

A Local Golfing Effort for Children with Autism

By Danny Frank



Ernie Els. Known as “The Big Easy,” he’s one of only six PGA Tour pros to have twice won both the U.S. Open and The Open Championship among his 71 career victories.

Off the course, the South African native is widely known for his heartfelt

Autism (www.familycenterforautism.org) in Garden City and the Long Island chapter of Autism Speaks.

In June, fifteen youngsters with autism from The Family Center For Autism were treated to a golf clinic hosted by the PGA staff pros at Tam

O’Shanter, led by Mark Brown and Anthony Cancro who were enthusiastic in volunteering their time and talent to make this inaugural event a success.

According to Michael Just, the parent of a child with autism: “Based on how this

first event was so well-received, we anticipate scheduling a second clinic before the end of the current

Lending a hand on golf instruction were Nick Patti, Josh Rackley, and Jon Eichner. New York Islanders star Casey Cizikas also dropped by to encourage the beginner golfers. Tam’s GM Carl O’Boyle made everyone feel welcome and supplied plenty of “healthy” snacks and beverages. Tina



support for autism research, treatment, and programs. His son, Ben, has autism, which led to the establishment of a foundation in 2009 which raises funds under a variety of special events it sponsors. Els For Autism, based in Jupiter, Florida is philanthropic in advancing golf for people with autism.

Jonathan Stone, a Tam O’Shanter Country Club (Brookville) board member has been inspired by Els’ efforts and perseverance for autism. Together with club member Michael Just, they hosted the “T Off 4 Autism” golf tournament at Tam O’Shanter on Thursday, July 14th, where the proceeds contributed by the golfers were donated to several organizations including: The Family Center For



golf season. We are hoping to get official designation from the Ernie Els Foundation. We believe Tam would be the only golf club on Long Island to gain this status from “Ernie Els” for our program.



Nicholas Pusateri with NY Islanders center Casey Cizikas. Nicholas was in a 3 way tie for the putting competition.

Moreno of “The Family Center for Autism” said, “golf is an ideal sport for people with autism because it helps to develop life skills and social interaction. It builds self-esteem and confidence all under a peaceful, relaxing, welcoming environment. The clinic features structured stretching, kinesesthetic activity. It provides people with autism new opportunities to develop and build friendships and relationships.”

Michael Just, who has been the catalyst for this effort at Tam, observes that “autism hits a whole family hard. As a parent you try to reconcile the heartbreak and challenge. Sadly, the kid with autism is often forgotten about and left out. Golf and the experience of these clinics which Tam and other golf courses can provide becomes a path where people with autism can connect.”