

Lifestyles

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Walk and celebrate

Summit holds annual benefit to help children with developmental disabilities

by **RIKKI CASON**
Reporter

The eighth annual walk to benefit Summit Educational Resources will be held Saturday, April 26, with registration beginning at 10:30 a.m. and the walk starting at 11:30 a.m.

The walk will begin at Summit Educational Resources, 150 Stahl Road, Getzville, and continue for close to three miles, following the Amherst Bike Path.

Teams and individual walkers will collect pledges, with the funds benefiting Summit. "The money supports general programs and services for children with autism and related disabilities," said Michele Buckles, development and special events coordinator.



Four-year-old Jimmy Roberts will participate in his first Summit Educational Resources walk. He has been going to Summit since last September.

well as refreshments and a chance to win prizes.

The individual who raises the most money will receive a Nintendo Wii. The team that raises the most money will win a party for up to 20 people at Lasertron. Finally, the team that wears the most creative T-shirt will win a prize for the team.

Last year, more than 300 people attended, but according to Buckles, close to 500 people are expected this year.

"It grows every year," she said. "A lot of our walk is parents, children and staff who get teams together."

Buckles said a high percentage of the participants come from the Summit family, along with many local businesses.

Jimmy Roberts is a 4-year-old boy who will attend the walk for the first time with his family and friends. He was diagnosed a year and a half ago, and initially, his family thought he just had a speech delay.

His mother, Sharon Roberts, didn't know much about autism, but learned "really fast." His mother remembers that Jimmy didn't talk at all, not until right before his third birthday.

"In this past year, he pretty much now has the speech of a typical 4-year-old," Roberts said. "He still has some things that are considered autistic, but if you were to meet him, you wouldn't know he has autism."

Part of Jimmy's progress comes from Summit Educational Resources, which he has attended since Septem-

ber. Even before attending, he had a therapist who came from Summit to help him at home.



Families walk in support of Summit Educational Resources. This year's event will take place on Saturday, April 26.

ber. Even before attending, he had a therapist who came from Summit to help him at home. "Jimmy has made incredible strides," said his cousin, Kim Geis, who will be walking with Jimmy on Saturday. "He went from not talking to you can't get him to stop talking. He's proving everyone wrong. Children overcome this slowly, but they make great leaps."

Jimmy's mother said her son likes to run up to people and give them hugs, and he likes playing with his little sister. "We're lucky he's doing great," Roberts said. "We have a fantastic speech therapist through Summit, an amazing team. It's startling how great he's doing."

Jimmy's family wanted to give back to Summit and to raise money for the work it does.

"I decided to start up a team this year because we feel we owe Summit a great debt of gratitude," Roberts said. "What they do there is miraculous. We believe that some of their teachers and therapists have been instrumental in making 'Jimmy's Team' strong and successful. We have called all the people that have helped 'Jim-

my's Team' since we received his diagnosis in August 2006. We believe with a strong team in place, Jimmy will recover."

Roberts has had many people say to her, "I'm so sorry about Jimmy..." Though she knows they mean well, to her it's important for people to know that they shouldn't be sorry.

"Jimmy is a miracle," Roberts said. "He has a diagnosis of autism, but that does not define who he is. He is a loving, beautiful boy who has worked harder in his four years than most adults I know."

The day of the walk, Jimmy's team will be wearing shirts that bear his name and a photo of him and his two-year-old baby sister, Maggie.

"Autism affects the whole family," Roberts said. "You really have to work as a team. That is why I put Maggie as our Team Captain for the walk. She is the best thing that ever happened to him. She keeps at him every day to talk to her and pay attention to her and to hold her hand, etc... All of

these things are amazing for a child with autism to do."

Roberts said that her son Jimmy loves to go for walks. Though they have never done the walk before, she knows that he will be very excited to help Summit.

"Jimmy does have needs and needs to get the best possible care," Geis said. "Summit can provide that."

According to its Web site, Summit Educational Resources is a private, not-for-profit organization approved by the New York State Education Department, New York State Department of Health, and New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, providing educational and therapeutic services to children with learning, communication and behavioral challenges.

It was founded in 1973 by Nancy Harris, who wanted to expand the language skills and speech of her son. Though beginning small, Summit has grown to almost 500 employees and assists more than 1,000 children a year. Summit helps children and young adults in various programs from birth to age 21.

In 2005, a state-of-the-art facility was built in Amherst that is home to Summit Academy.

Besides the walk, Summit Educational Resources holds events in the area to help raise money for its cause.

"Wicked Night" with Summit will be held Wednesday, June 18, when people can go see the Broadway performance of "Wicked" at Shea's Theater, to be followed by a dinner event at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo.

The ninth annual Golf Tournament will be held Monday, Aug. 4, at the Lancaster Country Club, with former Buffalo Sabres' player Brian Campbell returning from San Jose to play in the event. Campbell had been a big supporter of Summit during his time in Buffalo.

Finally, the Monte Carlo Celebrity Night will be held Saturday, Sept. 6, at the George F. Lamm Post in Williamsville, where games and a chance to win cash and prizes will be offered.

For more information on these events or Summit Educational Resources, visit its Web site at www.summited.org.

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