

# News



A newsletter for the friends of FECA • Foundation for Educating Children with Autism • Summer 2007

## DMLC Students Given Volunteer Spirit Award



MC Alan Kalter, Neil Boyle, Brett Schaffran, New York Life President Peter Bushyager, Joanna Straub, Volunteer Center ED

Students from DMLC were celebrated at the annual Volunteer Spirit Awards Celebration sponsored by the Volunteer Center of the United Way of Westchester, April 27 at the Doral Arrowwood in Rye Brook. The award was in recognition of their tremendous contribution to several United Way agencies.

At the American Red Cross offices, seven students conduct office work and collate, copy and prepare mailings for blood drives. They have assembled over 1,000 comfort kits used throughout the area for use in emergency situations. At My Second Home, four students interact with a group of seniors, play games, sing songs and form relationships, referring to their senior friends as "Grandma" and "Grandpa". Five students volunteer at the Bethel Nursing Home, becoming part of their workforce, volunteering in the departments of admissions, human resources, finance, physical therapy, and for the Director of Volunteers. Over the

years, DMLC students have volunteered at the Food Bank for Westchester by packing bags that help feed those less fortunate. Future service commitments include the SPCA, Muscular Dystrophy and Juvenile Diabetes Associations.

Pratik Ravichandran, Matt Pirraglia, Mark Brailey, Doug Campbell, Andrew Finder, Danny Shire and Brett Schaffran were present to receive the award as the New York Life Youth Group honorees. Jason Tabbert, Christine DiChiara, Alec Kaplan, Alex Lee, Dashiell Saines, Kelly Wedin and David Bigelow were also part of the DMLC team nominated for the award.

Alan Kalter of the David Letterman Show was the master of ceremonies for the event in which a number of area volunteers received awards including Marty Lyons, former outstanding defensive lineman and Super Bowl champion with the New York Jets.

## FECA Honors Siblings, Teachers at Autism Awareness Day 2007

The unique and heartfelt experiences of brothers and sisters and the presence of a newly elected U.S. Congressman put autism and its impact and importance in high relief as family, friends, staff and supporters gathered on April 9<sup>th</sup> to observe Autism Awareness Day at the Devereux Millwood Learning Center.

Organizers of the event felt that the voices of siblings of individuals with autism were well overdue to be heard and was an important way to raise awareness about what it is like for families living day-to-day with autism. To that end, FECA announced in February its sponsorship of an essay contest for siblings on the subject "Growing Up With Autism."

We were especially delighted that newly elected Rep. John Hall (D-19) was able to join us for the event where he heard about the impact that autism has in his district and the nation. Rep. Hall listened to the impressive essays, toured the school and met with students and staff.

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L to R – DMLC Parents Monica Haugh, Susan Murray, Congressman Hall, Melanie Schaffran, Drew Schaffran, Joseph Pirraglia and Theresa Pirraglia (front).

**FECA Celebrants Illuminate Elegant Rainbow Room**

*See photographs inside*

# FECA Honors Siblings, Teachers at Autism Awareness

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Each essay winner gave his or her personal account of what it was like to live with a sibling with autism, providing often highly emotional insight into their lives. They all affirmed their commitment towards raising greater understanding and awareness of autism.

After the essays were read, Rep. Hall took the podium before a tearful audience. He admitted his limited knowledge of autism but asserted his commitment to learning about its impact in his district, his state and the country. He stated that hearing the stories from siblings made him acutely aware of autism's impact, not only on the autistic child but on the whole family, as well. He vowed to sign the "Expanding the Promise for Individuals with Autism Act" (H.R. 1881) and to be an advocate for families afflicted with this disorder.

The Fox Lane Middle School Autism Speaks Club joined our program for the second year. The club was started by a student who had a sibling with autism with the goal of raising awareness among his middle school peers. Since that time, similar high school and middle school organizations have popped up all over the country. In just one year, three siblings of DMLC students founded Autism Speaks Clubs in their schools. Lauren DiChiara founded the Autism Speaks Club in Fox Lane High School, raising over \$300 to support autism

research. Daniella Roma founded the Columbus Middle School Autism Speaks Club in Mt. Pleasant. Lauren Brailey founded the Autism Awareness Club in Scarsdale High School with 20 members and has already raised over \$5,000 through walkathons and special events.

