

The 14th Annual Autism Awareness Night Draws Sellout Crowd to Rockford's BMO Center

Jan 31, 2025



The community turned out in full force last Saturday, January 25, at the BMO Center in Rockford for the 14th Annual Autism Awareness Night. Hosted by the Rockford IceHogs in partnership with The Autism Program (TAP) at Easterseals, the event was more than just an exciting night of hockey—it was a heartfelt reunion for TAP families and supporters and an essential fundraiser for autism awareness and support.

An Evening of Connection Beyond the Game

The community turned out in full force last Saturday, January 25, at the BMO Center in Rockford for the 14th Annual Autism Awareness Night. Hosted by the Rockford IceHogs in partnership with The Autism Program (TAP) at Easterseals, the event was more than just an exciting night of hockey—it was a heartfelt reunion for TAP families and supporters and an essential fundraiser for autism awareness and support.

Now in its 14th year, the event continues to evolve, thanks to the creativity of the IceHogs, TAP Program Manager Lori Davie, and dedicated supporters. This year, Davie gathered hundreds of personalized handprints to create a striking tapestry themed “Hands All In for Inclusion.” She and her team—including her daughter Emily Davie, Shannon DalSanto Funk, and many volunteers—adorned the concourse and walls of the BMO Center in a vibrant display of unity and awareness.

Before the packed crowd of more than 6,300 attendees, the evening kicked off with a special puck drop by sisters Emma and Lexi Wolf. The Wolf family has been part of Easterseals since 2018, and this was the fourth time that parents Micah and Zach, along with their girls, attended Autism Awareness Night. For the nearly 11-year-old twins, the opportunity to take center ice was a thrill.

“Emma and Lexi thought it was really neat to go out on the ice, meet some players, and drop the first puck. They were very excited, and we are grateful to Easterseals for the experience,” said their mother, Micah. She added that they deeply appreciate the IceHogs’ support of Easterseals, which enables families like hers to access vital services.

Fundraising Highlights

Excitement ran high with fundraising efforts throughout the evening. The IceHogs wore jerseys featuring the Chicago Storm Special Hockey Team (CSSH), an organization that gives children and adults with disabilities the chance to experience the game of hockey. CSSH also shared in the evening’s fundraising proceeds.

Adding to the fun, mystery pucks—signed by Rockford IceHogs and Chicago Blackhawks players and featuring the CSSH team logo—were sold by players’ wives and girlfriends. Leading up to the event, a premium raffle featuring coveted tickets to Chicago Cubs and Blackhawks games, among other prizes, sold out within 24 hours.

Reflecting on the event, Davie shared:

“This night is so much more than just watching our favorite team play hockey. It’s a space where autistic individuals and their families, friends, and support systems come together to celebrate inclusion, acceptance, and awareness. I absolutely love seeing so many families who have accessed services from our program over the years, as well as meeting new families. It was such a wonderful night. Our staff is deeply grateful to the IceHogs and all our sponsors for making this evening so special—it felt like a family reunion.”

Community Engagement & Awareness

TAP’s informational table, hosted by Davie and her team, provided details about Easterseals’ Rockford-area programs. They also highlighted HB Threads, Easterseals’ social enterprise that creates clothing, gear, buttons, and magnets while providing employment opportunities for individuals of all abilities. Attendees learned about autism screenings, diagnostic services, and TAP’s new social theater group—an engaging eight-week program where individuals with disabilities, along with their siblings, explore theater performance in a supportive and creative setting.

Meanwhile, visitors could take part in an Autism Facts Scavenger Hunt, reinforcing the event’s mission to spread awareness in an interactive way.

Thank You to Our Sponsors

Special thanks to the event’s key sponsors: the **Rockford IceHogs**, **LawnCare by Walter, Inc.**, **Bucciferro Family McDonald’s**, and media partners **WIFR TV** and **96.7 The Eagle Radio**.

To our Easterseals community, the Rockford IceHogs, countless volunteers, hockey fans, and everyone who contributed to the premium raffle or supported the event in any way—**Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford expresses its deepest gratitude**. This night’s continued success is because of you.

[Click here](#) for WIFR TV’s news segment covering the event. [Click here](#) for TAP Program Manager Lori

Davie on Rockford radio 96.7 The Eagle.