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Autism effort empowers parents

By **ROBERT LEE LONG**
Community Editor

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OLIVE BRANCH — Wayne Bartley, father of an autistic child, has never felt burdened with the behavioral disorder which affects his 15-year-old son Justin.

Bartley, the founder of the Autism Assistance Fund which has been established through the auspices of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, has nearly single-handedly set about creating an autism intervention program within the DeSoto County Schools which is second to none in the region.

"God gave me Justin for a reason," Bartley said. "I don't think it was a coincidence."

Bartley said he and his wife Carla have been able to provide certain advantages to Justin which other parents might not be able to provide.

Bartley wants to empower those parents as well.

"I meet so many parents who don't want know what to do or how to do it," Bartley said.

Bartley said thanks to the \$225,000 raised during the past 11 years through the annual Autism Charity Golf Tournament benefiting the DeSoto County Schools, parents have been provided with the tools to help unlock the mystery of autism.

"The school system has been able to provide services for these children which are unparalleled in the Mid-South," Bartley said. "There are so many people who depend on the school system to get the services they need."

The golf tournament has provided funding for instructors and curriculum within the DeSoto County School system.

"Everything for the day has been donated so 100 percent of the entry fee goes directly toward helping these special kids," Bartley said.

The cost for this event is \$400 per team and this fee is tax deductible. This includes lunch with over 150 kids being serviced by the local schools, a Callaway goodie bag, golf, on course beverages, and something special to snack on during the awards presentation.

Bartley said he anticipates the total funding for the past decade will top \$250,000 this year.

"We have been able to hire more personnel, provide more training for the staff and parents, and fund camp scholarships with money from previous tournaments," Bartley said.

The autism golf tourney, billed as "Wayne Bartley's Give a Kid A Chance to Be A Kid Autism Golf Tournament" has been rescheduled until May 19 due to wet conditions on the course at the Club at North Creek.

Bartley said the extra time will give organizers a chance to raise more money.

"If they want to make a donation we can still take it and we still have room for another team if they want to play," Bartley said.

For more details contact Bartley at 662-893-8679 or 901-550-1351.

Robert Lee Long: rlong@desototimestribune.com or at 662-429-6397, Ext. 252

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