

## University School Junior Reinvents the Charitable Golf Tournament



University School junior Jared Barclay with fellow University School volunteers

University School junior Jared Barclay designed the first Annual Tee It Up Golf Tournament not only to benefit the Autism Society of Broward County, but to provide a unique opportunity for teens and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. As a result, 25 excited teens participated in their first-ever golfing tournament.

“Normally when you have charity tournaments, adults play and support a cause with just money. But for the Autism Society, it’s not really about the money, it is about allowing these kids to have the experience of playing an activity and socializing with other people,” Barclay said.



Barclay learned the value of this mission after he researched a number of charitable golf programs and then began volunteering for the Autism Society’s Golfing FORE Autism. Every Friday night, Barclay joins P.G.A. professional Gary Braeseke and other volunteers at the Cooper Colony Country Club to mentor middle and high school students. For most, the secure, non-judging environment provides a rare opportunity for youngsters to build self-confidence by exploring a sport and making friends.



Putting a face to Golfing FORE Autism’s success is Erik Christensen who after three years of practice qualified for his high school team.

“It is hard when you have autism because there are not as many opportunities to participate in something like a high school team sport. But through this program, Erik was able to interact with other kids, which really benefitted him when it came to playing on a real team and in more serious competition. He even made it to regionals this year,” Barclay said.



Broward County Autism Society President Hugh Keough with a proud participant

While Erik’s success helped draw attention, the golf tournament allowed the Autism Society to further showcase the tremendous impact that Barclay, Braeseke and other volunteers witness on weekly basis.

“A lot of parents drop their children off so that they can have the Golfing FORE Autism experience, but because this was a big event, they came and actually got to see their kids do something that they never expected them to be able to do.” Barclay said.

“Volunteers who didn’t know what to expect were also really surprised at how well the kids handled themselves and at how good they were... not to mention that they had a really good time with them, too,” he added.

True to his vision the tournament did not culminate with a final check presentation because there were no fees. In addition, donations for the first-ever tournament made it possible to provide participants with collared golf shirts, individual framed photos, a celebration dinner, and medals and trophies. But neither Barclay nor the Broward County Autism Society were disappointed.

“It was just cool seeing everybody really excited to go out and play some golf,” Barclay said. “We’re definitely going to try to make this an annual event. It is something to look forward to in the future.”