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'Real Housewives' add glitz to charity run

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GLEN ROCK — Cupid's Chase, a 5K fund-raising run held Saturday, seemed like a typical community charity event — until a van pulled up at the starting line depositing the cast of the "The Real Housewives of New Jersey," their entourage of relatives and friends, and a Bravo camera crew.

Caroline Manzo, the matriarch of the clan, "rallied the troops," she said, to participate in the race, which benefits Community Options, a national non-profit organization that helps disabled people live in small group residential homes and find jobs. About 350 runners participated in the Bergen County event, raising \$14,000.

The "Housewives" made a fashionably late entrance — 10 minutes after the starting horn blared — because the "girls had to get pretty," Manzo said.

In addition to the reality-television star



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power, Cupid's Chase has some weighty political support as well. The first lady of New Jersey, Mary Pat Christie, is the national honorary chairwoman of the event, with races taking place in 24 U.S. cities. Christie did not attend the Glen Rock event.

State Sen. Bob Gordon, D-Fair Lawn, and his wife, Gail — a major fund-raiser for Governor Christie, who served on his transition team — chaired the Glen Rock race.

This quiet suburb became among the "major cities" — including New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago — hosting the event because one of North Jersey's Community Option's executive directors, Glen Rock native Meredith Quinn, wanted to bring the race to her hometown.

Community Options began in 1989 in the Bordentown kitchen of CEO and founder Robert Stack to get people with disabilities out of institutions and living and working in communities. The organization has grown into a multi-state operation. In New Jersey,

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they run up to 70 group homes and multiple social enterprises from flower shops to a business incubator that employs people with disabilities. Community Option's Bergen/Essex/Morris office is based in Elmwood Park and the Passaic office is in Wayne.

Damian Schuler, a resident of a Community Options home in Fair Lawn who attended Saturday's race, said the non-profit has helped him apply for jobs and fill out applications for Bergen Community College. Schuler proudly described the home he shares with one other disabled young man and an "adult leader" who supervises the pair. "It's two of us in the house. It's big with cherry wood in the kitchen and stainless steel," he said, adding, "We have to clean up after ourselves."

Long after the runners had set out, the "Real Housewives" crew gathered to join the race. With the producers and cameramen planning the shots, Teresa Giudice, sporting black and hot-pink spandex, lingered around the starting line with her husband, Joe, looking unsure about what to do. Then a producer shouted "Teresa, go!" and with that the couple took off at a leisurely pace, a golf cart with a camera crew shadowing them.

After finishing the run and not showing a bit



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of sweat, Jacqueline Laurita shared what she could about the new season, and two new undisclosed cast members. "It's different," she said, wearing a matching zebra-striped hat and gloves. "It's not evil. It's family drama. More people can relate to the situations."

A few steps away, one of the unconfirmed new "Housewives," Melissa Gorga, a petite brunette from Montville and the sister-in-law of Giudice, mounted the back of her husband, Joe, who was doing a push-up. "It's the Gorga push-up," Joe said. Asked if she's the newest member, Gorga smiled, "I'm not allowed to say."

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