

News



A newsletter for the friends of FECA • Foundation for Educating Children with Autism • Summer 2006

Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano Kicks off Autism Awareness Month at DMLC

Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano brought much needed attention to the concerns of parents of children with autism as he kicked off Autism Awareness Month at a press conference held at DMLC on April 3rd. Spano announced his backing of the *Combating Autism Act of 2005* which would authorize \$1 billion in federal spending over the next five years through research, screening, intervention and education. He is lobbying other county administrators around the country to do the same. Speaking from the location where DMLC students normally receive their occupational therapy programs, Spano also announced the creation of a new county resource, *Speaking Out About Autism*, a website to aid families living with autism. The site will serve as a catalogue of area resources in the Westchester area.

Alison Singer, senior vice president of the national coalition, *Autism Speaks*, created by NBC Universal CEO Bob Wright and his wife, Suzanne, urged everyone to participate in the annual Westchester County walkathon. Last year this event raised over \$700,000 for autism research (see related article).

Two Westchester area parents also

spoke. Paul Mehta, whose daughter, Sheela, attends DMLC, spoke about the need for autism organizations to provide a unified voice in order to receive more government funding. John Maltby, the parent of an adult with autism, spoke of the need to provide lifelong services for people with autism.



John DeCaprio, a DMLC student, greets Westchester County Executive Andy Spano



(L to R) FECA parent and co-founder Peter DiChiara, deputy mayor of Mount Kisco, and County Executive Andy Spano



(L to R) John O'Keefe, executive director, Devereux Foundation, Dena Saxe, Matt Harris, president, Autism Speaks Club, Phil Orlando, FECA parent and co-founder, CE Spano and Ann DiChiara, FECA parent and co-founder.

Autism advocacy spans all age groups. This was evident by the participation of students from Fox Lane Middle School in Bedford who founded their own group, entitled *Autism Speaks Now*, to raise awareness and hold fundraising events.

Executive Spano was led on a tour of DMLC by one of the school's students, John DeCaprio, and DMLC Clinical Director, Dr. Cindy Alterson. Spano, a former special educator, was impressed by the range of services offered at DMLC as he toured the school store, several classrooms, and participated in a basketball game with DMLC students and the Fox Lane student coalition.

The event received a wide array of media attention, with feature stories appearing in *The Journal News*, and on ABC TV's *Eyewitness News*, Cable Television's *NEWS 12 Westchester* and RNN, the *Regional News Network*. "It was a great day for parent advocates in

continued on next page

Students and Staff Expand Vital Computer Skills, Thanks to MasterCard

DMLC went high tech this winter, installing new computers with internet capabilities in every classroom. This technology boom was made possible by funding from a prestigious MasterCard grant, the 2005 Youth Education and Technology Award.

"Every student has benefited enormously by the additional computer time and access to the internet," states Cindy Alterson, Ph.D., DMLC's Acting



Education Director. Students are learning skills such as typing a book report, performing internet research, and learning to use e-mail to communicate with friends and family. Alterson states, "Not only are these skills valuable for students, they enable our students with autism to perform activities that their typical peers can relate to. This bridges the gap between students with autism and their peers, giving them similar abilities and increasing social interaction across the board."

For older students, the full time access to computers and computer technology has enabled them to learn skills that they can perform at their jobs in the community. "In the past six months, one student has learned to perform data entry and does so independently at his job several times per week," comments Neil Boyle, DMLC Vocational Director. "The new computers have made a huge difference in our educational and vocational training programs."

Spring Gala Is Music To Our Ears

Though the site is a home for “the blues”, the atmosphere was nothing but joyous as 400 participants came



(L to R) Phil Orlando, Gala Co-Chair and Honoree Duncan Niederauer of Goldman Sachs.

together on May 10th for FECA’s annual Spring Gala. Held at the nationally renowned *BB King Blues’ Club and Grill* in New York City’s Times Square, revelers wined, dined and placed bids on over 80 silent auction items displayed around the room.



(L to R) FECA Board Members John Lawton and Elise Orlando.

The event, chaired by David Bigelow and Phil Orlando, is a critical piece of FECA’s annual fundraising efforts. This year, the spring event hit an all-time record raising over \$200,000 through sponsorships, program ads, raffle tickets, silent auction bids and attendance at the event.

