

New autism center honors Trevyan Rowe

Autism

Gates site to teach community, pros

Caurie Putnam

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As schools reopen their doors this month, a Gates building shuttered for a decade is also reopening with an educational mission of its own: to teach the community about autism.

The Autism Council of Rochester's Autism Family Information & Referral Services Center opened Aug. 30 at 2118 Chili Ave. in Gates in the former, vacant Gates Police Department substation.

"This is a place for all families everywhere in the process with autism spectrum disorder," said Gates resident Lawana Jones, executive director of The Autism Council, about the center. "It's a place people can come in to get information, training and support."

It is dedicated to the memory of Trevyan Rowe, a 14-year-old from Rochester whose body was recovered from the Genesee River on March 11 after he walked away from School 12 in Rochester on the morning of March 8. Rowe was receiving services for a learning disability and may have had autism as well.

"Trevyan touched a lot of people in this community," said Mark Assini, Gates town supervisor, who helped search for Rowe, along with Jones and hundreds of other Rochesterians. "The outpouring of love and support among the community at large searching for that young man in the cold for so long was amazing."

After they saw each other at the search, Jones, a longtime resident of Gates, approached Assini with the idea to have a place in Gates to educate families and the community about autism. It just so happened that Assini had recently spoken to Gates Police Chief James Van-Brederode about trying to find a new use for the vacant police substation.

"This was the right time and a wonderful and appropriate use of the space," said Assini, who noted the town still owns the building but is allowing the

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The Autism Council of Rochester's Autism Family Information & Referral Services Center opened Thursday at 2118 Chili Ave. in Gates in the former, vacant Gates Police Department substation in Westgate Plaza. CAURIE PUTNAM



Velma and Kent Handy, aunt and uncle of the late Trevyan Rowe, hold the ribbon during the opening of the center dedicated to his memory. It will provide information, training and support to community members and professionals.

CAURIE PUTNAM



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nonprofit to use it rent-free. "It's a fitting tribute to Trevyan."

Jones agrees.

"We've got to remember Trevyan," she said. "We cannot forget him."

Members of Rowe's family were on hand at the ribbon cutting and his uncle Kent Handy spoke, telling those assembled: "We still grieve over Trevyan's loss, obviously, but things like this help us get through. It's a good thing to see the community come together. His death is not in vain."

"The center is a real opportunity to help people with autism achieve everything they can achieve and a place for their families to network," Assini said. It will be open from noon to 5 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and will be a resource not only for families but also for educational and administrative professionals by offering autism training and certification programs.

Jones, whose 28-year-old daughter, Marsche Johnson, has autism, hopes families will find support at the center regardless of what stage they're in with their own child's diagnosis.

When her own daughter was transitioning from high school to the adult community, she experienced a dearth of resources. Jones founded the Autism Council in 2007 in response.

Now, Johnson has become an ambassador for the Autism Council of Rochester, along with Liz Pritchard of Rochester and Dalton Letta, who works at the Gates Public Library.

“The center is a real opportunity to help people with autism achieve everything they can achieve,” Assini said, “and a place for their families to network.”

Caurie Putnam is a community columnist and a freelance writer living in Brockport.