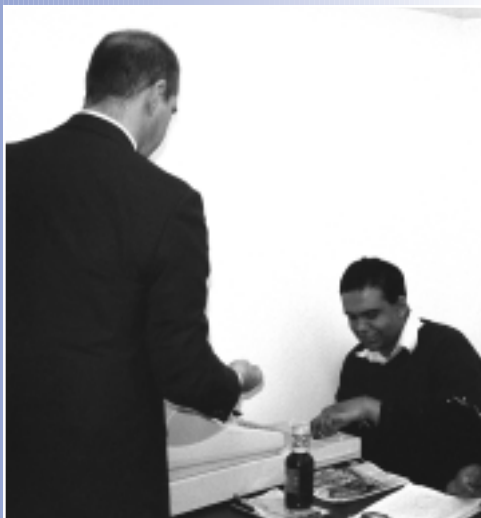


Congressman Hall and essay contest winners (clockwise from front): Natalie Tadena, Lauren DiChiara, Matthew Ford, and Jennifer DiChiara.

Michelle Greene, a teacher from Eastchester School District, was presented with the first annual Autism Awareness Leadership Award. Michelle was selected to receive this honor because of the active role she has taken in advocating for inclusion of students with autism in their school and in presenting positive skills and abilities of people with autism.

The morning's program concluded with a tour of the school. Rep. Hall observed the individualized ABA curriculum of the students in several classrooms, stopped briefly to buy a bottle of water from student Patrik Ravichandran, and concluded in the school gym where students John DeCaprio, Andrew Finder and Nick Petillo gave the Congressman a few pointers on his jump shot.

In addition to the impressive activities held at DMLC for Autism Awareness Day, Cindy Alterson, Director of DMLC, and Neil Boyle, Vocational Director of DMLC, joined a host of students, family and friends at the annual Autism Walk sponsored by Autism Speaks at Manhattanville College on June 10, 2007.



While touring the school, Representative Hall makes a purchase from Patrik Ravichandran.

## Words of Wisdom From Our Winning Essays

"(Christine)...makes this incredibly annoying sound that basically gives my friends a first impression that she is a 'retard'. I hate that word. Kids in my school use the label 'retard' to describe any kid who acts completely different than them. I have come to realize they use that word because they don't understand...This is how the learning and understanding and acceptance begin. It takes small steps and education to tear down labels. People give more love when they understand. In many ways I am so lucky to have Christine in my family. She has taught so much about tolerance and compassion. Without her I'd be just another kid in the hallway saying 'retard' under my breath."

— Jen DiChiara

"I love my brother very much and he loves me too. Whenever I ask him to play with me, he will *always* say 'yes.' I don't think that Matthew would even dare himself to say 'no'. It makes me feel good to know that there is a friend that always wants to be with you and would never want to hurt your feelings...Sometimes, my friends would even say to me, 'Can I trade my little brother for yours? Your brother is so nice!'"

— Lauren Lappetito



Congressman Hall shoots hoops with students Andrew Finder, Nick Petillo and John DeCaprio



Congressman Hall shoots hoops with student Andrew Finder

"Then, the day came, it started like most others. We were playing together in the basement, her mocking my action figure motions as usual, when my Mom called for me, I yelled, 'I'm coming Mom!' and was about to get up when I heard 'I'm coming Mom!' again. At first I thought it was an echo, then I turned around and saw something that might as well been a dream. Her mouth was moving, but not in the usual way...Back then, I had no idea of the enormity of this moment in my life, all I could think was 'It's about time'."

— Matthew Ford

"Through watching Christine, I learned about her behavior and how to handle it. Along with learning more about autism through Christine, I learned about care and responsibility. I saved up one hundred dollars and donated the money to Christine's school. My mom also trusted me to watch Christine and my younger siblings when she wasn't home...Today, I'm still helping the autistic community."

