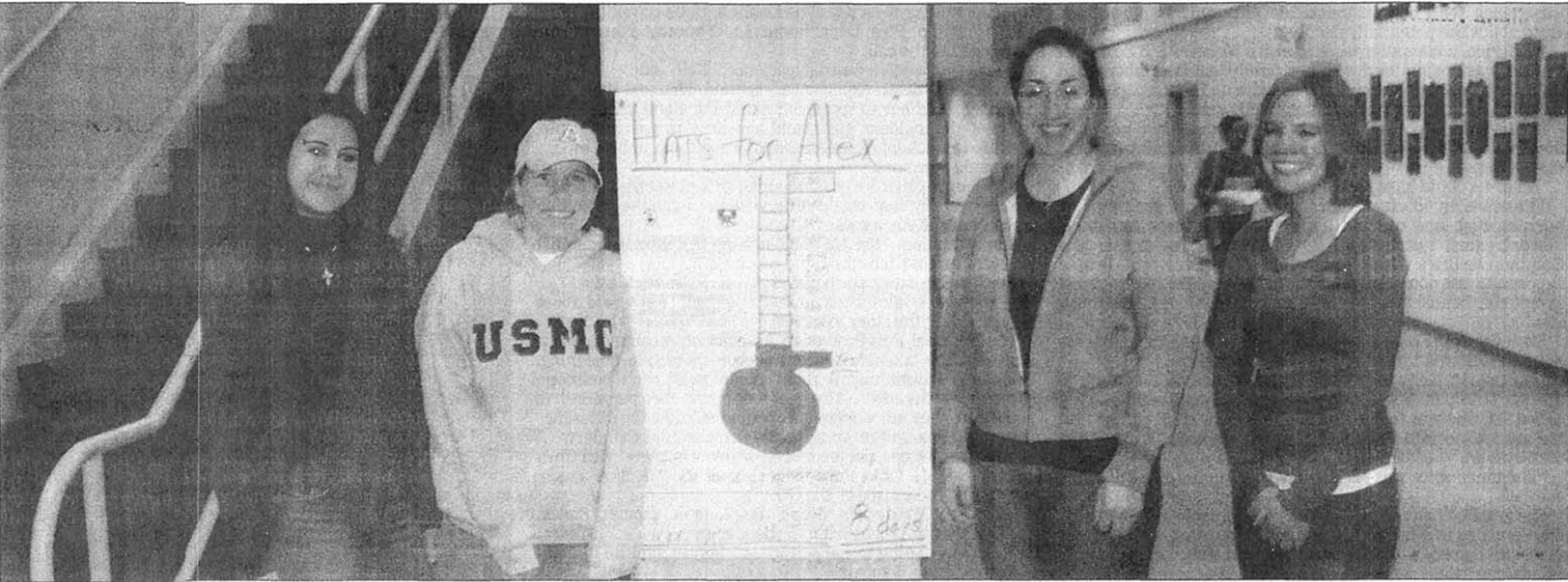


AHS breaks 'no hats' rule for special cause



BY RICHARD HOSFORD
NEWS STAFF WRITER

Norris said the student council members came up with idea of "Hats for Alex" week after trying to think of events that would generate interest among their classmates.

"We brainstormed some ideas, and we thought a hat day was something many kids would participate in even if they don't normally get involved in much."

"Lots of people want to wear hats," Grek added.

Norris said they decided to get involved and help Mrs. LeBlanc raise the \$11,000 needed for the dog after she came and spoke with them. Norris said there are many fund-raising efforts at the high school, including the Invisible Children campaign for students in Uganda, and she thought it was appropriate to also do something for a cause closer to home.

"Our school is good at helping people," she said. "And this is close to our community. If we can help kids in Africa, we should be able to help a kid in our own town."

