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## Children go to bat for ALS sufferers

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**Carnival at Driftwood Beach Club in Sea Bright, to benefit PALS (People with ALS), Sunday, November 18, 2007. Jake Tavill, 11, of Rumson, left, and Matt Callahan, 13, of Rumson, perform for the crowd. Drummer in background is Sean Callahan, 10, of Rumson.**

Matthew Callahan, an aspiring musician, woke up early on a rainy Sunday to haul his musical equipment to the Driftwood Beach Club on Ocean Avenue.

Matthew, 13, plays the guitar and sings. The Rumson teen was actually preparing to take part in a fundraiser to help those afflicted with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly called Lou Gehrig's disease, after the New York Yankees legend who contracted the disease.

"My mom has ALS, and I want to raise as much money as I can," he said.

Matthew was among approximately 60 kids who volunteered their time Sunday to take part in Carnival for PALS, a grassroots first-time fundraising event to bring awareness and financial support to local families coping with ALS. The day was planned, promoted and run by kids.

Close to 400 people attended, and more than \$10,000 was raised. Featured were a host of games, arts and crafts, food, prizes, raffles and much more.

"It feels awesome to know that there are this many people who care about this disease and want to do so much to help it," Matthew said.

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ALS affects nerve cells of the brain and spinal cord, resulting in muscle weakness and atrophy. According to the ALS Association Web site, about 5,600 people in this country are diagnosed with ALS each year. It is estimated that as many as 30,000 people may have the disease at any given time. It crosses all racial, ethnic or socioeconomic boundaries. The cause of ALS is unknown, and there is no cure for the disease, which occurs most commonly between the ages of 40 and 70. Cases of ALS, however, also occur in persons in their 20s and 30s. Life expectancy for those suffering from the disease averages about two-to-five years.

Sponsored by Edison-based Stillwell-Hansen, all proceeds will benefit the Joan Dancy and PALS Support Group, an all-volunteer organization located at Riverview Medical Center, Red Bank. The group's primary purpose is to provide services and programs that support ALS patients and their families.

Jake Tavill, 10, of Rumson showed his support because a friend of the family has ALS. Tavill sang and played the keyboard.

"It makes you feel good inside because you know you are helping people," he said. "I helped make banners and helped get some other kids involved."

Jake's mother, Judi, said her son is not new to lending a helping hand around town. She said on his sixth birthday, in lieu of birthday presents, the child instead accepted donations for a local Sept. 11, 2001, charity.

Teddy Sourlis, 10, said he couldn't ignore the invitation from his voice teacher.

"It feels very good to help out with good causes in the community," said Teddy, who sings and plays the piano.

Matthew Waters, 10, was joined by his mother, Lisa, and brothers, Sam, 14, and Jacob, 8, all of Rumson.

"I came to have fun and raise money for the people with ALS," Matthew said. "It's like I am helping the community and making other people happy."

"Children are our future," said Patricia Schaeffer, a nurse coordinator at Joan Dancy and PALS. "To see them want to participate in this community project just touches your heart."