



The state of the economy has impacted every individual and community across the nation and the globe. This is true of autism as well, with 1 in 150 individuals affected by this devastating disorder.

Raising awareness of autism is critical. The students in the Autism Awareness Club at Walt Whitman High School in Huntington Station, New York have continually challenged themselves during the past year to educate other students, staff, and parents about this growing epidemic.

These innovative student leaders formed the Walt Whitman High School Walk Team and came up with creative ways to fundraise. Seventy-five club members sold paper puzzle pieces at Walt Whitman Homecoming and Parent Orientation Night. Students created a new awareness and fundraising event, Guitar Hero Night, which was then featured in a [Newsday article](#). The proceeds from these efforts were credited to their Walk team and over 60 students participated in the Long Island Walk Now for Autism at Jones Beach in October 2008.

The Autism Awareness Club raised an incredible \$4,111.73 for Autism Speaks during the 2008/2009 school year. However, their fundraising success is secondary to the development of the Lunch Buddies Program. Autism Awareness Club members paired up with students in the Special Education Department during their lunch hour, offering students with autism the chance to socialize and make new friends.

In addition to the efforts of club members, Founder and President, Amanda Horn, spread awareness of autism nationally by winning first place in the New York State DECA competition. She went on to present her community service project, based on the activities and benefits of the Autism Awareness Club, at the National DECA Conference in California in April 2009.

Autism Speaks Long Island applauds the efforts of these talented student leaders for making a difference in the lives of so many affected by autism in the South Huntington School District.

