

Rockin' For Autism festival in Fanwood

Staff Report, @MyCentralJersey

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(Photo: ~Courtesy of Fanwood Borough)

The Town of Fanwood's Rockin' For Autism Music Festival conducted on Saturday, April 16, at LaGrande Park raised more than \$10,200 to support autism programs and services in New Jersey.

The fundraising effort surpassed the \$7,000 fundraising goal set by its creator --14-year-old Fanwood resident Mallory Banks, an Autism Awareness Junior Ambassador who ranks among the top kids in New Jersey raising money for Autism Awareness Month. It also doubled the \$10,000 that she had previously raised from 2011 through 2015 in honor of her brother Ethan (16) and all those affected by autism spectrum disorder.

"We are overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from the Town of Fanwood; the volunteers, musicians, entertainers, vendors, merchants and non-profits who helped make the festival a success; our friends and family; and the people who participated in our raffles, bake sale and who otherwise donated to the cause," said Gina Banks. "Rockin for Autism 2016 exceeded all of our expectations. There's no turning back now. Time to start planning for 2017!"

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"For the past few years, I've had a lot of success in raising funds for autism awareness by hosting bake sales and raffles," Mallory Banks said. "This year I wanted to do something bigger and better, and get more of the community involved," said Mallory, who conceived of the festival while recovering from spinal surgery last year. The Rockin' For Autism music festival is like a dream come true, and I am so excited that our mayor and so many local bands and businesses have committed to helping me raise funds for autism awareness."

In 2015, Mallory approached Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr during the town's annual Fannywood Day celebration and pitched her idea for hosting a music festival in La Grande Park. Since then, Mahr has been working closely with Mallory; her parents, Jeff and Gina Banks; and local government agencies to help facilitate the event. In 2014, the Fanwood Borough Council honored then 12-year-old Mallory for raising \$3,500 for autism awareness, and proclaimed June 17 to be Mallory Banks Day.

"Mallory Banks is an extraordinary girl, whose passion for raising awareness for autism is truly inspirational and sets an example for others to follow. I am honored to able to support her efforts and applaud her deep commitment to community advocacy," Mahr said. "With Everything that the Rockin' For Autism has to offer, I am confident that the annual festival will exceed expectations in terms of raising awareness and funds, and will have a long-lasting, positive benefit for Fanwood as well."

On Saturday, hundreds of people packed into LaGrande Park throughout the day to listen to music from a variety of local bands, including: Goodworks; Three-Piece Nugget; The Broadcasters; Leave the Gun; and Eric Harrison's Crash Course. Additional entertainment was provided by Main Source DJs; special needs music therapist Jammin Jenn; and the Cindy Smith Dance Studio.

Food and refreshments were provided by Nick's Pizza & Deli, "The Empanada Guy" food truck, Picklelicious, New Jersey American Water and more than three dozen volunteer bakers.

Local merchant and non-profit participants included: Be Craftful; Child's Play Challenge Course; Robert Wood Johnson Hospital; Children's Specialized Hospital; Autism NJ; Watchung Pediatrics; Tiny Tots Therapy; Jammin Jenn Music Therapy; Functional Performance Therapy; Rich Tric Photography; Temple Sholom of Scotch Plains' Inclusion Taskforce; Dip's Fashion Conception; Glam Pam and Her Glitter Overload; Eddie Lin, the "Ausome" Balloon Creator; Pete the Magician; Rodan & Fields; Chloe & Isabel; and many others who donated products and services for the raffle.

The festival also coincided with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Youth Baseball Association's annual opening day ceremony, where Malory Banks, Mahr and Scotch Plains Mayor Kevin Glover threw ceremonial first pitches. In addition, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Soccer Association and Wolves Basketball Academy ran sports clinics for special needs kids.

All proceeds will be donated to [Autism NJ \(http://autismnj.org/\)](http://autismnj.org/), the largest statewide network of parents and professionals dedicated to improving lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

Those wishing to donate online may do so at <https://www.crowdrise.com/rockin-for-autism-2016/fundraiser/rockinforautism2016> (<https://www.crowdrise.com/rockin-for-autism-2016/fundraiser/rockinforautism2016>).

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