

10 Council-Davenport Octoberfest

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They might look like they're just floating along, but Bionic Ducks will be doing more at this year's Council-Davenport Octoberfest than you think.

They're spreading awareness and raising funds for an organization created by one of Council's own.

Shannon Ball, a former native of Council, married his wife Sherry in August 2009 and together, the couple had a daughter Sarah in August 2010.

Around Christmastime in 2012, Shannon remembered coming home from his day job at Holston Valley Medical Center and calling out to his daughter. Two-year-old Sarah never turned around.

After several attempts at calling out her name, he finally closed the door and the vibrations startled her. Twisting around, Sarah lit up at the sight of her daddy.

By January 2013, she'd lost her hearing completely and was diagnosed as deaf. She was only two and a half years old.

"At the time, we didn't know anything about implants, never even heard anything about cochlear implants before," says Shannon Ball. "And as part of that journey, we found out that the numbers were horrible — only about five percent of the kids that are eligible actually get cochlear implants. And a big reason for that is that many have never heard of them before. I was amazed to find that out."

The Balls, however, did learn about the implants, which Sarah received seven months after her diagnosis at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, TN.

"So after Sarah got her implants, we started hearing stories that were very, very similar to ours and we decided we needed to do something about that. So that's kind of how Waiting to Hear was really born."

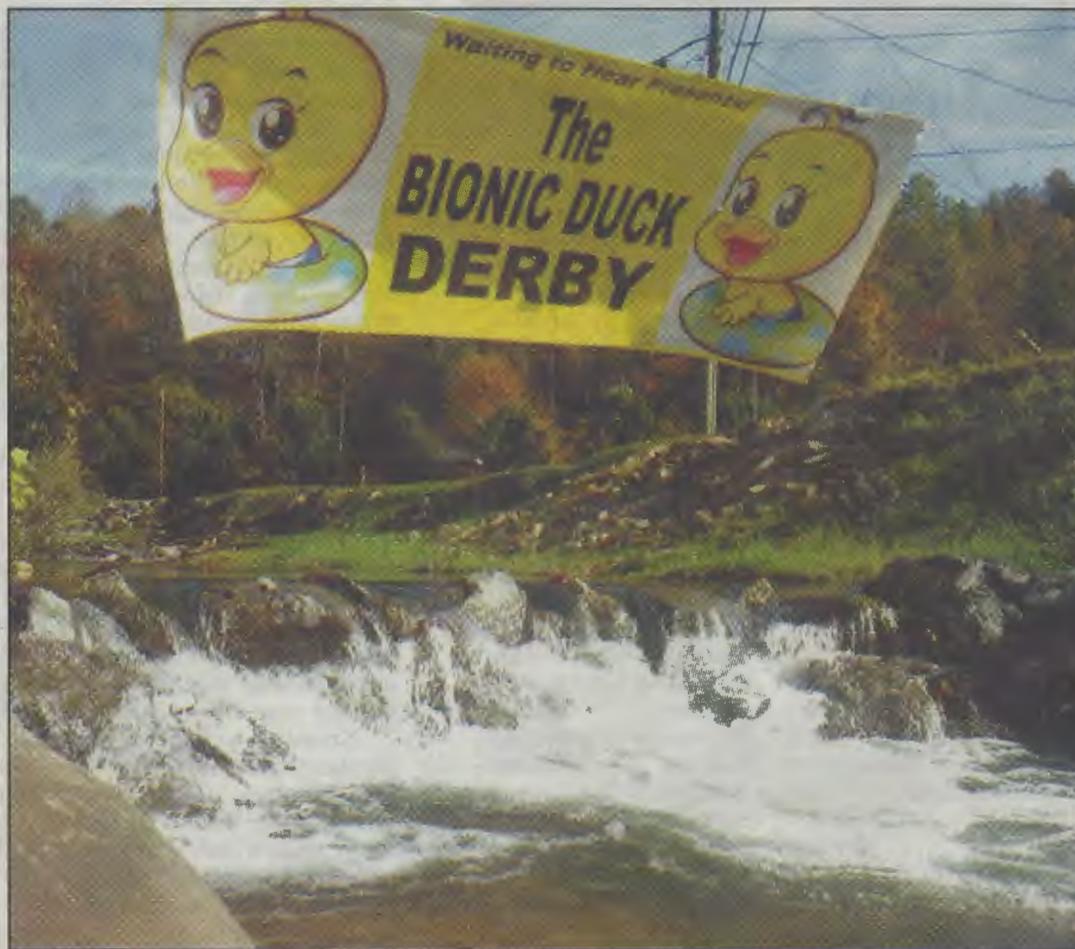
Waiting to Hear is a non-profit organization, which they formed to spread awareness and support programs that benefit others going through the same obstacles they faced with Sarah.

