

THE HAYRIDE ACCIDENT

Family's struggles shows need for more options for trauma rehab

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

LONG HILL TWP. — Life has changed for the Avirappattu family of Gillette in the year since Jacob, 8, was left with severe trauma to the brain after a Halloween hayride accident at the Shrine of St. Joseph, Stirling.

The once-spirited, sociable, and big-hearted child, who ran off to school with his older brother Davis last year, is now wheeled to the curb each morning to await the bus that transports him to a special needs school.

His younger brother, Daniel, whose childhood disappeared as quickly as his brother's accident occurred, is off to kindergarten this year.

Their once ordinary world now rumbles with confusion, disquiet and even apprehension.

The boys' parents, George and Jaya Avirappattu of Gates Avenue, are trying to create a new model of family life that centers around Jacob's physical needs.

Jacob is completely dependent on others. They are juggling day and night to attend Jacob's needs, to be present to Jacob's brothers in their education and other activities, and keeping their employment, while also trying to meet so many other demands this injury has brought upon them.

Mrs. Avirappattu is a scien-

tist with Schering-Plough Corp., Mr. Avirappattu is professor of mathematics at Kean University.

Despite a clinical diagnosis that classifies their son as a sightless and speechless quadriplegic, the couple, and those who have helped care for him over the past year, have been encouraged by Jacob's increased awareness of his surroundings, so much so that they determinedly home school him within the confines of their loving surroundings, and his capabilities.

"We try to make him participate with us, especially in our nightly prayers," said his father, "by giving him the responsibility to lead the prayer when it is his turn."

Jacob, who did not lose movement of his lips and tongue and thus can eat and utter sounds, responds to his father's requests and follows the cadence of the prayer he once knew so well.

Jacob also responds appropriately to humorous comments and stories, and is beginning to recognize newer voices and commands, Mr. Avirappattu noted.

While the signs kindle his parents with hope that his physicians recommended inten-



JACOB AVIRAPPATTU

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GEORGE AVIRAPPATTU

Jacob's dad

sive therapy could bridge the way between Jacob's two worlds, they are confronted with health insurance issues that limits the extent of his potential rehabilitation options.

The Avirappattus have witnessed Jacob's progress over the months and they, Jacob's therapists, and his doctors believe that an intensive program of inpatient therapies and treatments is critical at this time for a boost in Jacob's progress.

The parents are confused and bewildered by the lack of treatment and rehabilitation options for children who are brain injured.

"We are finding, as many others before us already know, that there is very little available on-

going treatment for children suffering from severe traumatic brain injury," noted Mr. Avirappattu.

Short of a breakthrough in stem cell therapy, most medical experts seem not convinced there is anything, including alternative therapies, that would be of significant help to Jacob's condition.

The Avirappattu's faith is a key to their sustenance through all these.

Their pain and anguish is visible.

Mrs. Avirappattu's eyes fill with tears as she thanks friends for their help, as she prepares to travel the road of uncertainty, searching and seeking new ways to help Jacob reach their goal of mobility and independence.

The parents have set a long-term goal to educate the public about the needs of brain injured children, and to care for Jacob until the day when he might be awakened.

For now, however they meet each day with thanksgiving for the kindness of many including family and friends, colleagues, the medical community, friends in Long Hill Township and beyond, and the Shrine of St. Joseph, for their support, prayers and physical assistance.

They are also grateful to the people who have donated to a special fund set up for Jacob with Help Save a Life organiza-

PLEASE SEE JACOB, PAGE 7

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