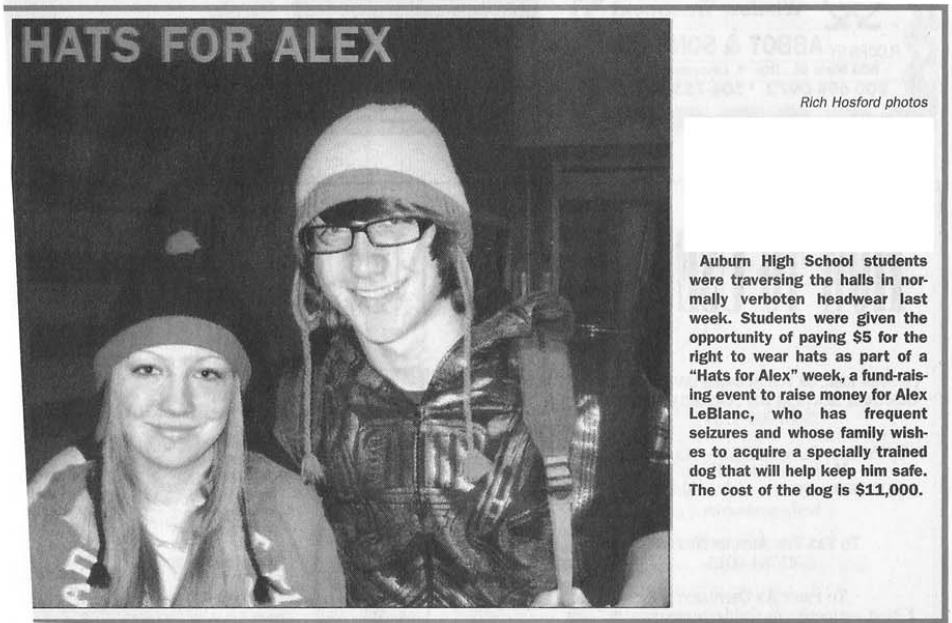
At last count, the "Hats for Alex" effort had raised about \$1,300, but the student council members want to do more. They are also planning a spaghetti dinner for Thursday, Feb. 28, to help the LeBlancs even more.

LeBlanc said she deeply appreciates the student's work, and is impressed with their spirit of giving and dedication to a cause that does not directly affect them.

"I can't believe it," she said. "These kids are in high school, and it should be all about them — their preparations for college and studying for tests. To know they are willing to put in the time to help my child is really overwhelming."

Rich Hosford may be reached by phone at (508) 909-4136 or by e-mail rhosford@stonebridgepress.com.

Above: Auburn High School student council members Joelle Kahale, Leah Norris, Kristy Callahan and Heidi Grek, along with Danielle Justice (not shown) came up with "Hats for Alex" week. Students were given the opportunity to pay \$5 to get a blue wristband that allowed them to wear their hats during school hours, and the money went to cover some of the \$11,000 needed to get Auburn resident Alex LeBlanc a specially trained dog meant to keep him safe during his many seizures. Below: Auburn High School students Anthony Sciaraffa and Evan Burokas pose in the halls of the school with their baseball caps and freshman Matt Coyne turns from his friends for a picture with his cap in the cafeteria. The students were allowed to wear the hats in the school building by donating \$5 for the "Hats for Alex" week.



Rich Hosford photos

Auburn High School students were traversing the halls in normally verboten headwear last week. Students were given the opportunity of paying \$5 for the right to wear hats as part of a "Hats for Alex" week, a fund-raising event to raise money for Alex LeBlanc, who has frequent seizures and whose family wishes to acquire a specially trained dog that will help keep him safe. The cost of the dog is \$11,000.

AUBURN — It is common practice in schools to forbid the wearing of hats in the building, and Auburn High School is normally no exception. However, anyone who visited the school last week would have seen students walking around with baseball caps, winter hats and other head coverings without any concern of getting in trouble with teachers or administrators. That's because when it comes to raising money for a worthwhile cause, a small sacrifice in the rules is of no matter.

Auburn High School student council members Heidi Grek, Leah Norris, Joelle Kahale, Danielle Justice and Kristy Callahan, working with principal Casey Handfield, organized a "Hats for Alex" week at their school last week. Students were given the opportunity to pay \$5 to get a blue wristband that allowed them to wear their hats during school hours.

The money from the fundraiser is going towards helping Alex LeBlanc and his family cover the costs of a specially trained dog from 4 Paws for Ability.

Alex, 5, has Myoclonic Astatic Epilepsy, a condition that triggers frequent seizures that cause him to faint on the spot, making any outing a potential risk, said his mother, Deana Leblanc. Taking him out to places like the mall or the grocery store is nearly impossible because of the hard surfaces that could cause injury if he were to faint, even though he wears a helmet most of the time.

LeBlanc said she thinks the dog would be a good companion for Alex, and help keep him safe in case of a seizure when she wasn't around.

"If Alex were to begin to shake all over, the dog would throw its body up against him so he won't hurt his head or body parts while he is shaking," she said. "It would try to break his fall."