According to Shannon, Waiting to Hear currently benefits the cochlear implant study at East Tennessee State University and its weeklong summer camp held annually in Elizabethton, supports the creation of resource libraries for parents of deaf children at hearing centers throughout the region, and most recently, the formation of a hearing aide bank available to those awaiting their cochlear implants.

The latter, Shannon says, is vital, given the importance of keeping auditory nerves strong. However, because a child might receive their implant within a year, absorbing the cost purchasing temporary hearing aides could easily be avoided with the creation of a hearing aide bank.

Additionally, Shannon says he hopes to someday bring free hearing screenings to schools in Buchanan County, where he knows he need in great.

"It'll always be home," he says. "Growing up there, you realize we are in a remote area of the state. And we don't have the resources of Roanoke or Knoxville. Down there, it's a lot simpler. You can get diagnosed, you've got people to talk to, other parents to talk to... A



The inaugural Bionic Duck Derby, which was scheduled to be held at the Davenport-Council Octoberfest last year, was held a few days after the event due to unusually high waters. According to Shannon Ball, the founder of the nonprofit organization Waiting to Hear, which created the fundraiser, this year's derby hopes to release ducks at the event, weather permitting.

lot of times in Southwest Virginia, you're on your own. A lot of the clinics will tell you, we're in new territory because they're used to seeing elderly patients."

And that's precisely the reason Shannon chose to bring Waiting to Hear to Council, where he hopes a parent might remember his crazy bionic ducks in the event their child suddenly loses his hearing, like his daughter Sarah.

The name, Waiting to Hear, actually came from the mantra the Ball family adopted during the difficult time between Sarah's diagnosis and the surgery that restored her hearing.

Refusing to refer to their daughter as deaf or hearing impaired while they awaited the day she'd undergo cochlear implant surgery, they chose instead to say Sarah was simply "waiting to hear."

Over the past year, they've hosted multiple fundraising events, working to make cochlear implants a household name, including Hear Me Roar at Creation Kingdom in Gate City, TN, and the Music To My Ears music series, like 'Hearing: From the King,' an Elvis tribute concert at the Lamplight Theater in Kingsport, TN.

Yet while Shannon hopes to spread awareness throughout the Tri-Cities, where he currently resides with his wife Sherry, he hasn't forgotten his hometown of Council in Buchanan County.

For that reason, he brought the Bionic Duck Derby to a hometown favorite event, the Council-Davenport Octoberfest.

Teaming up with the William P. Harris Recreation Park on Saturday October 10th at 2 p.m., Waiting to Hear will kick off the second annual Bionic Duck Derby as part of the Council/Davenport Octoberfest.

The event is designed to raise awareness about cochlear implants and raise money for programs that support hearing and spoken language outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children in our area.

Featuring a plastic duck race down the Russell Fork River, the derby will award the top finishing ducks prizes for their sponsors.

Duck Sponsorships are available at the event and online at www.WaitingToHear.org for a suggested donation of \$3 each or two for \$5.

Official Rules, prize lists, and more information are available at www.WaitingToHear.org or by e-mailing info@WaitingToHear.org.

The derby is sponsored locally by Thomas' Body Shop, Car Care, and Simmon's Auto Sales.

Additionally, Olaf from Disney's Frozen and Daffy Duck will be on hand at the Waiting to Hear booth to meet children and pose for photos.

Waiting to Hear, which was formed in 2013, is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit based in the Tri-Cities. Shannon, who is a 1992 graduate of Council High School, serves as the organization's executive officer and founder.

Shannon, a 1992 graduate of Council High School, is the son of Bill and Virginia Ball, of Combs Ridge.