

benefit 9-year-old Monroe boy

5th annual THANKS event in Ida Friday-Sunday

By MICHELLE SWARTZ

mswartz@monroenews.com

If there's snow on the ground, it must be time for softball.

At least for players brave enough to participate in the annual THANKS Inc. fundraising softball tournament this month.

A nonprofit organization, THANKS (Tailgaters Helping Aid Needy Kids' Spirits) is sponsoring the fifth annual Jamie Davis Memorial Winter Softball Tournament and Winterfest. The softball tournament is one of numerous activities during the three-day event.

"As of today we have six to eight teams. There are still more coming in," said Heidi Bolster, secretary of THANKS.

The signup deadline for the tournament is today.

Other events this year include a euchre tournament, gambling, live entertainment, a beer stand and food. The fundraiser will be held from Friday to Sunday in a heated pavilion behind the Ida Township Fire Hall, 3016 Lewis Ave., Ida.

Proceeds of the events go toward a local child who suffers from a serious illness.

"At last year's Winterfest, we raised approximately \$20,000. It was our most successful year to date," Ms. Bolster said.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

To sign up for the softball tournament, donate raffle items or for more information, call organizers of THANKS Inc. at 269-3027 or visit its Web site at www.thanksinc.com.

This year, proceeds will benefit 9-year-old Caleb Lanquist of Monroe, who suffers from an inoperable brain tumor. He lives with his mother, Pam, and older brother, Josh. The money will help pay for the family's medical costs and travel expenses.

Also, THANKS is paying for the funeral costs of Tabatha Smithers, who died earlier this month after suffering from acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). She was last year's sponsor child.

"Our organization has really grown these past five years and we are overwhelmed at how many families in Monroe County are in need of the assistance we provide. We are really asking the community to help us out. We are in desperate need of funds to be able to help all these families," she explained.

"You don't understand the hardships these families go through with having a

potentially terminally ill child until you meet with them one-on-one and hear their stories. We (THANKS) don't ever want to be in a position where we have to tell a family we can't offer them any support."

Some new events are planned for this year's fundraiser: Ron Wickenheiser, a chainsaw carver, will be carving works of art from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday. He will also do another demonstration at night.

Carnival-style games geared for younger children are also new this year. Several games will be available Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Raffles are expected to be a big draw once again. Numerous items have been donated, such as gift certificates, University of Michigan basketball tickets and an autographed baseball signed by Alan Trammell, manager of the Detroit Tigers.

"We do raffles at each of our events. We accept donations throughout the year," Ms. Bolster added.

THANKS Inc. was founded by the Tailgaters Softball team in Ida. Proceeds of year-round fundraisers go toward helping local families with children who have life-threatening illnesses. The tournament is dedicated in memory of Jamie Davis, a 3-year old girl who died from cancer six years ago. The organization was created in her honor.