

Spin 'n' Sizzle benefits autism nonprofit

By **DIANE SMITH**
dsmith@thearknewspaper.com

Back in 2008, Janet Lawson and Daniel Swearingen were unhappy with the lack of appropriate services available to their son, Ian, a teen with autism who goes to Redwood High School and who attended Reed and Bel Aire elementary schools.

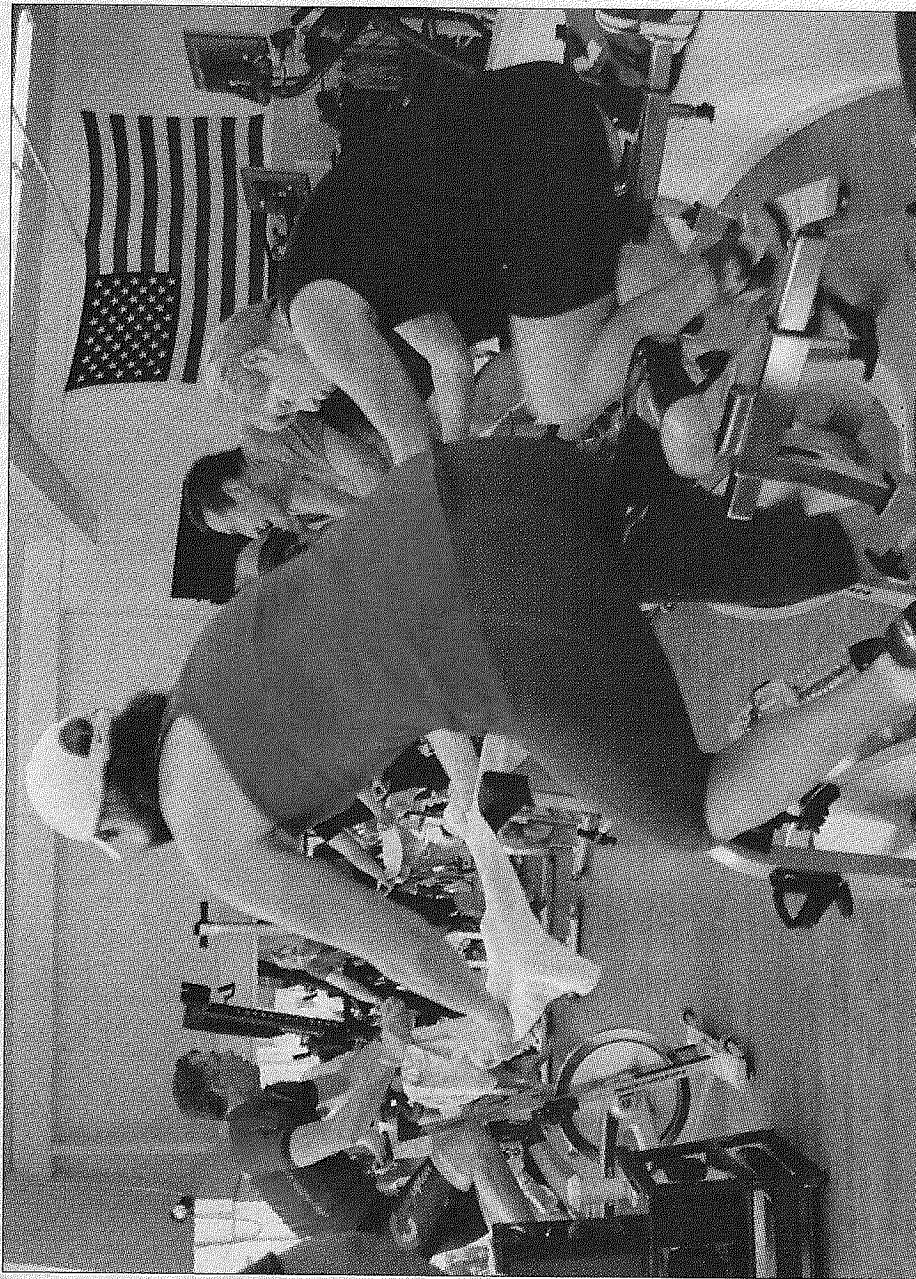
Lawson, a licensed marriage and family psychotherapist with a private practice, and Swearingen, an astrophysicist and software designer with Asperger's syndrome — a form of high-functioning autism — began working to fill the gap. They started by opening their East Corte Madera home to four children with autism and naming their enterprise the Autistry Studio.

Three years later, the organization had grown too big for their home, and they moved it to a 10,000-square-foot warehouse in San Rafael. The couple and their studio were featured in a November article in *The Ark*.

"We recently were asked to open a new autism center in the town of Sonoma," said Lawson, "and we're about to launch a new company. Autism Enterprises, that will give our students hands-on experience and help them experience employment."

Lawson and Swearingen are both longtime members of the Body Image Personal Fitness Center in Strawberry and, several years ago, the owners, Michael and Christine Lopez, offered to open the center on a Sunday for an Autistry Studio fundraiser. The first Spin 'n' Sizzle Spin-a-Thon and Barbecue was such a success, it has been repeated four times in the past three years, raising between \$3,000 to \$5,000 on each occasion.

The most recent fundraiser was held March 25 at the center, with a crowd that swelled with about 40 family members. The students at Autistry Studio work on all sorts of projects throughout the year, making a wide variety of articles, many of which were on view at the spin-a-thon.



DIANE SMITH PHOTO

At left, Michael Lopez, owner of Body Image Personal Fitness Center in Strawberry, leads one of the five spinning classes that raised funds for the Autistry Studio at its Spin 'n' Sizzle benefit. Molly Hynes (far right) of Tiburon came to give her support.

Among these were a diorama, a handmade guitar, puppets and paintings.

For more information, visit www.autistry.com.

Diane Smith has been with The Ark since 1980, writing and taking photos on everything from personalities to events.