

News



A newsletter for the friends of FECA • Foundation for Educating Children with Autism • Spring 2008

FECA's "Booooo-tiful" Evening a Howling Success!

Not to be outdone by the fabulously be-costumed Grease event of 2006, an extraordinary array of witches, hippies, cartoon characters, superheroes and even a 6'2" Easter bunny came together October 27th at the Rye Town Hilton for a wickedly fun masquerade and dinner dance to celebrate the work of FECA and the students of the Devereux Millwood Learning Center.



Elvis brings his ladies to the ball

While the theme of the evening gave revelers the opportunity to let their child-like creativity shine, the event also gave voice to the unsung heroes of the autism community - the brothers and sisters of the children with autism. The highs and lows of growing up as a sibling with autism was movingly presented in a video produced for FECA by Autism Speaks, featuring interviews with brothers and sisters of the students of DMLC. Speaking with characteristic honesty and compassion, these young individuals, wise beyond their years, shared their passionate commitment to protect and defend their siblings and to utilize their unique experience and insights to educate the world about autism and the special individuals inside the label. Many have taken their resolve to their communities establishing Autism Speaks chapters at their local schools and participating in fundraising events and walkathons.

Jennifer DiChiara, sister of Christine, read a heartrending essay that was recognized at the 2007 Autism Awareness Day, together with several other sub-

missions. Joseph Pirraglia, brother of Matthew, received the FECA Inspiration Award for his extraordinary efforts to obtain a \$10,000 grant from MBIA, where he served as an intern. Altogether, 20 siblings of students at the school attended the event and were recognized with a standing ovation.

Also honored at the event was Dr. Cindy Alterson, principal of DMLC, for her leadership, knowledge and insight over her tenure

with the school, which began with her previous role as educational director.

Ann DiChiara, who chaired the event with long-time volunteer RuthAnn Brazill, recognized Kathy Jardine and Daniela Fiorella who coordinated the dinner journal which raised \$36,000. Peggy Wedin, Liz Finder and Melanie Schaffran organized the silent auction again this year which raised \$37,000 and included over 100 items ranging from Caribbean trips and ski vacations, elegant designer jewelry and



RuthAnn Brazill and Phil Orlando

continued on next page

Assemblyman Ball Tours DMLC

Accompanied by FECA Board Members Terry Pirraglia and Melanie Schaffran, New York State Assemblyman Gregory Ball toured DMLC in July. Ball, who was first elected in the fall of 2006, represents the 99th Assembly District that includes parts of Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester Counties.

DMLC Principal Cindy Alterson conducted the tour, which included visits to several classrooms, a kitchen filled with students eating their lunches, and



New York State Assemblyman Gregory Ball and Cathy Cercena

a purchase at the school store from student Pratik Ravichandran.

Ball has since taken a very active interest in the needs of individuals with autism, joining revelers at the recent FECA Masquerade, participating in a roundtable forum to discuss the needs of adults with autism, and recently conducting a district hearing to gather insights into the experiences of individuals and their families in the area. Several FECA and DMLC representatives including Dr. Alterson and Vocational Director Neil Boyle spoke of the urgent need for state and federal funding for educational, vocational and residential programs serving the autism community.



Fitzpatrick Citizen Advocate Award Honors FECA Founder

The Martha Fitzpatrick Citizen Advocate Award for 2007, which recognizes significant accomplishments in advocating for an enriched quality of life for persons with developmental disabilities, was awarded to FECA Founding Board Member Terry Pirraglia.

The award was established by the New York State Rehabilitation Association, which represents over 120 rehabilitation provider agencies advocating on behalf of people with differing abilities. Terry received the award on September 25th at the NYSRA Leadership Training Summit Awards Dinner held in Albany.



Founding Board Member Terry Pirraglia accepts award

Upon receiving the award, Terry stated, "It is a great honor to receive the Martha Fitzpatrick Citizen Advocate Award, and I look forward to advancing greater opportunities for adults with autism in New York State."

DMLC at Bethel; From Apprentice To Co-Worker

There are currently eight DMLC students who now volunteer at Bethel Nursing Home. The positions include: data entry, copying, wheelchair escorts, preparing food in the kitchen, mailings,



Assembling Welcome Kits at Bethel

filing, assembling admission packets, stocking laundry supplies, labeling new admissions clothing, and running the gift shop. This booming vocational program will exceed 40 hours a week by February 2008.

The students started to work at Bethel as students with autism. Now, two years later, the students are known as "co-workers" and have become an intricate part of the success at Bethel. "Not a day goes by that a student is not making a difference in the patients' lives" said Jean Kulesa, Bethel's Director of Volunteers.

Z100 "Jingle Ball" Taps Autism as Official Charity

Joseph Pirraglia, brother to DMLC student Matthew Pirraglia, joined Autism Speaks Co-Founder Suzanne Wright and Executive VP of Autism Speaks, Alison Singer on the popular Z100 radio show, "Get Active" on December 8th, to talk about autism. Autism Speaks was named the official charity of the phenomenally successful annual "Jingle Ball" held December 14th at Madison Square Garden and received \$25,000 as such. Alicia Keyes, Justin Timberlake and Jordin Sparks were a few of the headliners. Joseph and Matthew were featured in the

program book given to all attendees.



Brothers and Friends, Joseph and Matthew Pirraglia

Comedy Night Benefits FECA

The popular New York City comedy club, The Laugh Factory, hosted a standup comedy event December 17th that not only raised the roof with laughter but with financial support for FECA.

Michael DeStefano, a partner at Ernst & Young and long time supporter of FECA, organized the event, which featured comedians Steve Cody, Ryan Reiss and Vince August. The raucous evening raised over \$4,000 that will support FECA's educational programs.



