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'Ghost Hunters' star helps raise funds for Tourette's at Westfield benefit

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When the stars of the hit Sci-Fi Channel show "Ghost Hunters" gathered Sunday, Nov. 30, at Temple Emanu-El, it wasn't for the usual purpose of investigating paranormal activity.

Cast members and about 500 other people came together to help raise funds for Tourette's syndrome awareness and support. The neurological disorder hits close to home for one of the show's stars, Dave Tango, and his father, Bruce Tango, who organized the event.

Dave Tango, an investigator and evidence analyst on the show, struggled with what he described as a mild case of Tourette's. Today, the 23-year-old Linden resident is a hero for youngsters with the disorder, characterized by involuntary movements and vocal tics. Tourette's also can be accompanied by obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-deficit disorder, learning disabilities and depression.

Tango said increasing awareness about Tourette's is important to him. He didn't have problems making friends growing up, but often had to get out of his seat in class because he said he felt "trapped" and always had to move. Teachers drew attention to his behavior instead of trying to better understand his condition.

"The hardest thing growing up with it was in school. It wasn't really the students, it was the teachers," Tango said in between signing autographs and taking pictures with fans.

Bruce Tango said the disorder was "devastating" for his son growing up.

"We didn't know what job he was going to do," Bruce Tango said. "It's been a tough road for him."

Bruce Tango said his son started showing signs of Tourette's when he was a toddler, but the disorder wasn't well-known, and his condition was misdiagnosed for years.

"As a parent, you want to find out everything you can about it," Bruce Tango said.

Dave Tango said one woman approached him in tears during the event and said he was an inspiration for her child with Tourette's.

"I don't know how to describe how that makes me feel," Dave Tango said.

SHOWTIME

This was the second benefit event for the Somerville-based Tourette's Syndrome Association of New Jersey. "Ghost Hunters" stars at the event also included Jason Hawes, Grant Wilson, Steve Gonsalves and Kris Williams.

Tango said he and a friend formed a ghost group that looked into local places rumored to be haunted, eventually contacting "Ghost Hunters" about a site in Roselle Park. The show filmed an episode there including Tango. He

received a call two weeks later to join the show while he was sitting in a movie theater.

"To be honest, I cried," Bruce Tango said. "He finally got that break that he needed. Something really good happened to him in his life. It was very emotional for me, moreso than my son."

Tango said he became interested in paranormal activity because of the horror movies his father would bring home.

"I would always wonder if any of that was real," Tango said. "I looked online and I noticed there were all these ghost hunting groups. I said, 'Wait, this is a real thing.' "

Faith Rice, executive director of the New Jersey Center for Tourette's Syndrome, said while there still is a tremendous amount of work to do, New Jersey likely leads the nation in services for families dealing with Tourette's, educating teachers and doctors and general awareness.

Last year's event raised \$12,000 for the association.

"This is a wonderful event, and it's a member-initiated fundraiser," Rice said. "Because of the celebrity of the 'Ghost Hunters,' we have an opportunity to reach thousands more people to create awareness of Tourette."

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