

St. Henry's parish embraces Down syndrome parishioner

By **BARB HILGER**

"He is not my Down syndrome son, he is my son," said Beth Soderfelt, speaking about her 5-year-old Aaron. He is the youngest of three children in the Soderfelt family, who are parishioners of St. Henry Church in Owasso.

Mrs. Soderfelt said Aaron is part of the parish family and is not treated differently than any other child. That is the goal the Down Syndrome Association of Tulsa is promoting during October, which is National Down Syndrome Awareness Month.

"Part of the awareness is getting the kids out into the community, so people can see that Down syndrome is not something to be feared," Mrs. Soderfelt said.

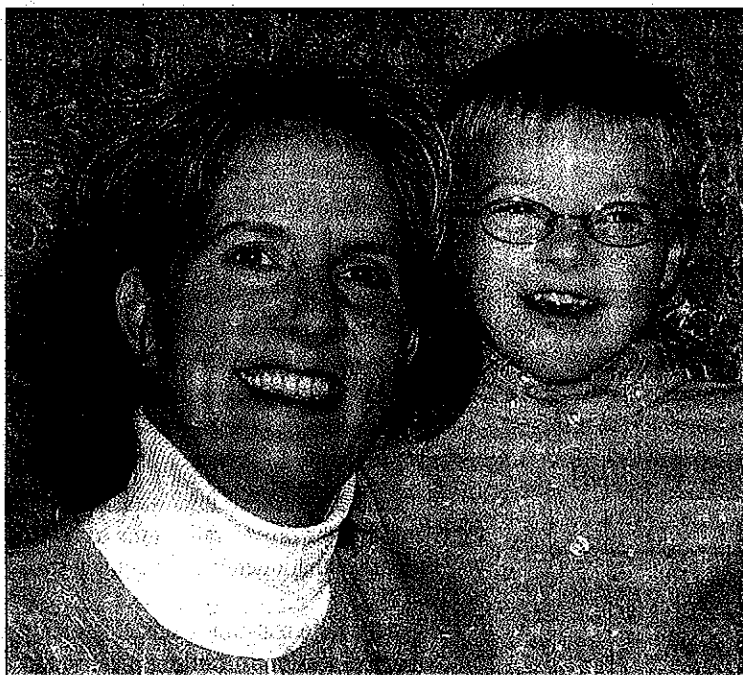
The association is sponsoring the fourth annual Buddy Walk, a national event in which people with Down syndrome invite others to be their "buddy" and walk with them to raise money and awareness. This year's event will be from 2-5 p.m.

Oct. 22 at Tulsa's Whiteside Park, 4009 S. Pittsburg Ave. The event includes a walk around the track and many activities for kids. The Tulsa Police and Fire departments will be on hand demonstrating emergency equipment, and there will be rides and games.

Mrs. Soderfelt is on the board of the Down Syndrome Association of Tulsa, a parent volunteer organization that provides resources for parents of children with Down syndrome. Money raised in the Buddy Walk will go to support both the local and national organizations, said Alana Kennon, event coordinator.

The local organization will use the money to fund new parent information packets, monthly newsletters and to keep local hospitals and doctors updated on the latest information about Down syndrome, which is a common genetic condition that affects people of all ages, races and economic backgrounds.

The national awareness website



Beth and Aaron Soderfelt

describes Down syndrome as "a chromosomal anomaly that occurs in 1.3 per 1,000 births. For some unexplained reason, an error in cell development results in 47

chromosomes rather than 46. The extra gene material slightly changes the orderly development of the body and brain."

"When you receive the initial

diagnosis you are told the limitations to expect," said Mrs. Soderfelt. The parent organization is in place to inform parents of what their children can do.

Mrs. Soderfelt said the first reaction she and her husband had was shock and worry over whether they would be able to handle a child with a disability. "Fast-forward five years, and we are no longer uncomfortable. Aaron has changed the perspective of kids, neighbors and friends, one of whom told me that God gave Aaron something extra. He didn't take something away from him."

As a parent of two other children, Mrs. Soderfelt said there are "barriers" with Aaron, "but there are barriers with raising any child. My expectations of Aaron are the same as those of my other children."

For information about the local association or to register for the Buddy Walk, contact Mrs. Kennon at 605-9931 or visit www.firstgiving.com/dsat.