

News



A newsletter for the friends of FECA • Foundation for Educating Children with Autism • Spring 2009

Festive Fall Dinner Honors Three Champions of FECA's Mission

Martinis and Motown were not the only things on the agenda at FECA's annual fall dinner held October 18th at the Westchester Marriott. Three stalwart champions of FECA's mission to promote and support the best educational services for children with autism were also honored.

Two area legislators, Assemblyman Adam Bradley and Assemblyman Gregory Ball, were honored for their leadership in Albany and in their local communities to promote greater access to services and to raise greater awareness as to the need for opportunities for adults with autism.

Following over two decades as a committed advocate for families and children, Adam T. Bradley was elected in 2002 as representative of the 89th District, encompassing much of White Plains and Northern Westchester. Bradley's commitment has resulted in significant contributions to the music program for students of DMLC, the substantial upgrading of the computer curriculum and support for the ever-growing vocational program. He has also provided his wisdom to a regional effort that supports potential legislative initiatives in Albany on issues ranging

from health insurance, to crisis management for families, and filling the current vacuum of services for adults with autism.

Assemblyman Gregory R. Ball has joined Assemblyman Bradley on this regional initiative and has earned a reputation as a strong voice on a number of issues affecting New Yorkers with autism and their families. Ball represents the 99th Assembly District, which includes sections of Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties. Assemblyman Ball has hosted several forums on autism, bringing together families, professionals and governmental representatives to identify areas of concern and need. His

newspaper and television interviews have stressed the lack of quality services for adults and children in New York State. Assemblyman Ball recently honored FECA and DMLC with a proclamation at the Autism Awareness event held annually in April at the school.

Founding Board Member Melanie Schaffran paid tribute to her fellow colleague and founding member, Terry Pirraglia, whose son Matthew was in the entering class at



FECA Honorees Assemblyman Ball and Terry Pirraglia



Pete DiChiara, Mt. Kisco Deputy Mayor, Assemblyman Adam Bradley and wife, Fumiko, County Legislator Peter Harckham and guest Tondra Lynford.

Schwab Institutional Award to Rob Clarfeld Given to FECA

FECA has been blessed over the years with many angels and mentors who have, through their enduring loyalty and generosity, made the realization of our mission possible. Rob Clarfeld, FECA friend and colleague, is the personification of such devotion.



Rob Clarfeld

From the earliest months of FECA's creation in 1994, Rob has been steadfast in his commitment, bringing dozens of friends and business associates to every FECA event and providing guidance and advice as the FECA Board weathered many financial storms and sought to expand its mission.

As Founder and President of Clarfeld Financial Advisors, Inc., which provides financial planning and investment advisory services, Rob is a highly regarded and nationally known advisor to many of the principal officers of Fortune 500 companies.

This fall, Schwab Institutional, a leading provider of custodial, operational and trading support for independent investment advisors, presented Clarfeld Financial Advisors, Inc. with their IMPACT "Best-in-Tech" Award. The award honors advisors and firms that have "advanced the industry through their visionary leadership, operational excellence and technology innovation." A donation of \$10,000 to a charity of the honoree's choice is the centerpiece of the Schwab Institutional recognition. FECA was chosen by Rob and his colleagues to receive the award.

This generous contribution was

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**FECA Friends
Gather at
The Westchester Marriott**

Spotlight: FECA's Grant-Seeking Partnership Program

FECA continues to build strong community ties through our grant-seeking partnership program. We salute the partners that have joined with us in our mission to ensure that children and adults with autism reach their full potential.



Neil Boyle, DMLC Vocational Coordinator (back row) visits **Hitachi America, Ltd.** in Tarrytown, New York with students Jalyne Castillo (front row) and John DeCaprio (third from right). DMLC Behavioral Specialist Steve Irizzary (far right) joins Hitachi Community Action Committee (CAC) Chairperson Ginnie Hays (far left), Senior Manager, Facilities and CAC members (left to right) Karin Shettle-Arduino, Legal assistant and Patent Administrator, Cindy Hecht Suna, Community Relations Specialist and Marta Bailey, Senior Manager, Human Resources. **Hitachi America, Ltd.** and the **Hitachi Foundation** supported the Vocational Training Program with a \$2,500 grant.



