

Community unites at benefit dinner for LeBlanc family

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AUBURN — The normally bare hard-topped tables of the cafeteria were draped with white tablecloths, complete with a vase of roses to help lend a formal atmosphere.

It was clear something special was afoot last Thursday, Feb. 28, at the Auburn High School.

That was the night of the school's Student Council, National Honor Society and Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD)'s Alex LeBlanc benefit spaghetti dinner, which featured a pasta meal and a very generous dessert table.

The purpose of the dinner was to raise money for LeBlanc, a five-year-old pre-school student at Mary D. Stone Elementary School, whose family is hoping to raise funds to pay for the training of a specialized helper dog. Alex suffers from Myoclonic Astatic Epilepsy, a condition that triggers frequent seizures that cause him to faint on the spot. The condition makes going out and being an active child difficult, because there is always a chance a fall may result in injury, said his mother, Deanna LeBlanc.

The dog they are hoping to get for Alex will come from the non-profit organization 4 Paws for Ability, a center in Ohio that trains dogs to assist and protect people with disabilities, including autism, mobility problems, hearing disabilities and frequent seizures.

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.

of the Student Council executive board, said another reason for the enthusiasm felt among the students for helping Alex is that he is part of their community.

"It's a local issue," she said. "He's an Auburn boy, so it's closer to home."

Vice Principal Gerry DeLongchamp, who first spoke with Mrs. LeBlanc about working with students at the high school, said he was not surprised by the amount of work they had done for Alex.

"The Student Council has always been very active in the school and community," he said. "They [and the National Honor School Students and SADD students] have leadership skills, they just come forward with so much enthusiasm. We have a great school and these kids are there when you need them."

There was also a presentation by Nicole Ploma, a student at the Auburn Middle School. They had done their own fund-raiser, and during the dinner, Ploma presented LeBlanc with a check for \$1,197.

All told, LeBlanc said the dinner, along with the raffles and the necklace sales, brought in \$2486.18.

There has also been support from other local groups, including the Rotary Club, other schools in the district, and small businesses.

Bob Mullen, owner of the My Alma Mater café and restaurant in the Auburn Mall, helped raise money from his establishment. From Friday, Feb. 29 to Sunday, March 2, half of the proceeds from their frozen drinks were donated to Alex's cause, and they were able to raise \$297.

Mullen, whose restaurant also gives money for scholarships each year, said he enjoys helping local initiatives.

"The My Alma Mater theme is giving back to the community," he said. "If that young man wants help going back to school, we wanted to participate."

Mrs. LeBlanc said the family also received \$703 from students at Mary D. Stone Elementary who did a variety of fund-raisers for their fellow student.

The campaign is close to hitting the necessary funds, LeBlanc said, and she hopes to meet their goal with an upcoming fund-raising dinner.

She said the Elks Lodge has been generous enough to offer its space for a benefit dinner Saturday, March 22, from 7 p.m. to midnight. Tickets for the dinner will cost \$20 and the event will feature entertainment such as a DJ, raffles, silent auctions and balloon sculptures from Connect with Magic.

Alex's father, Jeffrey LeBlanc, said he was grateful for all the work the students and other contributors have done for his son.

"It's overwhelming what the kids have done," he said. "The whole community is supporting us, it's fabulous."

What are your thoughts on the community's support for Alex LeBlanc? Rich Hosford may be reached by phone at (508) 909-4136 or by e-mail at r hosford@stonebridgepress.com.



Alex LeBlanc stands with his sister Jennifer and some of the high school students who worked to put on a benefit dinner Thursday, Feb. 28, to raise money to train a special dog that will help protect him during seizures. From left, Joelle Kahale, Danielle Justice, Jennifer Lang, Kristy Callahan and Annie Sheerin.



LEFT: Alex LeBlanc enjoys a spaghetti dinner with his grandmother, Betty LeBlanc, during a benefit dinner at the Auburn High School to raise money for a specialized seizure help dog. RIGHT: Members of the DiLeo and Parish families take a moment from eating their spaghetti dinners to pose for a picture at the benefit dinner.



LEFT: The Millette family poses at the benefit dinner for Alex LeBlanc. From left, Rick, Griffon, Suzanne, Aaron and Colin. RIGHT: Auburn Middle School student Nicole Ploma presented Deanna LeBlanc a check for \$1,197 that the middle school students raised to help Alex LeBlanc.



LEFT: Alex LeBlanc picks a name for one of the many items raffled off at the benefit dinner. Many local businesses and groups donated prizes to help with the cause.

RIGHT: Alex LeBlanc dances with a high school student at the benefit dinner.



Rich Hosford photos