

TOP STORY



'I want to get the word out'



Orange County real estate entrepreneur, Barry Saywitz, checks the mail with his five-year old son, Ryan. Saywitz has become extremely active in coordinating and participating with numerous autism-related organizations on a local and national level. As the host of last year's first annual "An Evening for Autism" event, he raised more than \$200,000. The goal of this year's event is set even higher - hoping to raise more money than last year.

Father of autistic child to host more than 500 people in his home for the second Evening for Autism event. He hopes the donations pass last year's total of \$200,000.

By Brianna Bailey

September 5, 2009

Real estate entrepreneur Barry Saywitz was having a hard time getting his 5-year-old son Ryan to eat his Rice Krispies at his Newport Beach home one recent morning.

"No, no, no," Ryan shouted, as his father patiently tried to lure him to kitchen table with a stuffed toy and a portable video game.

It's hard being a single dad and juggling business, Saywitz said, as he answered text messages from his employees in between trying to persuade Ryan to eat his breakfast.

Doctors diagnosed Ryan with autism at age 2 after his grandmother noticed he wasn't making eye contact with relatives.

"I had no idea what it was at first; I had no clue," Saywitz said. "I want to get the word out and raise awareness."

Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States, and affects one in

every 150 children in the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Saywitz will host more than 500 people at his Newport Beach home Sept. 12 for An Evening for Autism to raise money for charities that help families of children with autism. Last year's event raised about \$200,000 for charity.

This year's event, which will feature live musical performances as well as silent and live auctions, will benefit Easter Seals Southern California; Talk About Curing Autism and the Autism Society of America. Proceeds from the event also will benefit the Newport-Mesa Unified School District's autism programs.

Ryan, who has a talent for building things out of Legos and likes to draw and swim, will start kindergarten in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District this week. Saywitz enrolled Ryan in several therapeutic programs after his diagnosis and he was in the top of his class at preschool, Saywitz said.

"There are a lot of families out there who have children with autism that can't afford to provide these things," Saywitz said. "It can be very expensive."

Saywitz hopes proceeds from the Evening for Autism event will help other families who have autistic children.

The growing number of children diagnosed with autism has put a strain on nonprofits that support and educate their families, said Lisa Ackerman, executive director for the Costa Mesa-based nonprofit Talk About Curing Autism, which will benefit from the Sept. 12 event.

The charity, which provides educational programs for parents of children with autism, has seen a growing demand for its services.

The charity served 6,500 families across the country in 2007, but has seen that number jump to 15,000 in just two years, Ackerman said.

"We've never had enough money to meet the demand," she said, "and the economy just makes it harder."

If You Go

What: An Evening for Autism

When: 6 p.m. Sept. 12

Where: The home of Barry Saywitz in the Belcourt development in Newport Beach

Cost: \$150 per person

More information: Visit www.aneveningforautism.org.