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### **'Go places, make friends and have fun'**

**By JAKE LINGER Sports Editor**

For 28 years, Sarah Petit enjoyed life. She loved bowling and, by all accounts, may have had a legitimate crush on Louie, the Bowie Baysox mascot. Sadly, the spirited young woman who negotiated her own developmental disabilities passed away in 2002, but the story of Sarah Petit has hardly seen its ending written.

Betsey and Pat Petit established the Sarah Petit Fund after its namesake's passing. Soon thereafter, they came up with the fund's motto, "Go places, make friends, have fun." So when The Arc of Prince George's County partnered with the Petits to raise money for the fund via the annual Bowling Bash at AMF Bowie, it seemed natural to use one of Sarah's favorite activities to raise funds to help others with similar developmental disabilities. "Sarah would've been incredibly happy to be a part of the Bash," said Betsey, who is also an 18-year employee of The Arc, "and it keeps her name on people's lips."

Though the Petits admit that working to raise money for the fund meets an emotional and personal need to cope with the loss of one of their two daughters, there is no mistaking how important the Bowling Bash has become to raising awareness and money for such a meaningful cause. The Bowling Bash had actually been around for three years prior to the founding of the Sarah Petit Fund, but it was a small general fund raiser meant for folks to have fun more than anything else, according to The Arc's community affairs program administrator, Marianne Tropp. Tropp estimated that only about 75 people participated in the annual Bash prior to its connection to the Petit fund, but that participation has risen to over 300 over a two-day period in the six years since she has been a part of the event. "We fill all 32 lanes (at AMF Bowie) and there are about five or six people per lane," said Tropp, who also noted that due to increasing interest the event could possibly add a third day in the near future. "The Bowling Bash," said Tropp, "really is to try to make sure people have

as much information to help their child live the best life possible."

The Arc is a nationwide advocacy organization that has been in existence since 1952 and has approximately 600 members throughout the county. One of the beneficiaries of The Arc's programs was Sarah Petit, who participated in the Weekend Social Program as well as Individual Support Services. The Petits said that their oldest daughter enjoyed seeing others smile, thus making the Bowling Bash "a perfect match."

The money raised for the Sarah Petit Fund is allocated for recreational activities for those who suffer from the same disabilities that Sarah battled - and that would make her happy.

The numbers from this year's Bowling Bash have not yet been confirmed, but the 2007 event raised \$22,000 and was allocated in chunks ranging from \$200-\$400, which Betsey called "the typical range for the grants." The grants are intended to provide a healthy portion of the money needed to send recipients to camps, adult weekend social outings and vacations. Pat estimated that about 85 individual grants were awarded in 2007 and said that much of that money went toward overtime and extra staffing for The Arc's various programs and activities.

The "typical" dollar amount per grant, Pat said, "will probably grow as the fund grows."

"Lots of these families are not well off," said Betsey, who credits The Arc executive director Mac Ramsey as being an integral part of the fund's success. "Each year, we ask, how can we increase the funds?"

The Bowling Bash is something to behold. To raise money for the Sarah Petit Fund, bowlers gather sponsorships from friends and families and anyone who wishes to support the cause - and then they bowl! Referring to the two-day event as more of a carnival atmosphere, Betsey "hopes that we have something for everybody." One of the draws of the Bash is that bowling can be enjoyed by people with disabilities thanks to wheelchair ramps to get to the lanes and then bowling ball ramps on the lanes to keep everyone competitive and having fun. AMF Bowie seemed like a natural place to host the event because lanes are available for tenpin as well as duckpin bowling, which has attracted bowlers between the ages of 2 and 92.

The carnival atmosphere of the Bowling Bash can be partly attributed to the support of the community and the manner in which that support shows itself at AMF Bowie. In addition to the Baltimore Orioles Bird and Washington Nationals mascot,

Screech, attending the Bash, the Baysox make sure that Louie, the mayor of Louieville, Md., attends the Bash each year. "Louie was one of Sarah's favorites," said Pat. "The Baysox have been outstanding in their support."

Baysox director of communications, Ryan Roberts, said that the Baysox are simply in a support role in the team's partnership with the Sarah Petit Fund. "It's more Louie than anything," said Roberts. "Louie was such a big part of what (Sarah's) about. She loved coming to Baysox games."

Besides the professional mascots, there are others in costume, such as the folks who dressed up as bowling pins this year. There is also a ton of food, free popcorn and giveaways and a host of other activities that lend to the carnival atmosphere.

In addition to The Arc - particularly Ramsey and Tropp - the Petits credit corporate sponsorships and donations of prizes to making the Bowling Bash incrementally successfully each year. The two main sponsors this year were Columbia Bank and United Healthcare, and gift certificates were donated by Target. "(The fund) probably doesn't make a profit on bowlers," said Betsey, "but we make the money on donations. It's an event in itself."

The only true requirement to qualify for a grant from the Sarah Petit Fund is that the potential recipient be a member of The Arc or a beneficiary of its services. There is one other requirement actually. "Each grant recipient gets a disposable camera," said Betsey, whose sister gave the first sizeable donation to the fund. "We want to have a visual demonstration of what fun you're having."

In giving thanks to those who have helped make the Bowling Bash a success each year, the Petits stand amazed at the number of people who give to the fund without having even known Sarah. Pat is a retired librarian of 34 years at The Catholic University Law School. Simply from that connection, Catholic general counsel Craig Parker has become a major fund-raiser for the Petits. Parker's wife, coincidentally named Betsy, wrote to an old friend she hadn't seen in years, and who founded the Foster Friess Foundation, and a week later received a \$5,000 check made out to the Sarah Petit Fund.

St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Laurel has no affiliation to The Arc, but for three Sundays surrounding each Bowling Bash, the parish donates money at its services to the fund. "I am touched by people who never knew Sarah, but get it," Betsey said. "It humbles me and amazes me that people who didn't know Sarah help so much."

According to Tropp, working with the Petits makes her job

easier because of their passion for the Bowling Bash and the Sarah Petit Fund. However, as Betsey said, "We try to keep Marianne happy, she has a lot of work to do and she's a calm team leader."

The Petits have another daughter, Becky, who lives in California and works as a personal assistant and tutor for a man with cerebral palsy, but still manages to fly home each year to bowl in her sister's memory - and she brings friends. The more the merrier.

For information regarding The Arc, the Sarah Petit Fund and the annual Bowling Bash, visit [www.thearcofpgc.org](http://www.thearcofpgc.org). To join The Arc, call 301-925-7050, ext. 238.

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