

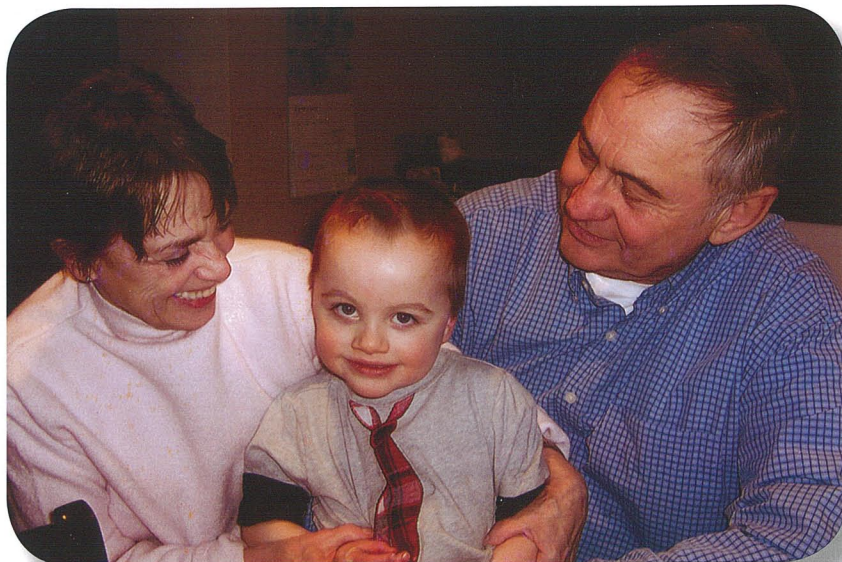
Group Offers Support for Grandparents

When Pat Quirk's twin grandchildren moved back to Erie from Georgia in 2008, she wanted to do everything that she could to support her daughter and grandchildren. Fortunately, the Grandparent Autism Support Group had recently started at the Barber National Institute. She began attending and found the speakers and the opportunities to share with other grandparents very helpful.

"I hadn't talked to many other grandparents before. Even though everyone does not have the exact same experience, the issues and concerns are often the same for everybody," said Mrs. Quirk. "It was good to see that you weren't the only one in that position."

The Grandparent Autism Support Group meets on the second Thursday of the month from April through November beginning at 6 p.m. at the Barber National Institute. The meeting usually includes a speaker on a topic of interest to the grandparents, followed by time for sharing and discussion. The sessions begin again for 2012 on Thursday, April 12. This program, and others like it offered by Family Support Services, promotes and supports family unity by meeting the needs of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Joyce McDonnell of Family Support Services at the Barber National Institute, who coordinates the meetings, said the group is one of the best that she has experienced. "The grandparents



LeAnne and Elmer Lemock with their grandson, Ethan Hermann, a student at the Elizabeth Lee Black School. The Lemocks have been participating in the Grandparent Autism Support group sponsored by the Barber National Institute.

are very, very involved and very, very interested," said Joyce. "They ask lots of questions and soak up information. It's clear they will do anything for their children and grandchildren."

LeAnne Lemock is one of those grandparents. Even though LeAnne is a registered nurse who had worked in Pediatrics, she and her husband, Elmer, had many questions when their grandson, Ethan, was diagnosed with autism. She said that they found information from the Support Group. "We never realized how many aspects there were, including the physical issues," said Mrs. Lemock. "From the group, it became clear how important it is to follow through with the plan for Ethan so it is very consistent."

Eileen and Albert Ednie, who are raising their six-year-old great-grandson, Alex, agree that the program has been very helpful. "It gives you the chance to talk to other grandparents to see if they experience the same things," said Mrs. Ednie. "It helps to know that you aren't the only ones going through it."

Mrs. Ednie has also appreciated the presentations by speakers. "They don't use all these terms and words you don't know," she said. "They brought information into terms that you could understand."

Joyce said that knowledgeable, accessible speakers provide the basis for a good meeting. "Grandparents have said that they are thankful to get information from a source they can truly trust. We look for speakers that can talk to them," said Joyce.

Some grandparents attend every session, while others come when their schedules allow. The group is open to any grandparents of children on the autism spectrum; registration is not required. For information, call Joyce at 814-878-5905 or email JoyceMcDonnell@BarberInstitute.org

Next Grandparent Autism Support Group Meeting

October 11 from 6-7:30 p.m.
Barber National Institute
Breakout Rooms

Meet other grandparents of grandchildren with autism, as well as the "Kids on the Block" puppet troupe!

Free program. Info at 878-5905

