

News



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

FECA Looking To The Future

As a wise woman once said, "People are adults a lot longer than they are kids." Take a walk through the hallways of DMLC and it is apparent that the "kids", many taller than their teachers, are nearing adulthood. With that formidable awareness, several FECA board members have been exploring and planning for the world of the post-21 DMLC graduate which, for some, is as early as next year.

FECA Board members Terry Pirraglia and Melanie Schaffran have been involved for the past year in the creation of the Hudson Valley Autism Network, a loosely structured coalition of parents, service providers, autism organizations and legislators in an effort to engage the appropriate state entities in a productive dialogue about the life-long needs of individuals with autism. As students "age-out" of the educational system it is glaringly apparent that, without substantial planning, they will lose all the gains made and the opportunity for most to be contributing members of their communities will be lost.

At the forefront of the planning is the hope for a seamless transi-

tion from the tremendous vocational progress made to comprehensive supported employment programs. Most of the students at DMLC are involved in an evolving vocational program as a critical part of their educational program once they reach the age of 14. The older two classes of students, ranging in age from 15 to 20, are involved in jobs ranging from wheelchair escorts to substantial office duties, from laundry facilities and nursing home gift shops to work at local stores and restaurants.

Without a network of support upon graduation, those jobs will simply dis-

appear along with additional opportunities for growth and development. Thus, a need exists for a substantial commitment on the part of the state legislature and the pivotal agencies to provide critical support.

To that end, Ms. Pirraglia and Ms. Schaffran provided testimony before an Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) panel upon that agency's invitation as it made its way across the state on a listening tour. In her testimony, Ms. Pirraglia referenced several on-going programs that had proven success and reiterated that it wasn't necessary to reinvent the wheel. Providing adequate funding for staff to research potential job sites and provide training and on-going on-site support would make a critical difference in the success of participants.

Ms. Schaffran urged the panel, which included the director of the program, Diane Ritter, to build into future efforts a "substantial place at the table for the thoughtful and sincere contributions of parents and caregivers as OMRDD develops the framework for supporting these special adults."

Both board members also traveled to Albany to discuss with legislators the need for leadership on this issue. Terry was a guest of the "Assembly Calendar" show, which is aired on a local cable station, at the invitation of local Assemblyman Greg Ball (R-99), who has become a passionate spokesperson for such programs.

In the meantime, FECA is awaiting approval of a supported employment demonstration project under Devereux New York that will, if appropriately funded, provided a seamless transition for our graduates.



Terry Pirraglia appears with Gregory Ball on the cable show "Assembly Calendar."

All The Colors Of "The Rainbow"

"What a glorious place for a party!" So said one of the 350 revelers! And what a party it was, all in support of the achievements of the 48 students at the Devereux Millwood Learning Center.



FECA honoree Paul Taubman celebrates with friends.

The May 14th event brought parents, staff members, long time supporters and even some of the students to take in not only the gorgeous views of the Manhattan skyline 65 stories above the world at Rockefeller Center, but also the dozens of amazing silent auction items that provided much of the entertainment along with the delicious food and good company.

The annual spring cocktail party was again a terrific success raising over \$237,000 that will go directly to supporting the educational programs at DMLC. An additional \$12,000 was raised to purchase another van to be used for transporting students to their ever-increasing range of vocational settings.

This year's FECA recognition award was given to long time supporter Paul Taubman, Global Head of Mergers and Acquisitions at Morgan Stanley. FECA Board Member James Schwab stated that honoring Paul was a great privilege. "He has not only been a loyal friend to our family but, through his

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**FECA Friends Gather at
The Rainbow Room**



FECA's Grant Partnerships

FECA is EXTREMELY APPRECIATIVE to the following funders who have partnered with us to ensure children and adults with autism reach their full potential. Their support enables us to embark on new and innovative programs and enhance our existing services to strive for excellence for our students and their families.



The MBIA Foundation has donated \$10,000 for our vocational training program, investing in FECA's students for the second straight year. Pictured with Joseph Pirraglia, center, a FECA family member and MBIA employee, from left are MBIA Charitable Foundation Committee Members Joyce Clark, Irene Weidelman, Jean McGovern, Leslie Zureiqi, and Sandra DeKoubia.



Assemblyman Gregory Ball (right) presented FECA with a check for \$10,000 and issued a proclamation during Autism Awareness Day at DMLC. Joining him (from left) are Cindy Alterson, DMLC principal, and FECA founders Melanie Schaffran and Theresa Pirraglia.



New this year to our Grant Partnership Program is Entergy whose employee committee has invested \$5,000 to enhance DMLC's Computer Assisted Learning Program. Shown from left: DMLC student Jonathan Sicular, Neil Boyle, DMLC Educational and Vocational Coordinator, Tom Orlando, Director of Engineering, Indian Point Energy Center, DMLC student John DiCaprio, Cindy Alterson, DMLC Principal, Melanie Schaffran, FECA Board Member, Theresa Pirraglia, FECA Board Member, and Don Calabrese Transition Team Leader, Indian Point Energy Center.



The Futures and Options for Kids Foundation have generously provided FECA with a two-year grant in the amount of \$15,000 for Vocational Training for students in the current program and an adult program to begin in 2009. From Left: Fred Mascia, Chairman, Pete Tuomey, Founder Emeritus and board members Sharon Jordan, Mark Intoccia, Jonathan Kleisner, Tom Greene, and Mike Belmont.



Ed McCraw, Senior Business Leader, Corporate Philanthropy, MasterCard Worldwide, presents FECA Grant Coordinator Lisa Keogh with the 2007 Youth and Technology Award. FECA was one of just ten Westchester non profits to share a \$100,000 award.



