

Bowling for Jason's and Austen's friends

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For most of the 1,000-or-so people who rolled heavy balls down El Mark-O's lanes on Saturday, Bowl for Jason's Friends is a good time that raises money for a very good cause.

But for the Engberg family, who rolled on lane 4 between 11 a.m. and noon, the event has a much more personal meaning.

"It is like a holiday for us," said father Shawn Engberg. "We make sure that we are here."

"We have been doing it every year since they helped us," he added.

Five years ago, Shawn and Shawna Engberg's second son, Austen, was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor, his mother said.

Because Casper had no facility where Austen, then just 3.5 months old, could receive the vital treatment he needed, the family had travel 275 miles south to Denver's Children's Hospital, Shawna Engberg said.

And Jason's Friends helped the Engbergs enormously when Austen got that treatment, she added.

"They have helped us out a lot," Shawna Engberg said. "They helped us out from the very beginning when we first went to Denver. They gave us money for food and they paid for us to stay at the place we were staying."

"They gave us a phone card with thousands of minutes on it, so when he was back home ... we could call each other all the time," she added.

Jason's Friends was formed in 1996 by Lisa and Rocky Eades after they lost their 9-year-old son, Jason, to cancer.

The organization assists Wyoming families who have a child with cancer get treatment in places like Denver, Salt Lake City, Billings and New York, Lisa Eades said.



Shawna Engberg holds her daughter Marissa, 2, as she prepares to take her turn bowling during the annual Bowl for Jason's Friends on Saturday morning at Mark-O Lanes in Casper. Shawna's 5-year-old son Austen is recovering from a cancerous brain tumor. The family was assisted by Jason's Friends.

On Saturday, over 1,000 people formed teams of five and came out to support the organization at the Seventh Annual Bowl for Jason's Friends, Eades said. Support for the event was so strong that El Mark-O's Lane's 24 alleys were all occupied all day by teams raising money for the organization, she added.

Last year, the event raised \$138,000 after expenses and Eades was hopeful that this year's event would raise even more money, she said.

One bowler who made it his personal mission to raise as much money as he could was 8-year-old Zacharie Engberg, Austen's big brother.

By going door-to-door, around school and to his dad's work, Zacharie raised over \$1,400 in pledges for the event, his mom and dad said.

"He wanted to keep going last night but we said, 'You have to stop sometime,'" Shawna Engberg said.

In addition to Shawn, Shawna and Zacharie Engberg, the team on lane 4 consisted of Zacharie's friends Morgan Jones, 8, and Hayden Traxler, 9.

Supporting the team was Austen, who is now 5 and is doing well, his mom said.

It's been five years since Austen was first diagnosed and four years since he ended his chemotherapy

treatments, Shawna Engberg said.

"They say after five years, after the stop of the treatment that they are cured," she said. "So he is getting close."

Although Austen's cancer has not returned, he has been slow in developing and still has a lot of recovery ahead of him, his mom said.

And he still needs to visit Children's Hospital once a year and will need to get check-ups there until he is 8, Shawna Engberg said.

"Even still, when we go down to Denver, Jason's Friends still helps us if we need money to go there," she said.

"They have done so much for us," Shawn Engberg said. "We can't thank them enough for all that they have done."

In addition to raising money for Jason's Friends, Saturday's event also raises awareness for the organization and what it does so that people who can be helped by it find out about it, Eades said.

If you or someone you know have a child who can be assisted by Jason's Friends please call (307) 235-3421 or visit Jason's Friend's Web site at www.jasonsfriends.com.



DAN CEPEDA/Star-Tribune

Austen Engberg, 5, rolls a bowling ball with his Child Development Center teacher Janet Owens during the Bowl for Jason's Friends fund-raiser Saturday morning at El Mark-O Lanes in Casper.