The evening gave FECA an opportunity to thank and honor Goldman Sachs & Co., a loyal and generous supporter of FECA for the past 11 years. In receiving the honor, Duncan Niederauer, a part-



FECA hits the big time on the Marquis of BB King Blues’ Club and Grill.

ner at Goldman Sachs, spoke eloquently about the special partnership between this esteemed Wall Street firm and FECA.



Gala Co-Chair David Bigelow (right) with FECA supporter.

The silent auction included a variety of items, such as Yankee and Mets tickets, sports memorabilia, Broadway theater tickets, and an amazing “Must Have Item,” a genuine Gibson Lucille guitar autographed by BB King himself. The auction raised over \$40,000 and was chaired by Gina DeCaprio, Elise Orlando and Monica Haugh.

FECA would like to thank everyone who contributed to this outstanding event. It was a success in every way.

DMLC To Open Its Doors To Two New Classrooms

As students at DMLC leave their school in late June for a mid-summer holiday, construction workers will arrive to begin a project that will enable twelve new students to join the student body in the fall. DMLC will welcome one classroom in September and a second in January. Screenings for both classrooms are well underway. Over \$12,000 was raised at the spring fundraiser especially for supplies to outfit the two new classrooms.

In addition to two new classrooms, which will be constructed on the second floor, students and staff will return in July to a brand new kitchen. A special fundraising campaign was waged at the fall event, specifically to help fund new cabinets and appliances for the kitchen, where many students and staff eat their lunches and are taught important daily living skills. Members of local labor unions, under the direction of Tony Ucci of the Building and Trades Council are donating their precious work time to make the kitchen a reality.

Andrew Spano (cont.)

the Hudson Valley region,” stated Melanie Schaffran, FECA Board Member and Founder, “We appreciate County Executive Spano’s commitment to our children and their educational needs.”

For more information on the event and other articles concerning Autism Awareness Month, go to www.westchestergov.com/mentalhealth, www.FECA.org, and www.autismspeaks.org.

Miracle Day on Wall Street

On Wednesday, December 7, 2005, CIBC World Markets partnered with the Wall Street community to raise funds for children with autism. On that day, CIBC donated all trading fees and commissions to children’s charities, including FECA.

A proud tradition since 1984, Miracle Day has raised more than \$110 million for children’s charities worldwide, and \$170,000 has been donated to FECA during the past five years. This past

Miracle Day raised a total of \$12,500 specifically for FECA.

The donated funds have been used to support educational programs for children with autism and enable special education professionals to achieve New York State certification in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

Mark your calendars now for the next Miracle Day...Wednesday, December 6, 2006.



DMLC Students Make Great Strides Out Into The Working World

Time is passing very quickly and nowhere is that more evident than in the halls of DMLC. Many students now tower over their teachers as childhood gives way to emerging adulthood. In anticipation of the next important phase of their lives, many DMLC students have had the opportunity to embark upon vocational experiences that are preparing them for the world beyond their school and aiding them in the transition onto individual paths where they rely less and less on the comforts of their homes.

Twenty-three students now participate in vocational programs that include stocking shelves, folding pizza boxes, washing cars, and a range of typical office activities.

Thanks to the extraordinarily creative efforts of DMLC Vocational Director, Neil Boyle, the doors to opportunity have widened considerably this past year.

Some highlights of the DMLC vocational program from this year include:

- Seven of the older students perform a wide range of office duties at the Bethel Nursing Home. Their work includes: computer data entry, copying, filing, making

admission packets, completing mailings and grading tests.

- The American Red Cross is the beneficiary of volunteer work of several students who put mailings and training packets together and, in the future, they will put crisis kits together for natural disasters.

- The Mt. Kisco Honda dealership has the assistance of a student who waxes the cars.

- A group of students participate with seniors at an inter-generational day program playing Bingo and lotto and taking care of the greenhouse and library.

- The local FoodPatch, which provides food for the homeless has the weekly assistance of several students who sort goods, and repackage food donations for distribution.

- Two of the local delicatessens have the help of several students who stock shelves and help with sweeping and cleaning up.

