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HALF HOLLOW HILLS

Teen Dreams Big

By Danny Schrafel

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As West Hollow Middle School eighth-grader Drew Quinto's Bar Mitzvah approached this November, he began to contemplate what his philanthropic project leading up to the ceremony would be.

But rather than make a single donation to charity, he used the opportunity to pursue something much larger. He launched a charitable foundation.

"This is when he said, 'Can we do something more than that?'" his father, Paul Quinto, said.

Six months later, his Bar Mitzvah philanthropy came to fruition as hundreds packed Hills vs. Autism's inaugural fundraiser at AMF Commack Vet Lanes Friday.

Drew and his family launched Hills vs. Autism on April 1 during Autism Awareness Month. Since its inception, the organization has raised more than \$15,000.

"Autism has always been a part of my family, and it's always been an idea and dream of mine to start something like this," Drew said, speaking of his older brother, who is on the spectrum.

Hills vs. Autism seeks to promote acceptance for children on the autism spectrum by allowing individuals the opportunity to participate in social activities in their community and enhance their lives with support and public awareness. One hundred percent of proceeds will be dedicated to the social skill enhancement of people with autism and distributed in grants to local programs and the Half Hollow Hills Alumni Association.

The lacrosse sticks in the new charity's logo are a nod to extensive support from Half Hollow Hills' varsity and junior varsity lacrosse teams. Drew, who plays junior varsity lacrosse for Hills



Dressed in retro bowling shirts, the Quinto family hosts Hills vs. Autism's first event at AMF Commack Vet Lanes on Friday. The organization is the brainchild of West Hollow eighth-grader Drew Quinto, second from left.

East, drew additional inspiration from the Challenger Program, which invites Hills lacrosse athletes to serve as coaches for children with special needs.

"It teaches kids with autism and other disabilities lacrosse, and it's a fun thing for them to do and get closer to other people," Drew said. "That's why I thought of putting the lacrosse into this."

Jim Wallace, who founded the Challengers program last year with the backing of Hills Youth Lacrosse and the Suffolk County PAL, said the organization provides valuable social opportunities with real benefits for the children.

"It's created friendships with the kids in the schools where our special educa-

tion kids have friends on the lacrosse team," Wallace said. "They get to go to lacrosse games with them, they get to have someone to say 'hello' to in the hallway, someone to sit with at lunch, so they're getting social opportunities through lacrosse that they never had before."

Drew said the bowling event would be the first of many events to support autistic youth in the community.

"I'm happy to see so many people care about such a great cause," he said. "I don't see this organization being a one-time event; it should be multiple events in the future. The more donations and support we get, the better for the future."

For more information, visit <http://hillsvsautism.org>.