

## SALINE

# They have an angel

*Angelman syndrome is rare*

By Brian Cox  
Staff Writer

When 11-year-old Jake Blovits returns home from school, he slips his backpack off and declares he wants Funyuns.

He is a big fan of the treat.

His father and mother, Jack and Terri, tell him the Funyuns are gone.

"You finished them last night, remember?" says his mother.

It's then that an undeterred Jake takes out his Dynamo, a small portable computer designed to give people with significant speech, language and learning disabilities a quick and easy way to communicate.

Jake's finger pokes at icons on the monitor and a computerized voice named "Paul" says, "I want to go to the store."

That is, after all, where the Funyuns are to be found.

Four years ago, Jake was diagnosed with Angelman syndrome, a rare genetic disorder characterized by, among others, developmental delay, speech impediment, flapping hands, and an unsteady gait. Jake is mostly non-verbal. He understands most of what is said to him if he is paying attention, but has limited ability to communicate verbally.

That's where the Dynamo comes in. It empowers Jake, allowing him to talk and be understood.

Terri and Jack will never forget the first time Jake ordered for himself at a restaurant. They were at Bob Evans.

"I want grilled cheese, please," Jake said through his Dynamo. "And water."

The waitress didn't miss a beat.

Jack and Terri laugh

recalling that moment, which had been a long time in coming, a long time of not knowing and worry.

Jake was born in Massachusetts and from the outset never hit developmental milestones. And then, when he was 2 years old, he had a seizure while at a mall with his mother.

"I thought he died in my arms," recalled Terri. "He just went limp."

Years of consulting doctors, neurologists, and other specialists followed, but no one could diagnose what was causing Jake's seizures and developmental problems. The young boy underwent spinal taps, and blood work,

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**Jake Blovits shows off his Dynamo, a portable computer that can speak for him at the touch of a button. Jake has Angelman syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes significant developmental delays.**

Photo by Brian Cox

*in their midst*

## ANGEL

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and MRIs and countless other tests as the doctors worked — and failed — to uncover a diagnosis.

And then Jake's father read about Angelman Syndrome on the Internet and a bell went off.

"It was like I was reading about Jake on the Web site," said Jack. "The kid I was reading about was in my house."

"We just sat there and sobbed," said Terri.

The Blovits moved to Saline in July 2005, and Jake began attending Burns Park Elementary School in Ann Arbor.

Last year, the Blovits heard of a walk-a-thon sponsored by the Angelman Syndrome Foundation to raise money for research into AS. They were thrilled to learn it was being held in Grand Rapids.

They borrowed a special-needs tricycle for Jake and went to the fund-raiser. It was

eye-opening for the family.

"It was so emotional," said Terri, "to see other Angelman kids. We had never seen another one before."

Jake felt right at home.

"For once it was about him," said Terri. "This was his life. For once he felt like he was in his own element."

The Blovits found the event uplifting and plan to return again this year May 19. Their aim is to raise \$1,500 for ASF research and programs and they have started a Web page at [www.firstgiving.com/angelhope07](http://www.firstgiving.com/angelhope07) with more information on Jake and Angelman Syndrome and for donations.

Jake's mother's greatest wish is for one day Jake to have a voice.

"I would love to see Jake communicate his life through the computer," Terri said.

He does that now to a certain, remarkable extent with his Dynamo.

And right now Jake wants Funyuns.

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