— Lauren DiChiara



Alison Singer, VP, Autism Speaks, Congressman Hall, Ann DiChiara and Devereux New York Director John O'Keefe

## 2007 FECA "Stepping Into The Future" Conference Presenters Announced

With the announcement of keynote speakers Carol Gray and Dan Olmstead, there is already much excitement buzzing about FECA's 2007 "Stepping Into The Future" Conference. The Conference, which will be held on November 9th, will include addresses by the keynote speakers and several workshops from which to choose. More information and details on how to register for the conference will be arriving in your mailboxes soon. Below is the list of topics and presenters lined up for the event.



**"How to Write Social Stories for Individuals with Autism"** Carol Gray, Director of Gray's Center for Social Learning and Understanding

**"Factoring Friendship in the Lives of Children with Autism"** Carol Gray, Director of Gray's Center for Social Learning and Understanding

**"The Age of Autism"** UPI writer, Dan Olmsted, will discuss his fascinating investigative report series on autism.

**"My Child was Just Diagnosed with Autism. Now What?"** Panel discussion with Dr. Susan Varsames-Young, Barbara Kimmel M.A., Ann DiChiara who will address what parents should do after the initial diagnosis.

**"Utilizing New York State's OPTS Program"** Eugenia Haneman, Director of NYS OPTS through Office of OMRDD • Joanne Howard, NYS OPTS • Allen Schwartz, Ph.D., NYS Office of OMRDD

**"Preparing Students with Autism for Post-Secondary Employment: Making a Seamless Transition from School to Work"** Cindy Alterson Ph.D, BCBA, Director of the Devereux Millwood Learning Center • Neil Boyle, Vocational Director of Devereux Millwood Learning Center

**"Positive Behavioral Supports"** Vince Winterling Ph.D., Devereux National Coordinator of Programs for Neuro-Developmental Disorders

## Thirteen Educators Receive Levin Scholarships

Each year FECA gives educational scholarships to eligible applicants. The Jonathan Levin Award program acknowledges an individual's commitment to the profession of education with an emphasis on working with students with autism, while utilizing the techniques of Applied Behavior Analysis. Announcements are sent to universities, autism research centers and special education schools around the country. Applicants are asked to submit resumes and their professional development plan. A committee chaired by FECA board member, Gina DeCaprio, reviews applications and selects winners.

Congratulations to our 13 recipients for 2007!

- |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Deborah Astman           | Candice Felske     |
| Lauren Elizabeth Besante | Courtney Guadagno  |
| Neil Boyle               | Susan Heitker      |
| Jill Casey               | Megan Robinson Joy |
| Stacey Coburn            | Mayleen Otero      |
| Maria Falco              | Lindsay Peterson   |

Nicole Scrivanich

# FECA "Rainbow Room" Spring Gala a Resounding Success!

Sweeping views of the New York skyline provided a gorgeous backdrop as over 350 celebrants gathered at the historic and elegant Rainbow Room for the 12th annual FECA Spring Gala this past May 15th. The event honored the partners of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, long-time supporters of FECA's mission of providing funding for programs at DMLC.

The silent auction provided one of the many ways that celebrants could participate to help raise critical funding for FECA's mission. It included a vast array of theater tickets, sporting event tickets, and sports memorabilia ranging from an autographed David Wright Mets jersey to an autographed Shaq basketball shoe. Selections of wine and gift packages provided something for everyone to bid on. "Must Have" items included golf with CNBC's Joe Kernon, which was won by Paul Taubman with a winning bid of \$10,000.

The raffle, which raised over \$16,000, included a grand prize trip to Cancun, tickets to Hershey Park, Yankees and Jets tickets and more. Congratulations to Kim McGraw who won the fabulous trip to Cancun.

A pledge board raised over \$13,000 towards the renovation of the playground at DMLC.



## SAVE THE DATE

Start looking for the perfect costume for FECA's

### Halloween Masquerade Ball

Saturday, October 27th  
at the Hilton Rye Town.  
Join us for a ghoulish good time!

