

Foundation Hosts Walk To Raise Money For Autism

BY NATALIE HANKINGS

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Andy Brown Jr. Community Park East will play host to the first-ever Brent Woodall Foundation Walkabout for Autism on Saturday.

The walk, held in memory of Brent Woodall, who lost his life in the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, will help to raise money for autism.

The foundation, started by Woodall's wife Tracy, is dedicated to providing educational tools, financial support, training and legal advocacy for families of children with autism.

Woodall said that she hopes the walk brings not only donations, but recognition to the program and its location in Coppel.

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– Tracy Woodall

"A lot of people don't know what we're doing because we don't have an office that says we're providing this to our own community as well as D/FW and beyond," said Woodall. "We have a really unique organization and we want the town of Coppel to be familiar with what we're doing. None of the families we work with know each other because we don't have a center. We want to help them meet each other and help the community to know what we're doing. To let them know about kids in their community with this disability and to raise awareness."

This is the first time the foundation has held a walk and they hope to make it a yearly event.

"We want to do this annually and make this our home base," said Woodall. "We would like to open an office and therapeutic center. We're hoping to get anywhere from 200 to 500 people there for our first event." The event will take place from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. and feature a 5-mile walk and

raffle as well as a car show and music.

Woodall began the foundation in order to keep her and her husband's commitment to children with special needs alive.

The foundation focuses on using Tracy's expertise in Autism, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and visibility with the media to raise awareness of autism and further to provide education, training and financial support to families with autistic children to better equip them to be more self-sufficient and effective as parents. Autism affects 1 in 250 children and can be devastating to a family of a child who is affected, according to the foundation's web site.

Woodall says that the foundation has grown immensely in the past year. "Our outreach has increased beyond Dallas," said Woodall. "We've had calls from all over Texas, different parts of Louisiana, Ohio, Oregon, Colorado, Chicago, California. Now we're even getting a lot of international contacts. We have seen more than 70 families this year alone and it's only September. Our staff is very overworked right now but it is very worth it. We're just trying to respond to the need and give out grant support to the families who need help."

Recently, Woodall has been invited to the Center for Disease Control to speak to their board of developmental disabilities. They're continuing to raise funds and want people to understand their donations will go straight to families in need.

"Every penny will go straight to help these families," said Woodall. "Most of the workers here are volunteers and I do a majority of the work myself. Most who work with us do it free of charge. We are just trying to reach out to more families. I just had a family from



ABOVE: Members of the Woodall Foundation meet to discuss their upcoming fundraiser, and Walkabout for Autism.

RIGHT: Brent Woodall and wife Tracy. The walkabout for is held in memory of Brent, who lost his life in the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, and helps raise money for autism.



California contact us. Her husband has been deployed since 9-11 and their daughter was born while he was overseas. They found out she had autism and they needed help. She came to me and this is kind of family I'd like to help. They don't have funding or support."

Woodall is looking forward to the walk and says she has been pleasantly surprised by the response she has already received from the city. "Everyone has been so supportive," said Woodall. "We've had a good number of organizations trying to help us make this happen. The city has been very helpful in getting us permits; this is our first year so we didn't know how to do this. Everyone has been very helpful."

The Woodall Foundation hopes that Saturday will bring nice weather and people from all over to help raise funds for this important, but often overlooked cause.

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