FECA will be conducting special fundraising campaigns to purchase additional vehicles to drive students to their worksites and thus enable opportunities to

expand geographically.



Behavioral therapist, Kara Torisi, works with Douglas Campbell in the DMLC school store.



David Cuevas uses the copy machine to perfect his office skills.



Christine DiChiara (front) writes on a computer with Lindsey Peterson's tutelage.

NYBOT/ Futures and Options for Kids Award Helps Launch Enrichment Program

Students at DMLC are lucky to have a group of "angels" on the New York Stock Exchange. Members of the *New York Board of Trade's Futures and Options for Kids* have been supporting the school since its inception. Thanks to FECA founding parent, David Kimmel, whose 14 year old son, Max, is a DMLC graduate, the students' successes and challenges are part of many Wall Street traders' daily lives. "When Max was first diagnosed in 1993, I shared the news with Fred Mascia (Futures' Chairman) and he asked what he could do to help," explained David at this year's Grant Recipient's Day, held on June 1st. "The emotional and financial support has been consistent, and increasingly generous ever since."

This year, FECA was the recipient of funding to launch *Project Enrich*, a

vacation-care program that will enable students to receive educational support when they would otherwise be away from school.

A component of *Project Enrich* is a computer camp that will enable stu-

dents to spend additional time utilizing computer technology and other office equipment, which will enable them to transition to productive jobs in the community.

"*Project Enrich* will eliminate regression and enable students and therapists to tackle educational goals," states Jennifer Hartnett, DMLC Educational Coordinator. Our heartfelt thanks to the *NYBOT/Futures and Options for Kids* board and staff for helping to launch *Project Enrich*.



Theresa Silk, executive director, NYBOT/ Futures and Options for Kids, David Kimmel, FECA parent and co-founder, and Angel Motisi, Managing Director, NYBOT.

DMLC Welcomes New Staff

Classroom 3 at DMLC welcomed a new teacher in June, Nicoletta Ronsini, who until recently, has been working at Rockland B.O.C.E.S. Nicolette will join Stacy Coburn, who was our first Manhattanville College Intern, as new members of the team. Stacy had previously worked at DMLC as a behavior specialist and is studying for her behavior analyst certification. Christine Doyle, Melissa Lopez, and Richard Marchena all behavior specialists, also recently joined the DMLC team. Welcome all!

Dr. Cindy Alterson, Clinical Director at DMLC, has been named Acting Education Director. C. Dena Saxe, Former Director, will retain her role as consultant to curriculum programs.

SAVE THE DATE

FECA Gala 2006
October 21, 2006
Hilton Rye Town

Mark your calendars now for the big fall event! October 21st promises to be a night to remember with a casino atmosphere, silent auction items, raffle prizes, delicious food, music and great fun all in the name of a wonderful cause.

For further information about upcoming events, please call Hospitality Resource Group at (914) 761-7111.

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

Team DMLC Walks The Walk!

Proudly sporting their "Team DMLC" buttons, dozens of staff, parents, family members, and students came out on June 4th for the annual Autism Speaks walkathon. Held at Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, the walk was expected to top the over \$700,000 that was raised last year for autism research. Sheela Mehta, Owen Murray, Alex Roma, Brett Schaffran, and Jason Tabbert represented their classmates at the two-mile walk, which drew participants from around the county.

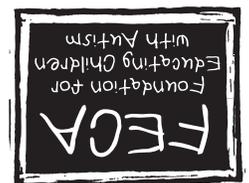
Randall Pinkett, the winner of "The Apprentice" TV reality show, was master of ceremonies for the event and kicked off the festivities with a rousing cheer. Randall won "The Apprentice"

competition, which features contestants vying for a job with Donald Trump, by managing a final baseball event, which raised funds for *Autism Speaks*.

Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke about the need for extensive federal funding to support research and educational services for children with autism and exhorted the "troops" to lobby their Congressional representatives to support the *Combating Autism Act of 2005* (H.R.2421/S.843) which she co-sponsors with House member Christopher Shays (R-CT). Shays, who also attended the event, detailed the range of programs that the bill would support. These include grants to states for screening, diagnosis and treatment.



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