

Sparks City Council Meeting April 11th

Good afternoon Mayor, City Manager and members of the Sparks City Council. My Name is Art Reitz and I have served as a firefighter for the City of Reno for the last 13 years but more importantly I am a father to a wonderful child affected by autism.

I'm here today to talk about a local non-profit called the Justin Hope Foundation which my wife and I co-founded 3 years ago and to let you know how your very own Sparks Firefighters Local 1265, Sparks Fire Prevention, The Chief Officers Association and Sparks Administration have been helping support the foundation.

The Justin Hope Foundation provides assistance and information to individual and families in Northern Nevada affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Neurodevelopmental disabilities by providing support and/or opportunities that will have a meaningful impact on the family as a whole.

One of the ways we help the community is through what we like to call G.A.P. which stands for Givings Award Program, where families, individuals or schools apply for financial help. Our G.A.P. program has helped families find the help they need to get a diagnosis. It pays for individuals to attend Social Thinking Camps. It helps cover the cost of much needed therapy and sends kids to summer camps. It pays for individuals to attend a bike camp to help them learn to ride a bike. It provides classroom supplies and money to cover costs on needed social outing field trips. It covers portions of dental bills and provides for gas cards so families can get their children to and from therapies. It has provided money for numerous family vacations. It has provided funds to purchase numerous iPads for individuals that are non-verbal or need help with communication and has even helped a family with funeral costs.

Over the past 3 years we have partnered with over 40 different local organizations or businesses. We have helped over 100 individuals/ families. We run monthly family support groups. We provide sibling workshops to provide support for the siblings. To date, the Justin Hope Foundation has given close to \$75,000 back to our community.

The Justin Hope Foundation's latest endeavor is to train first responders on how to recognize the signs of autism and how to safely interact with the person. To date we have trained over 300 first responders in Northern Nevada. This council should be very proud we have put all of your police officers through our training and hope to start scheduling your firefighters within years end.

The Justin Hope Foundation also has started a disability registry for our area. This registry is on a voluntary basis where the parent or legal guardian fills out a registry with specific characteristics about their child or adult with a disability. This registry is then turned into our dispatch center and entered into the CAD system. When an address is flagged to have a had a registry connected to it, additional information will be displayed on the run card for the responding officers or firefighters. This additional information could include that the child is non-verbal, doesn't like loud sounds, doesn't like to be touched or may tend to hide in certain places; helping our first responders devise a course of action even before they arrive at the residence.

For the past 3 years it has been our pleasure to have the support of Sparks Firefighters Local 1265, the Sparks Fire Administration, Prevention, the Chief Officers Association and Fire Chief Garrison. I want to thank Sparks Fire Captain Tom Krompetz who is a father of a child affected by autism for his continued support. Tom is my right hand man when it comes to organizing and mobilizing anything to

do with the Sparks Fire Department. Thanks to Chief Garrison's approval, your Sparks Firefighters will wear specialized uniform t-shirts during the month of April in support of Autism Awareness Month. Much of what we are able to do for our community is because your firefighters show up to our events and make it a memorable one for the kids. So I'm here, Mr. Mayor, to let you know what an outstanding and dedicated department you have from the Chief all the way down to the Firefighters.

Lastly, our annual fundraiser called *Spring Forward for Autism 5k Run/Walk* is set for **April 24th at UNR's Mathewson IGT Knowledge Center**. This is our only fundraiser we provide, and is the fundraiser that allows us to provide for our community here in Northern Nevada. All proceeds remain local; helping families here in our backyard. Last year, Governor Sandoval walked with his daughter, and a member of the Reno City Council read a proclamation. This year so far I've received confirmation that two members of Reno City Council will join us on April 24th. Will any of you? I'd like to cordially invite each member of the Sparks City Council, City Manager and Mayor to come out and support the Autism community. I'd like to leave you with a flyer for the event and a brochure about the Justin Hope Foundation. I thank you for your time and attention today and I hope to see you April 24th.