

# TAKING CARE *of* the LITTLE PEOPLE

Organization helps dwarfs cope with challenges

By **LYNNE AUSTIN**  
The Herald-Dispatch

**A**SHLAND — Nine-year-old Cody Grubb is first and foremost an athlete.

"Cody finds a way to do what he wants," his mother, Karen, said proudly of her son. "He's got a good outlook on life."

His outlook keeps him motivated, she said. That's important because Cody is a dwarf.

"He doesn't want pity for his size, just understanding," Grubb said.

The Grubbs were among about 25 people traveling from around the region to Ashland Saturday for a local chapter meeting of the Little People of America. Children and adults came from as far away as Indiana and the western side of Kentucky to socialize with their short-statured people and learn more about the group.

The national organization, founded in 1957 by 3-foot-9 actor Billy Barty, has expanded to include more than 5,000 members who want to meet other dwarfs and help each other.



Lynne Austin/The Herald-Dispatch

Short-statured children and adults and their families attended a local chapter meeting of Little People of America on Saturday in Ashland. Some traveled from as far away as Indiana and western Kentucky to socialize with other families.

...tics and medical, social and discrimination issues for little people, including youths.

Much of this information is distributed throughout the year through "LPA Today."

More than 50 local Little People of America chapters across the country give people the opportunity to get together more frequently, usually monthly, and provide support for dwarf children, teen-agers and adults.

The Grubbs, from Russell, didn't have to travel far to find a local group. Even so, Saturday's meeting was their first contact with the organization.

"I had heard of it but I didn't know they were this close," Grubb said. "You don't know how grateful I was to see that there are other people out there."

Bobbie Roper of Louisville said she had never even seen a dwarf when her daughter, Alyssa, was born in 1997.

"We waited six years to have a child," she said. "We knew absolutely nothing about it."

Roper said she's taken the knowledge she's gained from attending LPA meetings and reassured family members her daughter will be OK. Association with other families also has helped, she said.

### For more info

For more information about Little People of America, call (888) LPA-2001 or call Linda Wardle, parent coordinator for the local LPA chapter, at (606) 325-5271.

"Our families are all in Texas," Roper said.

"This is the only support we have."

Linda Wardle of Ashland faced a similar situation when her son, Joel, now almost 5 years old, was born. She turned to LPA for answers, she said.

"I was ignorant about dwarfism," she said. "I called people and parents of short-statured children throughout America looking for verification."

Dwarfs are born about 1 in 10,000 births and about 80 percent are born to average-sized parents with no history of dwarfism.

And while some forms are detectable at birth, others aren't identified until between 2 and 4 years old. Dwarfs are expected to have an adult height at or under 4-foot-10.

The Wardles rarely miss a meeting or a national convention.

In fact, during last summer's convention in Portland,

*"I want to meet more people for his sake as well as the families. It makes him feel good about himself and know he isn't the only one in the world like himself."*

### Linda Wardle

Mother of dwarfed child

Ore., Joel showed off his athletic abilities at the Dwarf Athletic Association of America Olympics taking three gold medals in swimming and three silver medals in track and field.

"I want to meet more people for his sake as well as the families," Wardle said.

"It makes him feel good about himself and know he isn't the only one in the world like himself."

Grubb said the connection with LPA could help her understand the medical problems associated with dwarfism and give Cody interaction he hasn't yet experienced.

Already, Cody wants to follow in Joel's footsteps next year and is making plans to attend the national convention in June at Minneapolis, Minn.

She said the community is stepping in to help support



Lynne Austin/The Herald-Dispatch

Bobbie Roper of Louisville enjoys lunch with her daughter Alyssa, Saturday at a local chapter meeting of the Little People of America in Ashland.

the trip with donations to the Cody Grubb Olympic Fund at First and Peoples Bank in Russell.

Chapter President Mark Brown said membership in the local chapters gives dwarf children the opportunity to have role models.

"The younger ones are always following the older ones," he said.

"We give the kids the ability to handle situations and help them understand what is going on with themselves."

Grubb said she is counting on that as Cody continues to get older.

"Being around adults here will boost his self-esteem," she said.

"He'll find he has a purpose in life."