

INSIDE **AUTISM** Our culture and autism



Fundraiser goal: \$250,000 for autism

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On Saturday, real estate businessman [Barry Saywitz](#) will raise a quarter-million dollars for autism. It's an enormous effort, hosting at least 600 people at his Newport Beach home, twice as many as he's ever had before. It takes multiple caterers, drink sponsors, corporate sponsors, three live bands, press coverage, red carpet entrance, etc.



So, of course, I ask how long he's been planning it.

He laughs.

"Um, I bet it wasn't 90 days. ... The goal is to raise \$250,000 or more in one evening in 90 days of planning. That'd be a helluva accomplishment."

The idea was actually planted (but not acted on) about a year ago, when he had a much smaller, less organized party at his house to benefit autism organizations.

"I decided this year to make it a full-blown charity event," [the entrepreneur](#) says. So three months ago he started making phone calls, always expecting tepid responses, always shocked at how eager people and companies were to be involved.

“The idea was to have it be tropical themed, like a Tommy Bahama event. So I called them. Got all the way to the president of the company in Seattle and left a detailed message. Didn’t expect to hear back.”

“Five minutes later, I get a phone call. Turns out the head of Tommy Bahama in Southern California has a son with autism, and he happened to be in the president’s office, and he happened to hear the message while he was there. So we made them the keynote sponsor.”

Other companies soon followed. The restaurants alone: Scott’s Seafood. Tommy Bahama’s restaurant division. Maggiano’s. The Yard House. The Newport Rib Company. The Cheesecake Factory. Beach Pit BBQ. There is going to be a lot of food.

But, Saywitz says, “the real underlying story is the services and the programs these organizations provide for people with autism. The goal is to get the money directly to these programs so they can expand or do things they couldn’t before. One hundred percent will go directly to these organizations.”

The beneficiaries:

- [Easter Seals](#), which provides child development, job training and more for people with disabilities;
- Newport Beach Unified School District, which like most districts has felt the financial impact of autism;
- Autism Society of America, a national advocacy group that is in the process of establishing its first Orange County chapter;
- And Talk About Curing Autism, the national support group that was started in Newport Beach mom [Lisa Ackerman’s living room](#).

Of TACA, Saywitz says: “I’ve gone to several seminars and heard people from their organization speak, and they’re proponents of alternative medicine



and alternative avenues in treating autism. With my son, we've tried a lot of different treatments and programs, and I'm a big proponent of the scientific side of things as well as the alternative medicine."

Of the other groups: "There's a growing need for services that aren't provided. It's going to be a growing problem, the more kids that are diagnosed at an early age. These kids grow up. They get out of preschool, and they (eventually) get out into the workforce. The services these different organizations do, although some are dissimilar, in a lot of different ways they compliment each other."

Entrance costs \$150. For more information, [click here](#). Or, call (949) 930-7508.