

National Autism Awareness Month



Submitted Photo

Team Tolerance walked in the Project Autism Imagine Walk at Goddard Park last week. By raising \$10,000 for the cause 30 people from the school district can be specially trained in spectrum disorder education. See Page A-6 for more photos.

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COVENTRY — Teachers, faculty, staff, students, parents and others from Coventry all came together in a joint effort last weekend to support a common cause.

The Autism Project hosted its 9th Annual Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day for Autism in conjunction with National Autism Awareness month.

Many from our local community were a part of the more than 6,000 that marched through the trails at Goddard Park in support of the project.

Jennifer Cohn, a special education teacher at Blackrock Elementary School partnered up with Cara Capalbo, who is also a resource teacher in the district, to organize the local commitment to the cause. Each year for the past four years the two women have organized the local community behind one unified team known as Team Tolerance.

Team Tolerance has raised thousands and thousands of dollars for the Autism Project, a feat which has also delivered much in terms of benefits to the local community.

Cohn said that the Autism Project presents a challenge each year to local teams that want to participate.

“The Autism Project presents a school and community challenge that says that if you raise \$10,000 as a team you can get

30 people from your school district trained in a 9-week course for spectrum disorder education,” Cohn said. “We have met that goal 3 years in a row so we have already had 90 people trained, which is a tremendous asset to the students in our district that are diagnosed with a spectrum disorder.”

Cohn said that typically such trainings cost upwards of \$450 per person and would be a cost and commitment that would be required of teachers on an individual basis. This opportunity, she said, allows the district to secure the opportunity at no cost at all to teachers, faculty, administrators and all others that are employed through the school district.

“This really is a big deal,” Cohn said. “It’s a great opportunity for teachers and actually it is not just limited to teachers. We have had teacher’s assistants, administrators, therapists, many different roles within the district that we have sent to be trained.

“And the good thing about it is that the training is not just limited to working with kids with autism,” she said. “The tools that the trainees get in this course can be applied to working with all types of sensory and spectrum disorders.”

Cohn said that the training is typically offered in the fall and the evening so comes with a commitment on behalf of the teachers who want to participate. That has, however, never

been an issue. Each of the past three years that the district has secured the training, she said that she has received an overwhelming response of interest from the district.

“Almost every year we have had to turn people away, that is why it is so important to us to come up with that \$10,000 again this year,” she said.

So far the district has not yet achieved their goal for which they need to meet the challenge, but Cohn said that they have until the end of the school year to do it. She said that there are still two organized fund raisers already scheduled and that more may be arranged depending on where the final tally from these two events lands the district.

The first of the last two scheduled fund raisers is planned for this Saturday, April 16th at Papa Gino’s in Coventry. Anyone who wants to support the cause is just asked to dine at Papa Gino’s in Coventry anytime between 5 and close and mention Team Tolerance. Cohn said that 20 percent of all Papa Gino’s sales where Team Tolerance is mentioned will be donated to the local team.

A similar campaign will run next weekend, on Saturday, April 23 at the Texas Roadhouse. Anyone who dines at that location on that date between 5 and 10 p.m. and mentions Team Tolerance will have 10 percent of their sales donated to the cause.

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Two more events are scheduled before school year ends

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“So far I actually have no idea exactly how much money we are short,” Cohn said. “I know we are not there just yet, but we are close.

“Overall, as a district, we are

very fortunate when it comes to fund raising,” she said. “People are tremendously supportive so I am hopeful and confident that we will meet our goal.

“We have every year for the past three years so I just hope that these next two events will

put us over the top,” she said. “This training opportunity is just not something that the district can afford to miss out on and it's for a wonderful cause so together, as a community, I hope we will be able to pull it off.”