

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## Mother, son team up to fight SMA

*Their fundraiser helps group seeking cure for teen's genetic disease*

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TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

Sunday, February 12, 2006

Thirteen-year-old Andrew Creighton has a disease that limits his mobility, inhibits his growth and saps his strength. It doesn't, however, come anywhere close to hindering his spirit.

His sly smile suggests that.

"We call him the instigator," said Hunter Goins with a grin.

Hunter, 15, has been Andrew's buddy for years. One of their favorite pastimes is making homemade movies. They've produced a number of them, including one about Elvis, Andrew's beagle-dachshund mix.

"He gives me the ideas," said Hunter, who does the actual videotaping and other legwork. "I'm the slave. He's the director."

Andrew and his mother, Carice Smith, have been among the grass-roots leaders in the effort find a cure for spinal muscular atrophy, the genetic disease that afflicts Andrew and is the No. 1 inherited cause of death of children younger than 2, according to FightSMA Inc.

For the past seven years, they've held the Strike Out SMA Bowl-A-Thon and raised more than \$300,000 for SMA research.

The eighth annual Bowl-A-Thon will be March 4 at Hanover Lanes in Mechanicsville. All proceeds will go to FightSMA, the Richmond organization established to raise awareness and finance research.

Researchers have made progress in recent years and have expressed confidence that breakthroughs in treatments are on the horizon, Smith said.

"That, for us, is gold," she said.

The Bowl-A-Thon is a way not only to raise money for research but to put a face on a deadly disease, Smith said. It also is gratifying to see the community support year after year.

"I know it's important because it's my child," Smith said, "but seeing all of these other people see the importance of it is really what keeps me going."

Said Andrew, "It's just fun being with all your friends."

Andrew, an eighth-grader at Oak Knoll Middle in Hanover County, was diagnosed with SMA before his first birthday. Doctors warned his family that Andrew might not live more than a few years.

### Want to bowl?

The Strike Out SMA Bowl-A-Thon will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

#### March 4: How it works:

Get together a team of four to six participants and submit a registration form. Each participant is asked to raise at least \$60 in donations, which will entitle the participant to two hours of extreme bowling, shoe rental and T-shirt. Corporate sponsors also are needed.

**Details:** The event will be held at AMF Hanover Lanes, 7317 Bell Creek Road, in Mechanicsville.

More info: Call (804) 515-0080, e-mail [werfamily3@msn.com](mailto:werfamily3@msn.com) or visit [www.fightsma.com](http://www.fightsma.com).

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Some of those with SMA walk for a time before the onset of the disease. Andrew wasn't one of them; he never walked, getting his first wheelchair when he was 2. He weighs only 32 pounds and is terribly frail. He's survived serious illnesses and near-death experiences, such as the time his father, Wayne Smith, minister of discipleship and missions at Cool Spring Baptist, had to resuscitate him when he stopped breathing. All of that and he never feels sorry for himself.

He depends on others for simple tasks most of us take for granted and, in some ways, he must live vicariously through others. But that's not what his life is about. He is fully engaged in pursuits such as art and drama. He loves to fish and one of his favorite classes was wood shop. A few years ago he decided one day he wanted to play hockey. His grandfather -- or "granddude," as Andrew called him before his death two years ago -- rigged a hockey stick on his wheelchair and set up a hockey "rink" in the driveway.

His two favorite places in the world are Smith Mountain Lake and Disney World. After school, he thinks he might like to work as a movie director or for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. He's passionate about history; World War II is his favorite era.

"It was a turning point for our country," he explained.

He comes from a close family. No one's closer than his cousins, Jenna and Lyndsey Martin, ages 4 and 2½, who like to crawl into Andrew's chair so they can hug and kiss him. They love him dearly and have absolutely no idea that he has a disability.

"For many years, I questioned why this happened . . . and felt sorry for our family," said Caryn Martin, Andrew's aunt and Jenna and Lyndsey's mom, of Andrew and SMA and the circumstances of his life. "Then one day it dawned on me: He is the biggest blessing of our family. He's the epitome of courage. He's just a great person."

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