At a site visit to celebrate approval of an **Autism Speaks** Family Services Community Grant are (L to R) Cindy Alterson, DMLC Principal and Director, Christie Godowski, Executive Director, Autism Speaks Westchester Region and Virginia Connell, Walk Manager, Autism Speaks Greater Hudson Valley/Westchester/Fairfield Region, DMLC student Alex Lee, FECA Board President Melanie Schaffran, and DMLC student Brett Schaffran.

We would also like to thank the following partners for their support:

The Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism, Inc. has provided FECA with a first-time grant in the amount of \$10,000 to support our award-winning Vocational Training Program.

MasterCard Worldwide named FECA as one of their 2009 Youth and Technology Grant Award Recipients. MasterCard has selected FECA for the prestigious \$10,000 award for several years and we are extremely grateful for their continued support.

Energy served as the presenting sponsor for our educational series with a grant in the amount of \$5,000.

The Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation provided support for educational series materials with a \$2,500 donation.



Ronald McDonald House Charities Board Member Peter Samaha (third from right) visited DMLC to present a check in the amount of \$15,000 from Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC). The support will help us purchase laptop computers to accompany the installation of SmartBoard technology at DMLC. Joining Peter, left to right are: DMLC students Christian Cordasco, Farjana Kali, Adam Rivera (front row), FECA Board Member Peggy Wedin, Neil Boyle, and student Dashiell Saines.



The Westchester County OMRDD Family Support Services Committee (FSS) provided funding for a Vacation Care enrichment program which provided respite for parents and recreational activities for students. Joining students Christine DiChiara (left) and Kelly Wedin (far right) for breakfast at a local eatery are (l to r): Beatrice Block-Iaconetti, Consumer Council Member, Gayle Cratty, FSS Chair, and Claudia Spaziente, Family Support Services Director.

Educational Series Workshop Provides Valuable Insight

A group of parents, educators, scholars and advocates joined together on Friday January 16th for a morning workshop to explore vocational training. The workshop, entitled *Preparing Students with Autism for Post-Secondary Employment: Making a Transition from School to Work* was led by Cindy Alterson, Ph.D., BCBA, Principal and Director at Devereux Millwood Learning Center (DMLC) and Neil Boyle, M.Ed., Vocational Director at DMLC. Dr. Alterson and Mr. Boyle shared the keys to a successful vocational training program for both students and employers. DMLC has an award-winning program that has been the focus of national attention, including a CNBC television profile several years ago.

This workshop was made possible by a grant from Entergy. Additional support was provided by the Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation.

Heidi Lee, whose son, Alex, attends DMLC, was at the workshop. According to Heidi, "The workshop helped get parents thinking about their child's transition timeline early on (and getting it in the IEP), and also starting to think about ways to help them be as independent as possible in the home." Some of the helpful hints suggested by Neil Boyle were to find a job that follows the child's own interests. One example is a student at DMLC who loves animals is now working at the SPCA.

Dr. Alterson pointed out, much to many parents' relief, that employers are more concerned with the way a student fits into the workplace than their measur-

able job performance. According to Dr. Alterson, employers value a worker who will say hello to their supervisor and keep the bathroom clean and are less concerned with the number of papers that are shredded in a given time frame. "Preparing the students to master a task is important but our experience has taught us that employers are most concerned about social skills and attendance."



Neil Boyle, DMLC Vocational Director shares his expertise with conference attendees

Mr. Boyle provided many resources for parents, educators and advocates during the workshop and stressed that attendance and communication are key to a successful placement. "Our work site partners rely on our students – many parents bring their children to their jobs when school is closed. Several of our volunteer partnerships have turned into paid

employment opportunities for students." The key to any good vocational training program is communication. "Letting an employer know about the student and addressing any problems that come up very quickly is vital," states Mr. Boyle. Heidi Lee felt this was an important piece of information. "Neil's suggestions of having a quiet exit route preplanned if the student needs a break and getting a bag of chips at the vending machine after the work is done were so helpful," states Heidi. "I think that parents of students from other schools came away with many practical ideas of how to approach their school districts to get a good transitional plan in place."

Additional workshops are planned for the future. Please visit www.FECAinc.org for more information.

