

Family still fighting to find a cure

Bowl-A-Thon brings in \$35,000 for rare spinal disease research

*By Nicole Fisher
Special Correspondent*

A local family pulled together recently to fight Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA).

Wayne and Carice Smith held the 8th Annual Strike Out SMA Bowl-A-Thon at AMF Hanover Lanes on March 4 to raise money for the research for a cure.

Their son, Andrew Creighton, suffers from the disease, which inhibits his growth and forces him to remain in a wheelchair.

There is currently no treatment or cure for SMA, so the Smiths do all they can to raise money for the research of the disease.

All donations go directly to the researchers working to develop a cure for the disease in coalition with FightSMA, a national non-profit organization with headquarters in Richmond.

FightSMA is run solely by the parents of children with SMA. By using the resources available at www.FightSMA.com, parents as well as those interested can find out about SMA. There are currently 15 chapters of FightSMA, all headed and run by parents.

Carice Smith set a goal of \$40,000 in donations to top the \$35,000 last year, but said, "No matter how much we end up receiving, any donations at all will be of help."

The Smith family was able to raise unofficially around \$35,000 (close to last year's amount), according to Carice.

AMF Hanover Lanes was completely booked. There was also a raffle of about 200 items ranging anywhere from a red beacon light, Penelope silver bracelet, and Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden Complimentary pass for two to a \$100 gift certificate to Circuit City, Alan Furs knitted black mink scarf with leather tassels and a trip to Disney World.

This year's bowl-a-thon featured a rock and roll theme.

There was a live DJ present plus there was a visit from the "bad guys of Star Wars" and Elvis. Andrew was made an honorary "storm trooper." A balloon artist made balloon animals while clowns entertained.



Photo by Nicole Fisher

Andrew Smith is surrounded by some of the colorful characters who turned out for the SMA Bowl-A-Thon. Andrew suffers from a rare disease for which there is no known cure.

An eighth grader at Oak Knoll middle school, Andrew isn't slowed down by his physical impediments. He made his way through Hanover Lanes talking with family and friends, taking part in the entertainment, and of course, bowling.

"I've known him (Andrew) since I was two," said Rachel Goins, a close friend to Andrew.

"He's a good friend. When you meet him, you think of a lot of things differently. You don't think of him as a guy in a wheelchair anymore. You just think of him as a friend. When people find out we hang out together and they say, 'Is he the guy in the wheelchair?' I say, 'Not really.'"

Despite a three-week-hospital stay due to the flu, Andrew was full of energy. SMA weakens the respiratory system so any type of cold could be fatal. When he does catch a virus, as he did in this case it is vital for him to receive immediate medical attention, but Andrew returned home the day before the bowl-a-thon.

Seven million adults have a recessive gene for SMA and don't know it. If they happen to have a child with another adult with the same gene a child is born with the disease. SMA is the number one inherited killer of infants.

There are also three types of SMA. Children with type one usually don't live past 18 months, type two, eight years, and type three sufferers usually won't survive past twenty. Andrew has type two, however, he is 13.

"We have been blessed with extra years," said Wayne Smith.

The Smith family is very active in fighting SMA. However, their efforts are just a drop in the bucket towards finding a cure. Donations are always needed, as well as support.

The Smith family will be traveling to Washington D.C. to meet other families from all over the U.S. as part of the FightSMA group. They will support each other, find out about the progress made in research and also petition for more government support for SMA.

SMA often is one of the least acknowledged diseases and does not receive much government funding. The Smith family is trying to remedy that with the support of FightSMA.

For more information on FightSMA, visit www.fightsma.com and for information as to the struggle of the mothers to fight children's diseases click on "Fighter Mom."

Donations to help advance the research for a cure can be made by visiting the web-site www.fightsma.com.