

Sports program for autistic kids gets \$5G

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Photo credit: Daniel Brennan | Aiden Lorenzo, 9, right, practices his golf swing with Annmarie Ayers, an occupational therapy grad student from Touro College and volunteer with ISF (Inclusive Sports and Fitness) at Give It Your All Sports in Ronkonkoma. The ISF program is designed to give children with disabilities the opportunity to take part in sports and fitness activities that will help them develop and grow physically, socially and personally. (Oct. 23, 2013)

A Ronkonkoma indoor sports facility that runs athletic programs for children with autism has been hailed as a model for future public programming and has received a \$5,000 donation to expand its scope. The GCA505 chapter of the Sheet Metal Air Rail Transportation Union donated the money to Inclusive Sports and Fitness this week to help expand the program's size and resources. Inclusive Sports and Fitness was launched by Mike DiFilippi, who owns the Give It Your All Sports facility in Ronkonkoma. There, he runs a "free play" sports program for high-functioning children with autism ages 7 to 15 that develops their physical fitness, social skills and mental coordination.

Therapist Alexander Lopez also runs a more occupational therapy-oriented program at Give It Your All that uses golf as a method to help those children. "We really want to look at this as a potential model program," said Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, who attended a ceremony last Wednesday at the sports facility. "It's having a tremendous impact on these kids, and we'd like to see how the results are. This is, from all accounts, a program that works."

"We wanted to serve a program that benefits our local community," said Anthony Simon, chair of the SMART union.

"We came and watched, and we were impressed. We thought it was a nice program where you can see the results."

Islip Councilman Anthony Senft hailed the sports program as a successful example of a public-private partnership.

"This donation almost doubles the capacity of the program," Senft said. DiFilippi said the donation will enable the next class to serve 20 to 24 children, instead of the current 10 to 12. He also plans to add basketball to the retinue of sports offered to the children. "I'm flipping out," he said of the unexpected donation. "This business is very competitive and it can be hard to find money."