother and sister-in-law.

"It (SHADE) was really started because there wasn't anything else out there," Schilling said. "So many people lost loved ones and a lot of people really didn't know what it was. I felt like I had an obligation."

The Schillings are involved in a number of charitable pursuits, among them Curt Schilling's partnership with the ALS Foundation. But running the marathon is a way Shonda can raise money for SHADE without depending on Curt. It also furthers the goal of educating children and parents about skin health, which she says is often ignored.

"We teach kids how to brush their teeth but we don't teach them how to take care of their skin," Schilling said.

Heidi and Tripp Johnson, neighbors of the Schillings in Medfield, Mass., made the trip Saturday night to support the SHADE Foundation. Having known the Schillings for more than two years, their connection runs deep.



SHADE founding member Shonda Schilling, wife of Red Sox ace Curt Schilling, announces to attendees of Saturday's event in The Ballroom at the Rockingham the names of people running the Boston Marathon this year. (John Huff/Staff photographer)

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use. It's amazing."

As a health and physical education teacher at Dover Middle School, George Liset says he is aware of the lack of skin cancer awareness and a supporter of the SHADE Foundation. And as a lifelong Red Sox fan, he was eyeing any number of autographed memorabilia Saturday night, including a signed Curt Schilling jersey and a signed issue of Sports Illustrated declaring the Red Sox "Sportsmen of the Year" following their 2004 World Series win.

"I was one of those people who when they won the World Series I went to

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The Johnsons' son William, 7, suffers from Spinal Muscular Atrophy, a completely debilitating disease similar to ALS. Schilling noticed William's disability when the two families ran into each other at a neighborhood baseball field. In Oct. 2005, Schilling was instrumental in getting the Johnsons on an episode of Extreme Makeover, where their old farmhouse was transformed into a mansion.

In addition, Heidi Johnson has battled melanoma twice, first in 1998 and again 2001, leading her to support the SHADE Foundation whenever possible.

"The power of the Schilling family goes far," Heidi Johnson said. "They take all their energy and put it to good

my grandparents' grave," Liset said. "I've got a (Carlton) Fisk autograph, a (Ted) Williams autograph, and a (Carl) Yastrzemski autograph, and it's my goal to get a Schilling autograph tonight. I might have to break the bank to do it."

Plus, any money he bids goes to a good cause.

"It's great when they give something back to the community," Liset said. "Any chance to support a great organization, I like to be able to do that."

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