

Carroll County Times

'The Little Prince'

By Erica Kritt, Times Staff Writer

After traveling world seeking therapy for her son, Upperco mother hopes fundraiser will help pay medical bills

Residents rallied in 1997 after 16-month-old Jacob Armacost fell into the family pool and nearly drowned.

Jacob survived, but he suffered cerebral anoxia, which occurs when the brain is deprived of oxygen, causing brain damage. The ailment left him unable to talk or walk.

Residents contributed \$100,000 to a fund to help the family pay medical bills. But today, Jacob is 11, money in the fund is nearly depleted and the family still has a lot of medical bills to pay.

"It's tough, but I always feel like he is just the little prince," said Donna Armacost, Jacob's mother and a part-time school nurse at Sandymount Elementary.

Donna has taken Jacob around the world to get treatments, and Jacob has found success in a number of nonintegrated, alternative therapies.

"Three years after his accident, we started to do hyperbaric chamber [therapy] and he calmed down," Donna said.

The therapy helped Jacob use his throat muscles to swallow and loosened other tense muscles.

Donna travels to Columbia, Pa., for that service. The pressurized chambers were recently added to Carroll Hospital Center, but Donna said hyperbaric chamber therapy isn't covered by insurance for Jacob. Nor are his other therapies, such as stem-cell, rolting and myofacial.

Jacob has a special heated waterbed to correct scoliosis he developed because of his physical limitations. "It improved his spine by 40 degrees," Donna said.

Doctors said Jacob would need surgery to correct his spine, but after the therapy, the operation was called off because Jacob had progressed so far, Donna said.

She and Jacob have traveled to London to learn about Brain-Net, a program that stimulates the senses. It includes activities that involve touching or moving something to keep Jacob alert.

They have also been to the Dominican Republic to get stem-cell therapy.

"It's extremely frustrating. If insurance would cover some of these things [it would be much easier]," Donna said.

To help raise more funds, a benefit pig roast and silent auction will be held Saturday at the Arcadia Fire Hall's activities building.

Jacob has nurses to watch him when Donna is not around. Nurse Patti Graff takes care of Jacob on Wednesdays and Fridays. Graff said new therapies have been effective.

"He's more alert, he smiles, he laughs at things," Graff said.

Though Jacob still doesn't have a lot of range of motion and cannot talk, Donna said the improvements have been remarkable.

"If you could see him 10 years ago, he [wouldn't have been able to sit here]," she said, noting Jacob would sweat profusely and his muscles would be very tight.

With the progressive therapies, Jacob has been able to attend Carroll Springs School two days a week. Donna said some of the money raised at Saturday's benefit would help pay for a wheelchair-accessible van to transport Jacob to and from school and therapy.

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DYLAN SLAGLE/STAFF PHOTO

While his mother, Donna Armacost, center, looks on, nurse Patti Graff helps 11-year-old Jacob Armacost with his shoes at the family's Upperco home Wednesday. Jacob has suffered from cerebral anoxia since nearly drowning in a pool 10 years ago.