

# News

## UTM 'LIGHTS IT UP'

### TISL raises money for Autism Awareness Month

**Toshya Leonard**

Staff Writer

April is National Autism Awareness Month, and the UTM delegation of the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature is getting involved by fundraising for Autism Speaks.

Monday, April 7, through Friday, April 11, the delegation will have a table set up in the University Center. Members will be selling baked goods as well as goody bags containing puzzle pieces.

Students also have the opportunity to participate in a scavenger hunt for puzzle pieces of various colors that are hidden around campus. Students can return the puzzle pieces for a chance to win a prize.

"It's rewarding to know that you are helping a cause that can be easily overlooked. I can only hope that Tennessee state officials will one day act and incorporate the costs of autism into our state's healthcare system," said UTM TISL Philanthropy Chair Rachel Washburn.

This philanthropy hits closer to home for TISL than what some may think. Political Science professor and TISL faculty advisor Dr. Bryan Parsons has a child with autism.

Dr. Chris Baxter, a Political Science professor and adviser for TISL, appreciates the learning experience the process has created for the group.

"The story of the TISL delegation's

support of autism awareness is such a great story on so many levels. Obviously, it's about great people working really hard for a great cause. For these students, working with Dr. Parsons and seeing how this issue affects his family has been the real success story of the entire TISL experience. TISL shouldn't just be about gaining knowledge about government for its own sake; it should be about using that knowledge to change lives for the better," Baxter said.

"The members of the TISL delegation are even better and wiser people than they were a year ago, and it's not just because they learned legislative processes and parliamentary procedure. I hope the rest of UTM is as proud of their leadership as I am."

Two years ago, members of the delegation drafted a TISL bill that would cut the costs of medical care for parents with autistic children by allowing them to be covered under regular insurance. Jamie Arnett was one of the original authors of the TISL bill, which passed through the TISL General Assembly.

That same TISL bill was used to create support for similar bills working through the state legislature this year.

"You never really know how important legislation can be until you see how it could directly impact you.



(From left) TISL members Camille Hall, Rachel Washburn, Morgan Fitzgerald, Faith Flynt and Toshya Leonard sell homemade goods to raise money for Autism Awareness Month. | **Pacer Photo / Mary Jean Hall**

The autism bill is a product of student engagement that many lessons were learned from. It is scenarios like this that teach us more than we could learn in a class room. While the bill never passed the legislature, it was a way for everyone involved to learn lessons and give back to the community," Arnett said.

All of the money raised within the week will be donated to Autism Speaks. Autism Speaks was founded in 2005 and has grown into the world's leading autism science and advocacy organization.

They are dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism;

increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families.

"One in 68: that's how many children are affected by autism. 0.55 percent: that's the amount of funds allocated by the National Institute of Health to give to autism research," said UTM TISL Vice President Morgan Fitzgerald. "Autism needs a voice, and the UTM TISL delegation intends to help make that voice be heard."

For more information on UTM TISL's Philanthropy Week, visit [www.facebook.com/UTMTISL](http://www.facebook.com/UTMTISL).