Danny Shire, Graduate... King for the Day!

Classmates, teachers, family and friends all turned out December 20th to salute the great achievements of DMLC student Danny Shire, which have enabled him to graduate back into his home school district. Danny received



King for the Day

the "royal" treatment as his teachers and principal Dr. Cindy Alterson spoke movingly about how proud they were of Danny and how much his infectious smile and humor will be missed at the school.

Congratulations to Danny and to his parents Didi and David and best wishes for the future!

FECA Welcomes New Funding Partners

It's been an exciting quarter for the FECA Grant-seeking Partnership Program as we announce grants from **Autism Directory Services, Inc., MasterCard International, and The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation.**

The grants will enable FECA to provide funding support for our Vocational Training Education Program and a Vacation Care Enrichment Program. As our vocational program expands to serve 21 students at 50 sites, our need for additional vehicles continues to grow. "It is so exciting that our students are able to contribute volunteer hours at a multitude of non-profit agencies and community businesses," states Dr. Lalitha Ravichandran whose son, Pratik, works at Bethel Nursing Home. "We are so thankful to The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation and MasterCard International for recognizing the importance of the vocational program, both for our students and for the agencies they serve," says Rita Bigelow, FECA Board Member. "It is a joy that there are funders that recognize the need for support in areas such as job training, respite, and regression prevention."

It is this "perfect fit" that brought the Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation into FECA's focus. "The Foundation, inspired by the life of Danny Fiddle, is particularly interested in partnering with programs that honor the individuality of every person with autism so that each may participate throughout their lifetime in vocational, recreational, educational and residential opportunities that are suitable, stimulating and sustainable and allow for maximum integration in the community," comments Linda Walder Fiddle, Esq., Foundation president.

A third grant, aimed at providing both respite for caregivers and addressing the academic and social needs of DMLC students when school is not in session, is thankfully provided by Autism Directory Services. We launched the Vacation Care Enrichment Program last year, thanks to a grant from the New York Board of Trade's Futures and Options for Kids Foundation and we applaud Autism Directory Services, Inc. for allowing us to stave off the winter blahs with a February session that will enable our students to enjoy cultural and recreational activities together while keeping up with their academic pursuits.

FECA continues to apply for grants and support from local and national funders who believe our programs are an investment in the future for children with autism and their families. "This year our grant-seeking partnership program enabled us to raise vital funds for several of our most important projects," states Lisa Keogh, grant coordinator.



(L to R) Ann DiChiara, FECA president and her daughter Christine, a vocational program student, pose with Howard S. Fiddle, secretary, The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation. Joining them are Neil Boyle, DMLC vocational coordinator, Davey and Rita Bigelow and DMLC principal Cindy Alterson (front).

In the Spirit of Giving

FECA Advisor and Director of the Holistic Learning Center Susan Varsames Young provided DMLC with an "end of year" gift of a number of educational tools including a Jupiter Laminator, a Youth in Transition Diagnostic Manual, an occupational therapy body sock and self-help hygiene items. **Thank you Susan!**

Patrick and Evan Bolton celebrated their 8th and 6th birthdays this past August and, in lieu of birthday presents, asked their friends to make a donation to their cousin Sidney Jardine's school. Happy birthday and thank you to the Boltons for their heartfelt donation of \$1,000 to DMLC.

Thank you to the **Senior Class of Edgemont High School** for donating \$2,800 to FECA made possible through the encouragement of FECA supporters Art Nelson and Susan Cardelino.

Do You Have a Friend With Autism?

Call for Essays/Nominations

Dr. Cindy Alterson, DMLC principal recently issued a call for essays and nominations in commemoration of Autism Awareness Month. Following on the heels of the emotionally charged sibling essays of 2007, this year's focus will be on the theme, "I have a friend with autism" describing the positive aspects of having a classmate or friend with autism. The Second Annual Autism Awareness Leadership Award will be given to a teacher who has gone above and beyond the call of duty in educating students with autism or educating students about autism. Nominations for this award and submissions of essays should be sent to Chair of Awards Committee, DMLC, 14 Schuman Road, Millwood, NY 10546 by March 24, 2008. Awards to be presented in April at a date to be determined.



Thank You

Thanks also to the following donors who contributed funding for computer technology, equipment, and job coaching:

**Senator Suzi Oppenheimer
Assemblyman Adam Bradley
Michelle and Robert Smigel**

SAVE THE DATE

FECA Spring Gala

May 14, 2008 at 6:30 pm

The Rainbow Room
30 Rockefeller Center, NYC

For further information about upcoming events, or to inquire more about the FECA Spring event, please contact Hospitality Resource Group, Inc. at (914) 761-7111.

To learn more about the Foundation for Educating Children with Autism, log on to our website at www.FECAinc.org

FECA Debuts New Website

FECA is proud to announce that November 15, 2007 marked the debut of their new online home, www.FECAinc.org. Developed in partnership with Hospitality Resource

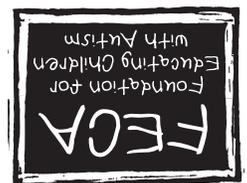
extremely rewarding experience," said Debbie Catalano, president of NetIntellects. "It is gratifying to know that this new site will help FECA to communicate their message of hope to those within the autism community." All FECA supporters are encouraged to visit the site and check back often for updates, by clicking on www.FECAinc.org.



Group, Inc. and NetIntellects of Katonah, the new website features an updated design and a new navigation system which promotes ease of use and greater capacity for archives, photos, news items about autism, and information about upcoming events. "It was an

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