Be sure to mark your calendars for the 2007

### "Stepping Into the Future" Conference

Friday, November 9th

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

## Senate Subcommittee Approves Funding For Autism

The Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee moved to provide \$53.3 million in funding for autism detection, education, awareness and intervention activities under the authority of the Combating Autism Act approved by Congress last year. The bill goes to the full Senate Appropriations Committee where it is expected to pass, where it will then face reconciliation with the parallel appropriation in the U.S. House.

To learn more about the **Foundation for Educating Children with Autism**, log on to our website at [www.FECAinc.org](http://www.FECAinc.org)

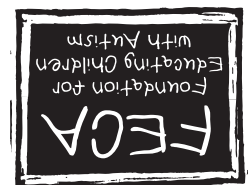
## Happy Campers



The students and staff of the Devereux Millwood Learning Center enjoyed a weeklong summer camp, which took them on various field trips around Westchester County. The trips included the Maritime Aquarium, pool, movies and bowling. This was the first camp sponsored by FECA and the Devereux Foundation. Thank you to Futures and Options for Kids Foundation who provided the grant funding for the camp.

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# FECA Partners with the MBIA Foundation, the Westchester Community Foundation and Futures and Options for Kids

The growth of the award winning Vocational Training Education Program has created additional needs for funding and FECA has looked to grant partners to fulfill these needs. In the past few months, we gratefully began a relationship with two new investors, the Westchester Community Foundation and the MBIA Foundation. The MBIA Foundation was introduced to FECA through vocational program student Matthew Pirraglia's older brother, Joseph, an MBIA employee.



MBIA Vice President Joanne Taylor (L), MBIA Intern Joseph Pirraglia (C) and MBIA Senior Administrator Jean McGovern (R)

"We appreciate that Joseph sought out this opportunity for FECA with his MBIA supervisor, Joanne Taylor, and we are grateful that MBIA was willing to support the DMLC students who live in the same neighborhoods where its employees live and work," stated FECA president Jay Wedin. MBIA's grant of \$10,000 will be used to help underwrite the transportation and occupancy costs associated with training our students at school and transporting them to their workplace training sites.

A second new investor, the Westchester Community Foundation, recently expanded their guidelines to include educational programs to meet the needs of students with autism. "We are delighted that the Westchester Community Foundation committee granted our request to build our voca-

tional training education program through the development of a full time position dedicated to this program," states Cindy Alterson, DMLC's director. "Their support in the amount of \$15,000 will enable us to dedicate vital staff resources to the expansion of this program."

FECA also was recently presented with a \$5,000 check from New York Board of Trade (NYBOT)/Futures and Options for Kids, a Foundation who has supported FECA for more than ten years. This grant will help underwrite behavioral specialists who accompany students to vocational program work-sites. "NYBOT/Futures and Options for Kids is a great friend to FECA and the kids at DMLC," noted Dave Kimmel, one of FECA's founding family members. "We are lucky to receive



Fred Mascia (L), Board Chairman of NYBOT's Futures and Options for Kids and Dave Kimmel, one of FECA's Founders, at the 2007 Grant Recipients Ceremony.

continued and growing support from Chairman Fred Mascia and the Futures and Options for Kids Board of Directors. They became an investor in FECA's earliest days and can share in our success stories as they watch our educational programs grow along with the needs of our students."

If you would like to recommend a grantor to partner with FECA, or would like more information on FECA's grant partnership program, please contact Lisa Keogh, FECA's grant coordinator at 914-761-7111 ext. 29. "We look forward to creating vital community partnerships as more funders find out about our one-of-a-kind programs for students with autism," states Melanie Schaffran, FECA founder and board member.

## Three Students Graduate From DMLC



Jamie Seven Sky Voltaggio

To applause and tears, [Jamie Seven Sky Voltaggio](#), age 21, became the first student to graduate out of the DMLC program. Jamie has been a student at the school since July of 2000.

[Jared Sawyer](#) also graduated, having achieved the necessary skills to succeed in classes in his school district. [Alex Roma](#) will also enter the ranks of those who have graduated come this August.

FECA extends hearty congratulations to all and wishes Jamie, Jared and Alex continued success in the future!



Alex Roma