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7th annual Going Blue for Autism celebration helps raise community awareness

Keith Huffman | Reporter

Opelika-Auburn News

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Opelika Police Lt. Tony Amerson proudly bestows an honorary badge sticker upon Kyle Lumpkin, 5, of Beulah, as Kyle's mother, Kathy, watches on Monday during the 7th annual Going Blue for Autism ceremony.

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Blue enthusiasts gathered at Opelika's Courthouse Square on Monday evening in recognition of a special cause.

A crowd of families, first responders, the Opelika High School football team and community representatives met for the 7th annual Going Blue for Autism celebration.

"In 1980, autism was 1-in-20,000," said Luanne Helms, area coordinator for the Lee County Chapter of the Autism Society of Alabama. "Today, autism is 1-in-68, and that's one in every 42 boys. Those numbers are critical as we raise awareness in our communities. Because people with autism should be able to come out into the community and have others accept them, understand and welcome them."

Blue fountain water and balloons were among highlights during Monday's event, during which Patsy Jones, president pro tem of the Opelika City Council and Ward 1 representative, presented a proclamation signifying the celebration and declaring April 2, 2018, as World Autism Awareness Day.

Partnering with the Autism Society of Alabama, the city of Opelika has held autism-based training sessions for first responders during the last three years, Jones said while presenting the proclamation, adding, "And again, we are proud that we have trained more than 285 first responders in autism risk and safety management. To date, the city of Opelika has more trained responders than any other city in the state of Alabama."

'Comforting'

Families with relatives who have autism were grateful for the annual opportunity to fellowship and meet new friends from the community.

"For us, autism awareness is every day," said Auburn resident Ayme Orwin as her son, 7-year-old Beeson, affectionately known as "Beezy," delighted in observing the fountain. "But to be around families who are going through similar things, it's comforting. Because every child with autism is different, but some of the things other families do for their children can help us, too."

Samantha Edwards enjoyed the celebration with her 7- and 6-year-old daughters, Sam and Teresa.

"This is fun," said Edwards, who lives in Opelika. "This is a reason to get out. Not many autistic families have a place where their kids can socialize and be themselves."

Kyle Lumpkin, 5, of Beulah, received an honorary officer badge sticker from Opelika Police Lt. Tony Amerson. An airplane flew by, and a grinning Kyle waved happily to it. Fun moments like these are part of the reason why his mother, Kathy, absolutely loves the annual event.

"It brings autism awareness to the community," she said.

KEITH HUFFMAN

Reporter



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