

WILLY'S WORLD NEWSLETTER

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Board Member Spotlight

Patti Kiefer

With a passion for community involvement, event planning, and supporting children with disabilities, Patti brings her expertise and dedication to advancing Willy's World's mission.



Willy Thomas beaming with excitement under the balloon arch on the front stretch at Sharon Speedway!light

Walk for Willy's World June 29, 2025

Walk for Willy's World was an incredible day of community, compassion, and celebration, raising over \$100,000 to support individuals with hidden disabilities. Hosted by Sharon Speedway, participants walked the track to raise funds, while enjoying a vibrant lineup of activities – local craft vendors, Sky's the Limit Face Painting, Twin State Auto Racing Club's classic car show, race car displays, music, and delicious food. The event also featured local businesses offering disability resources, a basket raffle, silent auction, and 50/50 drawings. Families soaked up the sunshine, connected with friends, and embraced the spirit of inclusion. A heartfelt thank you goes out to our corporate sponsors and volunteers whose generosity and hard work made this day such a success!

UPCOMING EVENTS

* Sunflowers of Sanborn

September 6, 2025

Visit Sanborn, NY, to enjoy a beautiful sunflower field, walk through the Willy's World Corn Maze, pick fresh blooms, and enjoy great food with the whole family!

* Trumbull County Fairgrounds Halloween Family Fun Weekend

September 19-20, 2025

Be part of the Trick-or-Treat fun and spend the weekend with friends and family – come enjoy the festivities and get your spooky on!

* Grace Chapel Church presents Graceful Strides 5K

September 2025

Graceful Strides, the annual 5K Run/ Walk event unites participants of all fitness levels, for a day of community camaraderie.

Message from our Executive Director

I am incredibly proud of all we have accomplished together! We continue to raise awareness and vital funds for those with hidden disabilities, and our journey is only just beginning. The future holds exciting plans, and I can't wait to share what's next for Willy's World!



Willy's World Fund Grants

Sharpsville family starts fund for kids with hidden disabilities

Full article posted in the Sharon Herald August 1, 2025.

What began as one family's personal journey has grown into a mission of awareness, hope, and support for countless others. After years of navigating medical challenges and a Level 2 autism diagnosis with their son, Willy, Tammy and Will Thomas decided to turn their struggles into something positive. In January 2025, they launched Willy's World, a nonprofit dedicated to helping children with hidden disabilities and their families.

The road to Willy's World was not easy. From the very beginning, Willy faced medical hurdles, including craniosynostosis and a major cranial reconstruction surgery at just 2½ years old. Later came a diagnosis of non-verbal autism. Tammy recalls how difficult those early years were, trying to find answers and resources when it often felt like there were none available. Through persistence, research, and advocacy, the Thomas' finally connected with the right services and therapies. With the right support, Willy has thrived — and now they want to make sure no family has to face the same roadblocks alone.

Since its launch, Willy's World has already made a tremendous impact. In less than six months, the organization raised more than \$100,000. Now, those funds are being put to use. The very first Safety Grant is being awarded to a Sharon family for the installation of a backyard fence so their autistic son can play safely outdoors. This is only the beginning. In the coming months, Willy's World will also provide Speech Therapy Grants, Educator Grants, and Sunflower Friend Grants, extending its reach to even more families and classrooms.

The organization's mission is not only to provide financial help, but also to spread awareness and create a more inclusive community. Willy's World proudly promotes the Hidden Disability Sunflower Program, a global initiative that uses the sunflower symbol to help identify individuals with hidden disabilities. By encouraging local businesses to become "Sunflower Friends," staff can be trained to better recognize and support children and families who may need extra understanding. Tammy explains, "Our mission is to create awareness, spread hope, and provide resources and financial support to families. We want to make sure no one else has to face the same roadblocks we did."

Community support has been strong. This summer, Willy's World hosted its biggest fundraiser yet, the Walk for Willy's World at Sharon Speedway, where families, businesses, and community members came together to raise money and show their support. Events like this not only raise funds, but also bring visibility to the needs of children with hidden disabilities — from autism to ADHD, epilepsy, anxiety, and other conditions that may not be immediately visible.

With every step, Willy's World is working toward a brighter future for children and families. What started with one boy's journey has now become a foundation of courage and compassion, providing resources, guidance, and hope to many.

To learn more or apply for a grant, visit www.willysworld.org or email willysworldfund@gmail.com.

Willy's World Fund Grants

Willy's World Presents First Grant to Sharon, PA Family

Full article posted in the Sharon Herald August 12, 2025.

Willy's World proudly presented its very first grant to the Webber family of Sharon, PA. The \$8,600 Safety Grant provided funding for a backyard fence so their 8-year-old son, Maxx, who is autistic and non-verbal, can safely enjoy playing outside. For Maxx, who loves to run, jump, and explore, this fence brings peace of mind to his parents, Heather and Matt.

Founded earlier this year by Tammy Thomas in honor of her 6-year-old son, Willy, the nonprofit has already raised over \$100,000. Willy's World is dedicated to offering Safety Grants, Speech Therapy Grants, and Educator Grants, along with valuable resources for families navigating hidden disabilities.

Heather expressed her gratitude, sharing that finding support and resources has often been overwhelming: "Everything Tammy is doing is absolutely wonderful. You can call her and she has a million resources to send you in the right direction."

This first Safety Grant is only the beginning. Willy's World will continue expanding its grant programs to bring hope, courage, and practical support to families throughout Western PA and Eastern Ohio.

To learn more or apply for a grant, visit www.willysworld.org or email willysworldfund@gmail.com.



Pictured above: Olivia Winner, Sara Cipriano, Tammy Thomas, Will Thomas, Willy Thomas, Maxx Webber, Heather Webber, Matt Webber, Jo Krummert, Angie Carroll, Patti Kiefer



McGonigle Ambulance Service Community Fun Day

McGonigle Community Fun Day!

A huge thank you to McGonigle Ambulance Service for hosting their first annual Community Fun Day on August 9th! It was such a wonderful event for local families to explore ambulances, fire trucks, and even watch a medical helicopter landing. We loved the chance to connect with families and share our mission at Willy's World. Events like this truly bring our community together!



Pictured to the left:
Willy's World Board Members,
Sara Cipriano, Olivia Winner,
Tammy Thomas & Willy
Thomas



Our Summer in Photos



The Willy's World Kids club at Sharon Speedway hosted driver autographs and games on August 2nd.



Willy Thomas giving two thumbs up in front of a McGonigle Ambulance at the Community Fun Day!



Willy's World was proud to participate in the South Py Stop, Drop, and Ride UTV event in support of the South Pymatuning Volunteer Fire Company.



Willy's World volunteers pictured with Ryan Blaney, Willy Thomas, and Tammy Thomas!

Willy's World Kids Club at Sharon Speedway Racing into Kindness with Ryan Blaney

On August 11, NASCAR driver Ryan Blaney joined us at the Willy's World Kids Club at Sharon Speedway for an unforgettable Racing into Kindness event. Ryan participated in a special Q&A session, answering questions from young race fans and sharing inspiring words about kindness and being a positive role model. He expressed his admiration for Willy's World and our mission, helping create greater awareness for children with hidden disabilities. It was a memorable evening filled with inspiration, encouragement, and community spirit.

"That [Willy's World] is something amazing that the Thomas family has put together."

—Ryan Blaney

