

Golfing FORE Autism



Joey Houwers was diagnosed with Autism at the age of three. His mother, Jo-Anne Houwers, came to the realization when Joey turned 15 that there were no special programs available for kids that were his age. She also felt that she needed a way to be able to share experiences with other families that were like hers, and in 2000 decided to do something about it. The Jim Beech Recreation Center in Ocoee granted her wish to start her own program for children and teens like Joey, and it has now become a thriving, non-profit organization with over 300 families!

Once a week, children with Autism and other disabilities meet at the recreational center and play with toys, a jump house, a pool, etc. This gives the children a chance to be normal and have fun while interacting with others who are just like them. It also gives the parents a chance to bond with one another. Thus, with each other's support, both the children and their families are reassured that they are not alone.

The Autism Gym's mission is,

"To establish a center with recreational programs for individuals with autism and related disorders where innovative ideas come together to enhance the lives of individuals and their families, and to build new friendships, promote learning, community involvement and disability awareness."

The Autism and other Related Disabilities Gym has an annual golf tournament, appreciation dinners, car washes, and other fundraisers that are all designed to raise money in order to broaden the horizons of these remarkable children and their families.

This year, the 4th annual Golfing FORE Autism tournament was held at The Villas of Grand Cypress Golf Resort. It raised a grand total of \$7,500 thanks to the help of over 140 participants and many volunteers! With this, the gym will continue to grow as Jo-Anne hopes to open her own facility in the future.

For more information log on to: autismgym.org.

