



Photo by MARK H. ROBINSON

# Palin says son Trig inspired her, talks politics at benefit

□ Pundit says she can advocate for special needs causes outside the White House

**SEE VIDEO:** [baldwincountynow.com](http://baldwincountynow.com) in Baldwin County Area News

**BY THOMAS BONI**  
EDITOR  
[bulletin@gulfcoastnewspapers.com](mailto:bulletin@gulfcoastnewspapers.com)

“You’re a godsend for special needs parents in Baldwin County. You’re here for the right reasons — not allowing America to descend to mediocrity.”

So said Sarah Palin, the Exceptional Foundation of Baldwin County’s featured speaker at its first major fundraiser Tuesday evening at the Grand Hotel Marriott. The foundation’s goal is to provide daily programs for special needs participants — children 5 years of age through adulthood — that include arts and crafts activities, team sports, exercise classes, social events and music.

Craig Dahle, an event organizer, said the local Exceptional Foundation modeled its program off one in Birmingham that has 300 participants. The Baldwin County program’s sessions — to be held at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Daphne beginning in the fall — help enrich special needs residents who can’t depend on public school after a certain age. “Once kids turn 22 — buh-bye,” Dahle said, referring to special needs’ students’ right to receive publicly funded education until they reach age 22.

However, the keynote speaker’s remarks indicated that special needs advocacy, particularly to those in attendance, begins long before adulthood — namely in the womb. Palin knew the struggle well because her youngest son, Trig, was diagnosed

with Down syndrome in utero and she has since spoken in favor of special needs children’s rights.

During her speech, the Wasilla, Alaska resident said she initially feared the “challenge” of having a child with Down syndrome. Being 43 years old — “no spring chicken” — when informed she was pregnant, several factors exacerbated the situation. She was Alaska’s governor; her husband was a commercial angler; their eldest son, Track, had enlisted in the U.S. Army’s infantry brigade; and she was already mother to three other children, Bristol, Willow and Piper.

Ultimately, the Pentecostal Christian’s anti-abortion beliefs helped her put things in perspective.

“Being pro-life, I always just thought there was this whisper in my ear: ‘Are you gonna just talk the talk or are you gonna walk the walk?’” she said, explaining why she carried the pregnancy to term.

Trig arrived in seven and a half months, and the extra care he needed crystallized the Palin family’s understanding of their purpose.

“It was as if God gave us eyes to see Trig’s perfection. He allowed for us to understand what really matters in this world,” the 47-year-old said. One such lesson he taught them was to start the day with a little joy; the mother of five said she’s inspired by her son’s morning ritual of rolling out of bed, clearing his eyes and clapping.

It’s a scene that most women with similar pregnancies will never see. About 90 percent of women who receive positive prenatal test results for Down syndrome abort their pregnancies, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.

It’s a worrisome trend, Palin said.

Published  
in the  
May 6, 2011  
The Bulletin