



The Mercedes-Benz Winter Event Featuring the 2013 GLK-Class  
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Mercedes-Benz

## WALKABOUT FOR AUTISM

Written by Phil Cerroni

Family event raises awareness, funds for program for children with developmental delays

By Sissy Courtney

The Brent Woodall Foundation for Exceptional Children celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary at its annual Walkabout at Andrew Brown Community Park East in Coppell Sep. 22.

"Close to 200 people participated in our Walkabout for Autism," said Carley Waltenburg, assistant director. "This was a wonderful time to reflect on the mission of the BWF and the



children we support. Both children and adults participated in our Velocity Fitness Challenge. We had winners for each fitness station, and all the children who participated received prizes.

“We were able to raise money and educate the community about autism and our mission, and 100 percent of the monies raised goes to support the programs provided by the foundation,” Waltenburg said.

### **Jacob’s journey**

Jacob has autism. His twin brother does not. They will be six years old soon.

His dad said Jacob has come a long way in the three years he has been enrolled in the Brent Woodall Foundation for exceptional children.

“He started not knowing anything, not being able to do anything,” his dad said. “He couldn’t make eye contact. He couldn’t share a point or an object with you. He wouldn’t look anybody in the face, ever. He didn’t know about his mouth or vocalization. He was just lost and completely in a bubble.

“Immediately, when he started going to the Woodall Foundation, he started picking up many, many skills: about knowing what your face is, about expressions, about pointing, about sharing in interests and objects, able to get your attention and let you know what he wants and what he needs.”

Recently, Jacob learned to communicate using icons on his iPad.

“He’s getting really proficient with his iPad and letting us know what he wants,” his mom said.

“They’ve taught him to request things and to communicate with us and taught us to understand his frustrations and his needs,” Jacob’s dad said.

Jacob’s mom said the boys have very minimal interaction.

“They have parallel play,” his mom said. “Before (Jacob) went to Woodall, he had no verbal imitation, no interest, there was no way to engage him.”

“He was in his own universe,” Jacob’s dad said. “He had nothing to do with the rest of us.”

Although it is difficult for him, Jacob now tries to imitate sounds.

Jacob’s dad said he has the same hopes and dreams for both of his boys.

“I think (Jacob) stands every chance of learning the skills necessary to continue learning and growing, and I think he can learn how to speak,” his dad said. “And I think if for some reason that isn’t in the cards for him, he will definitely learn how to communicate.”

### **Understanding**

“Today is about raising awareness for children with autism as well as other children with developmental disabilities,” said Tracy Pierce Bender, who founded the charitable



organization in memory of her late husband, Brent Woodall, who was lost in the events of Sep. 11, 2001. “It’s also about raising money for them to provide treatment for them without placing a financial burden on their parents.

“The main thing is to provide a family fun event for families who have children with developmental disabilities and autism as well as the rest of our community so that they understand and can be supportive of a special group of families in our community.”

### Nicholas’s story



When Nicholas was 18 months old, he was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

“Nicholas was nonverbal, no receptive language. It was flat zero,” his mom said. “No understanding. No concept of anything. After three years (at Woodall), Nicholas is able to speak to us, tell us exactly what he wants. He’s verbal now. His receptive language is within the normal functioning of other kids, so that’s wonderful.

“Prior to the program, we were totally lost,” she said. “I cried every day, but since we have been with the ABA program (Applied Behavior Analysis), the staff at Woodall has been doing an amazing job with him. There’s hope for us in spite of the long term future for him. We see some amazing progress with Nicholas. Miss Tracey and Woodall do some amazing work for all of these children.”

Velocity Sports Performance sponsored the event and provided the fitness challenge during the walk.

For more information or to donate go to [www.woodalkids.org](http://www.woodalkids.org).

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A horizontal advertisement for the Mercedes-Benz Winter Event. On the left, a red 2013 Mercedes-Benz GLK-Class SUV is shown in a snowy, mountainous landscape. To its left is a white sign with red and white stripes that says 'Mercedes-Benz Winter Event'. To the right of the car, the text reads 'The Mercedes-Benz Winter Event Featuring the 2013 GLK-Class NOW THROUGH DECEMBER 31<sup>ST</sup>'. Below this text is a button that says '▶ SEE OFFER DETAILS'. On the far right is the Mercedes-Benz logo and the text 'Mercedes-Benz'.

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