Brett Schaffran prepares a mailing as part of the Vocational Training Program supported by funding from the Westchester Community Fund. The Westchester Community Foundation has renewed their investment in the program with a two-year commitment totaling \$25,000.



Assemblyman Adam Bradley is a veteran in terms of loyal support, providing \$10,000 for educational programming in 2008. He and his wife Fumiko have attended many FECA special events.

DMLC and FECA Commemorate Autism Awareness Day with "I Have A Friend With Autism" Theme

The James Taylor song, "You've Got a Friend," would have been a perfect accompaniment for an emotionally charged May morning at DMLC. In recognition of Autism Awareness Month, friends, family, staff and students gathered to bear witness to testimony from three stalwart young people, each describing their special relationship with a friend who just happens to also have autism.

Ella Vanderbilt-Fried a sixth grader from Robert E. Bell Middle School in Chappaqua, spoke about her friend Kevin who has Asperger's syndrome. Ella said that despite his autism it "in no way effects Kevin's heart." Knowing that he "faces challenges that most people don't," she nonetheless had "never once seem him complain, brag or tease...or tell secrets." She offered that "if (she) could see past what other people think of me it would be a great accomplishment. Kevin is able to do this." Ella finds it "incredibly brave to defy the ordinary."

Donna Fraoli from Fox Lane Middle School offered her testimony in the form of a letter to her friend Rocco. "Rocco, I know you have your difficulties and life can be a struggle for you at times, but to me you are perfect just the way you are," Donna wrote. She offered up the important lesson that "you can't make judgments on people without (spending time with them), because you never get to know the special qualities they might be hiding inside." Donna thanked Rocco and

committed to taking "those lessons with (her) through (her) life."



Gregory Ball, Cindy Alterson and Terry Pirraglia appear with the autism awareness honorees.



Emily Schulman reads from her essay.



Alison Singer, Executive Vice President, Autism Speaks provides vital information during Autism Awareness Day.

Finally, Armonk senior Emily Schulman spoke movingly of her life-long relationship with her buddy Brett, a student at DMLC. She talked about not understanding when she was younger but as her family and Brett's spent so much time together taking vacations that "his smile and lovable disposition... could melt even the coldest heart." Emily spoke about idolizing Brett's older sister Lindsay as the older sister that "she never had" and that it was "her unwavering loving c o m p a s s i o n towards Brett that spoke to me louder than words." The lesson she had "learned most from Brett...was his appreciation for the most simple things." She c o n c l u d e d , "Before I judge I will think of Brett, before I turn away from helping, I will think of Brett and before I lose faith in myself or anybody I will think of Brett."

DMLC Principal Dr. Cindy Alterson presented Alison Fish, a teacher from Midland Elementary School, the second annual Teacher Appreciation Award for her unwavering commitment to her students from multiple grades, who have a variety of disabilities.

Assemblyman Gregory Ball (R-99), a staunch supporter of FECA's efforts to support children and adults with autism, issued a proclamation which

applauded DMLC's significant influence in the larger community. Ball commended DMLC for helping to broaden awareness of autism by "assisting their students in becoming active consumers and taxpayers {and} by giving support to those family and friends who live with autism each and every day."

The complete text of the student essays and the proclamation can be found on the FECA website, www.fecainc.org.

Bethel Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Along with dozens of other volunteers, the work of DMLC students was celebrated at a dinner held in May at Cortlandt Colonial Restaurant.



Celebrating at the Volunteer Appreciation event are (l to r): DMLC student Brett Schaffran, Jean Kulesa, Director of Volunteers, Bethel Nursing Home, student Pratik Ravichandran, Bethel CEO Bruce Bradigan and student Andrew Finder.

All The Colors Of "The Rainbow"

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unwavering support and dedication to FECA, he has made an enormously important impact on the lives of the students of DMLC over the past decade."

As the FECA established school enters its 13th year, long time parents and board members shared an overwhelming sentiment of gratitude and appreciation to the hundreds of supporters who have maintained their commitment year after year. As a result of their support, our students continue to demonstrate progress, many of them preparing for graduation.

Decade-Long Partnership with CIBC World Markets' Miracle Day

For the tenth consecutive year last December, FECA was honored to be part of the CIBC World Markets' Miracle Day fundraiser from which we received \$5,000 to support educational programming. Since the program

started in 1984, CIBC has donated more than \$100 million to hundreds of worthy children's charities throughout the world. FECA has been very fortunate to be a beneficiary of their generous philanthropic efforts.

Phil Orlando states "FECA is grateful to CIBC and the many individuals who selected to make a trade to benefit FECA and other children's charities during the past ten years."

SAVE THE DATE!

The FECA "Growing Up and Thriving on the Autism Spectrum" workshops will kick off on October 17th at

The Westchester Institute for Human Development in Valhalla with a panel presentation. Workshops will continue on November 21st and January 16th.

The FECA fall gala "Martinis & Motown"

will be held on Saturday, October 18th at the Tarrytown Marriott. Featuring the Party Dolls.

For up to date information on these events and more, be sure to click on the FECA website at www.FECAinc.org

Congratulations To The Grads!

FECA extends hearty congratulations to the following individuals of post graduate programs: Jackie Adams, Yvonne Brock, Lindsay Peterson, Mary Britney, Dina

Turic, Joe Maddi and Neil Boyle. Also to DMLC students, Alec Kaplan, Jami Israel and Doug Campbell who are graduating back to district or another program.



Douglas Campbell accepts his diploma.

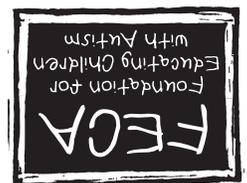


Jamie Israel is all smiles.



"V" for Victory for Alec Kaplan.

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