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'Hear me Roar' event set to raise money, awareness about cochlear implants

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Sarah Ball feeds a lemur at the Creation Kingdom Zoo in Gate City, Va. Sarah's parents started a non-profit organization to raise awareness about cochlear implants. (contributed photo)

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After finding out their daughter was deaf and going through the process to get cochlear implants, one local family decided to start a non-profit organization to help raise awareness about the implants.

The organization, called Waiting to Hear, will be holding its first fundraiser on August 8 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Creation Kingdom Zoo in Gate City.

"It all started about a year and a half ago," said Shannon Ball, one of the founders of the organization. "That's when we found out our daughter lost her hearing."

Shannon said they knew something was going on with Sarah Ball because at 18 months, her vocabulary was still very limited, so he and his wife took her to the doctor. They were told it could be a number of things, from speech problems to autism.

One day Shannon, who is a respiratory therapist, came home earlier than usual and Sarah was sitting with her back to the door. She was staring into the kitchen and didn't seem to notice him.

He called out to her, but got no response. After a few times of trying to get her attention without success, he shut the door. The vibration from the closed door caused her to turn around.

"That's when it hit me that something was wrong," he said.

It was at that point the family went to see an audiologist and received the news that Sarah was deaf. Shannon admits hearing the news was like a punch in the stomach.

SPECIAL SECTIONS

While they were at the doctor, they received information about cochlear implants and the family decided getting implants was the way they were going to go.

A cochlear implant is a small, complex electronic device that can help to provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing.

The process to get the implants took a while, but they had another family, who had went through the process before, guide them through every step.

Waiting to Hear was established in part to help other families the way they were helped and in part to raise awareness about cochlear implants. Shannon learned of some troubling statistics while learning about cochlear implants, like only five percent of deaf children are told about the implants.

When a patient receives cochlear implants, it can take a while for them to get adjusted to the sound. It was no different for Sarah.

The family had begun visiting the Creation Kingdom Zoo in Gate City because Sarah liked animals. One day they were at the zoo after Sarah had her implants. She stopped suddenly and pointed up, making the sign for bird. She was able to hear the birds with her implants.

"It was one of the best days of my life," Shannon said. "That and when you get your first word repeated back to you...A couple of days ago, I got my first, 'I love you daddy.' There is just no describing what that felt like."

The event will cost \$10 per person and will feature a number of things, including drawings for free tickets to places such as Dollywood and Ripley's Aquarium. There will also be some special guests on hand including Elsa from Frozen, Tigger, Buggs Bunny and Captain America.

The cost is \$10 a person, except for children two and younger. The money will go to help sponsoring children next summer at a hearing camp in Elizabethton and a book to help families who may have a deaf child and don't know where to turn.

Mostly, Shannon just wants to get one message out to the people who attend the event.

"Deaf kids can hear," he said.