Schwab Institutional Award to Rob Clarfeld Given to FECA

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matched earlier in the year by a personal donation from Rob. Combined, these donations will support the further development of FECA's

partnership with Devereux to establish a post-graduate adult program. Once again, FECA extends its heartfelt gratitude to Rob and his partners.

New Rochelle Families Raise Funds for FECA through Olympic Games

Infused with the spirit of the Beijing Olympics, members and families of The Isle of Sans Souci Beach and Pool Association in New Rochelle staged an inspiring series of swimming events this summer, raising over \$1,200 for FECA in the process.

Over 30 families participated under the Olympic theme of "One World One Dream," buying tee shirts and competing in swimming events. The group chose to help children with autism as their way of sharing the universal values of the Olympic spirit: Unity, Friendship, Progress, Harmony, Participation and Dream. Theresa Walsh, organizer of the event, thanked the families for making a difference and creating a fond memory "for our children, and hope for children with autism."

Newly Elected FECA Officers



(L-R), Monica Haugh, Secretary, Melanie Schaffran, President and Ann DiChiara, Treasurer

FECA Advisor Annual Gift Will Help Vocational Program

Susan Varsames, Director of the Holistic Learning Center and a long time member of the FECA Board of Advisors, has made her annual FECA contribution one that is substantial and practical, once again. In the past, Susan has given books, games, computer CDs, sporting and occupational therapy equipment for the gym. This year, Susan's Christmas gift was a new laminator. The school's laminator is always in high demand due to the increasing number of students who execute many of the mailings and clerical work for most of the area's United Way agencies. Thank you, Susan!

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DMLC 13 years ago and will graduate this year. Terry has repeatedly challenged the obstacles and prejudices that children with autism have encountered. "No" was simply not an option when Terry, along with the rest of the founding board, was told that the creation of a school was not possible. Terry played a pivotal role during the early days when the school was just a dream, through its inception and early struggles to find its footing, and with its current growth to the 48-member student body it educates daily.

The struggle is far from over, however, as FECA embraces the harsh reality that our students might graduate to a world that still makes opportunity and growth difficult, if not impossible. Once again, Terry will not accept failure. Progress on the post-21 adult program that will provide supported employment and community integration opportunities for our graduates, and others in the surrounding communities, is expected to be in place, thanks largely to her stalwart leadership.

Though the honorary achievement awards reflected the serious challenges that FECA has met, this was also an opportunity for celebration and the over 300 friends, family, colleagues and supporters all took to the dance floor as The Party Dolls presented a challenge of their own: how to keep up with their spirited Motown beat! Those who had to take a breath made their way to the colorful martini bars and the spectacular silent auction organized by FECA Board Members Liz Finder, Peggy Wedin and Melanie Schaffran.

A fantastic array of silent auction items included theater tickets, fine wines, gift baskets, jewelry, designer handbags and computer programs. The sports and entertainment section, organized by FECA Board Member Phil Orlando, featured hard-to-get football tickets, autographed photos of Michael Phelps and Eli Manning; and even special items like collages of Miley Cyrus and High School Musical for the younger folks.

Trips ranged from escapes to St. Croix, Vermont, Cabo San Lucas and Whiteface Mountain. As a result of the generosity of our donors, the auction raised a total of \$28,000.

A program book gave the opportunity for friends and family and DMLC parents to honor and thank those who contribute to the lives of the students at DMLC. The book, which raised \$22,000, was organized again this year by Kathy Jardine and Daniella Fiorella.

Though the event came as the crisis on Wall Street was unfolding, thus affecting the lives of many of our friends and supporters, their loyalty and support was still keenly felt in their substantial support for FECA and the students of DMLC.

FECA wishes the very best to DMLC Alumni Sidney Jardine, Douglas Campbell and Alec Kaplan on their next big adventure!

Save the Date
Tuesday, May 19, 2009

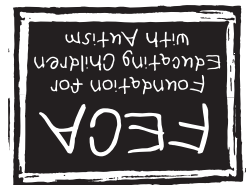


Please join the
 Foundation for Educating Children with Autism
 for our 14th annual
Spinning in the Park Gala

Bryant Park Grill • 25 W. 40th Street, New York, NY
 6:30 - 9:30PM • Cocktail Reception and Silent Auction

For up to date information on this event and more, be sure to
 click on the FECA website at www.FECAInc.org

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