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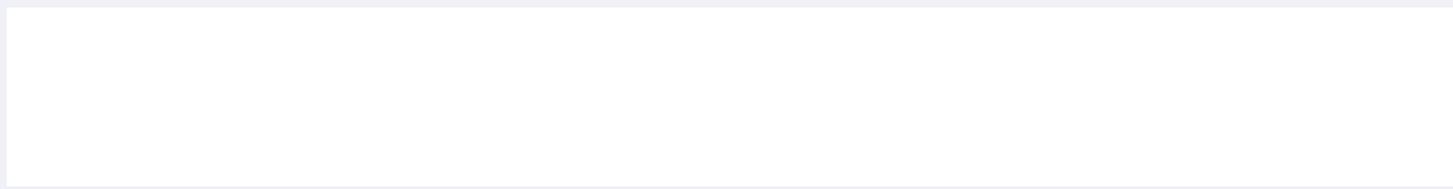
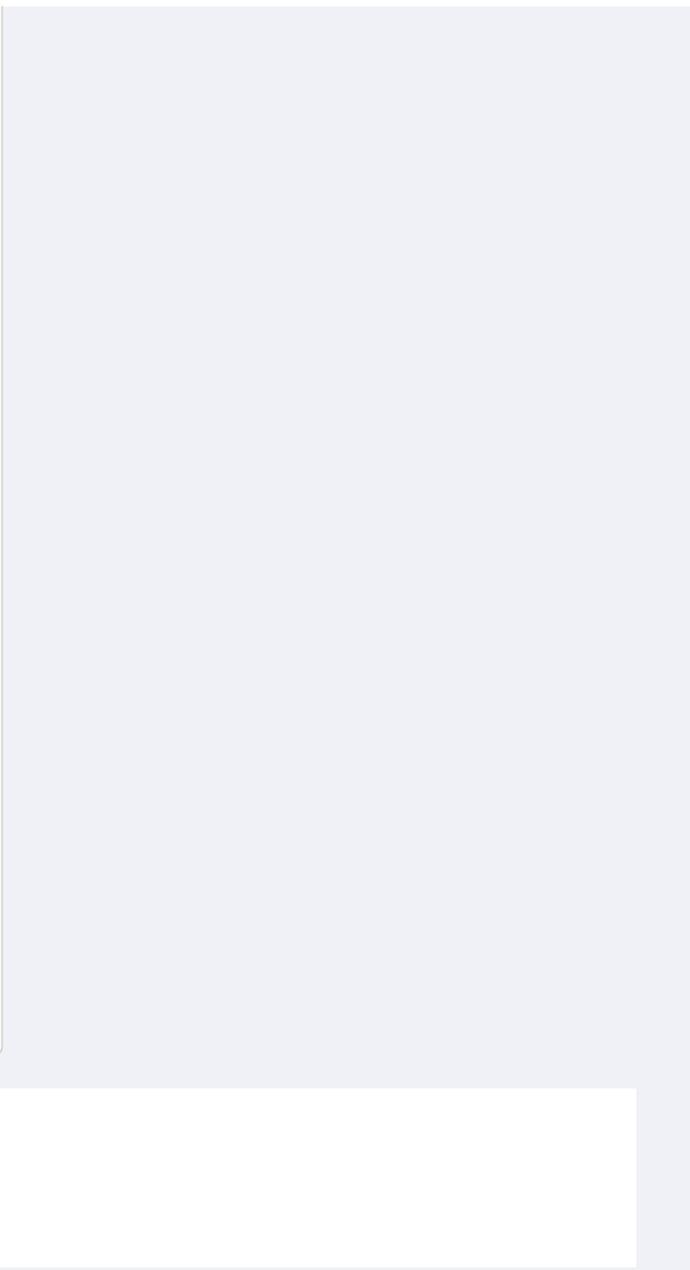
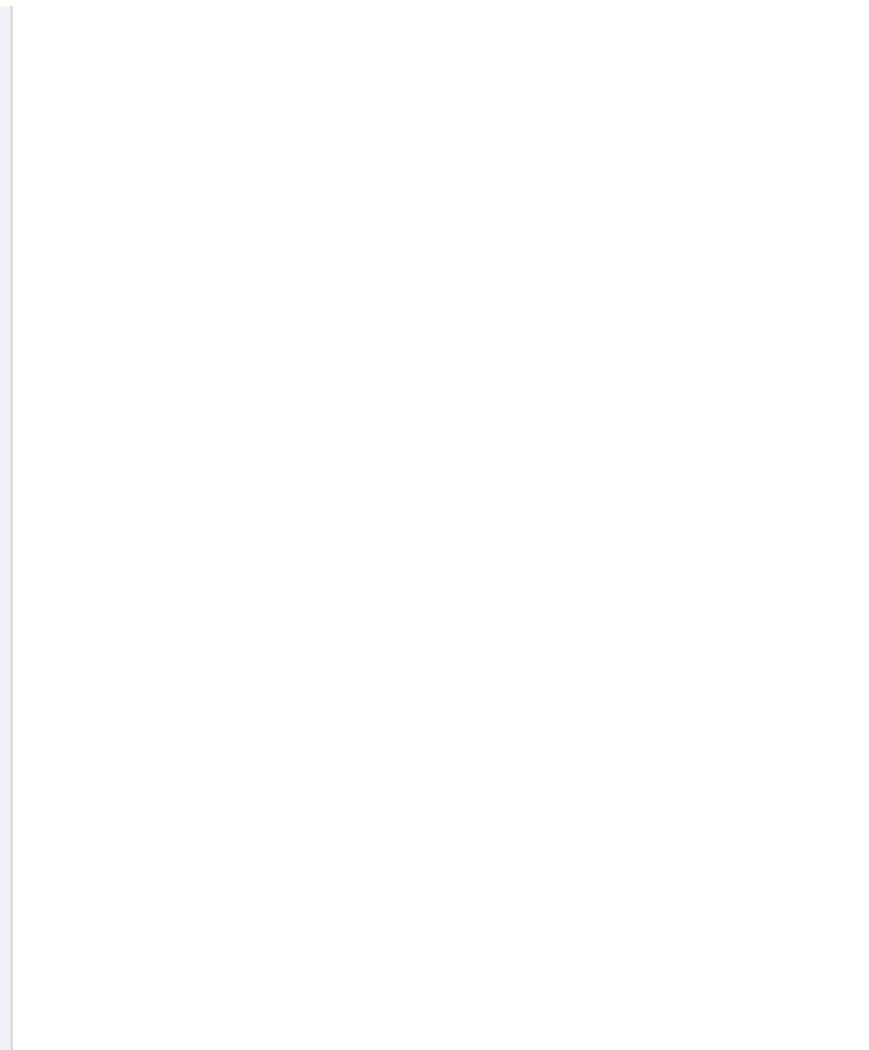
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