

News



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

Grease is the Word at FECA Gala

Grease was the word heard around the ballroom one Saturday night in October. That night, over 400 supporters proved how "hopelessly devoted" they were to FECA and the students of

DMLC. Re-creating her famously charming role as "Frenchy" from the movie classic, Grease, actress Didi Conn devoted her considerable talents that night in support of her other most important role: mother to Danny, a student at DMLC. Didi enthusiastically joined her husband, esteemed composer, David Shire, and the FECA dinner committee to plan and stage a magical and rollicking 1950's-themed sock hop, complete with fellow cast members from the movie.

Many of the celebs, festively dressed in poodle skirts and greaser attire, mobbed the dance floor to the strains of Sha Na Na's Jocko and the Grease Party Band. Throughout the staged production, hostess and resident "Pink Lady" Didi Conn waxed nostalgically about all the first loves and memories of our lives. Olivia Newton-John, who played "Sandy" in the movie, joined Rosie

O'Donnell, who played "Rizzo" in the Broadway stage production, to welcome the crowd in a videotaped message. Annette "Cha Cha" Cardona and Barry "Doodie" Pearl led the crowd in a raucous "hand jive" contest judged by Rydell High's esteemed assistant principal, Dodie Goodman.



Didi "Frenchie" Conn charms the hoplessly devoted crowd at the FECA Gala & Sock Hop



Phil Orlando presents RuthAnn Brazill with the Lifetime Achievement Award

Five students from DMLC – Danny Shire, Pratik Rachicandran, Andrew Finder, Brett Schaffran and Matthew Pirraglia – jitterbugged along side their parents and teachers.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was given to RuthAnn Brazill, who has worked tirelessly to bring FECA's fall fundraising events to new heights, creatively and financially. Several individuals were also honored for their support for the autism community. Tony Ucci and the Building and Trades Council of Westchester, Plumbers and Steamfitters, Local 21, and Pat

Morrissey of P. Morrissey Contracting were thanked for volunteering their efforts to remodel the new DMLC kitchen and the two new classrooms.

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Cindy Alterson Assumes Principal Position at DMLC

Longtime DMLC educational and clinical director Dr. Cindy Alterson was named Director and Principal at the start of the 2006-7 school year, in an announcement made by Devereux New York Director John O'Keefe. In applauding the decision, FECA President Jay Wedin, spoke for all parents in extending heartfelt appreciation for "the tremendous effort that Cindy has already put into making our school and our children successful in her five years as Educational Director" pledging to continue our partnership as the school grows from six classrooms to eight in the coming months.



Miracle Day Fundraiser 2006

For the ninth consecutive year, FECA was honored to be part of the CIBC World Markets' Miracle Day fundraiser, held on Wednesday, December 6th. The event – which partners with the Wall Street community to donate all global trading fees and commissions raised on that one day to children's charities – raised some \$12 million, which it will distribute to 350 different charities throughout the world. FECA will receive an estimated \$10,000 in March, when the new contributions are expected to be distributed.

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Grease is the Word at FECA Gala & Sock Hop

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Many of DMLC's new parents joined veteran parents in making the silent auction hugely successful. Tickets to theater and sporting events, themed baskets, sports memorabilia, weekends in Vermont, wine collections and date nights made possible by DMLC staff were joined with a raucous live auction. Two adorable puppies were the center of attention of the live auction, along with trips to St. Croix, Park City, Utah and Narragansett, which were hugely popular. The auction offered dozens of Grease-themed memorabilia including a jacket signed by Olivia Newton-John. Melanie Schaffran, Peggy Wedin and Liz FINDER organized the silent and live auction events again this year, which raised a combined total of \$44,500. Kathy Jardine did a masterful job by bringing in \$35,000 through advertisements in the dinner journal.

Supporters bought pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which added up to \$22,000 for the purchase of another van for the school's vocational program.

Dinner co-chairs Ann DiChiara and Liz FINDER announced that the dinner brought in over \$200,000, which will go directly to fund the educational programs at DMLC.



(L to R) Peter and Ann DiChiara with longtime FECA supporter Assemblyman Adam Bradley and his wife, Fumiko



Didi Conn and Barry Pearl pose for a picture, nostalgic of their roles as Frenchie and Doodie





SUBMISSIONS NEEDED Autism Awareness Contest

Plans are underway for a combined observance of Autism Awareness Month and DMLC's 10th anniversary. DMLC and FECA will be

sponsoring an [essay or video contest for elementary, middle and high schools students](#) on the subject of "Growing Up With Autism." Students may either write a one to three page essay or submit a five-minute video on the topic depicting the positive aspects of having a sibling, family member, friend or someone in the community with autism. Submissions are due by

Friday, March 9th, with selections to follow on March 30th.

[Nominations for the first annual Autism Awareness Leadership Award](#), to be given to a teacher who has gone above and beyond the call of duty in educating students with autism, are also being accepted. This individual should have taken an active role in advocating for the inclusion of students with autism in the community and in presenting the positive skills and abilities of people with this disability.

[For further information and criteria for the contest and the award, please contact Cindy Alterson at \(914\) 941-1991.](#)

DMLC Adds Two New Classrooms; Kitchen Completed

Carved out of existing common room space, two new classrooms and several offices were constructed over the summer months in anticipation of 12 new students entering DMLC during the fall semester. One classroom is already up and running under the tutelage of new teacher, Dina Turcic. The second classroom is growing slowly as prospective students go through the intake process. The new classrooms will bring the student enrollment to 48 with 12 new staff members added to continue the one-to-one educational model critical to the success of our students.

Students can now fully participate in their daily living and vocational training in the newly renovated kitchen completed this summer through the efforts of volunteers from the Building and Trades Council of Westchester and the Plumbers and Steamfitters, Local 21.

President Signs Combating Autism Act

After several years of stalemate, due to the political machinations of several members of Congress, the landmark Combating Autism Act passed the U.S. Senate December 7, on the heels of swift passage in the House one day earlier.

Sponsored by Senators Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT),

the bill authorizes nearly one billion dollars over the next five years to combat autism through research, screening, early detection and early intervention, thus increasing federal spending on autism by 50 percent.

President Bush signed the bill into law on December 19, 2006.

2007 "Stepping Into The Future" Conference Announced

This year FECA's "Stepping Into The Future" Conference will be held on November 9, 2007. And, while the date may not be on your radar yet, it is already shaping up to be a spectacular event with guest speakers Carol Gray and Dan Olmsted already confirmed.

Carol Gray is the Director of the Gray Center for Social Learning. She spent 22 years as a teacher of students with autism and now works as a national speaker and consultant on teaching social understanding to individuals with autism via pictures. Gray is also well known for her best selling book *Social Stories*.

Dan Olmsted, otherwise known as "Autism's Dick Tracy," is an investigative reporter and senior editor for United Press International and author

of *The Age of Autism* report series. His most famous of these reports was in June 2005 entitled *The Amish Anomaly*, where Olmsted questioned the absence of autism in the Amish population, who do not vaccinate their children.

More information about the conference will be forthcoming as the date approaches. Please mark your calendar now for what will be a very captivating and informative conference.



FECA Welcomes New DMLC Staff Members

Ashley Abrams – Class 1

Bethany Bensen – Class 8

Shekeida (Yvonne) Brock – Class 3

Marissa Crociata – Class 7

Diane Klein – Class 1

Tara Lieto – Class 5

Amanda Lysiek – Class 6

Laura Mathieson – Class 8

Michael Persampieri – Class 3

Lynn Socci – COTA

Carol Stanson – Class 5

Daniela Sumerano – Class 3

Dina Turcic – Class 1

Wendy Volkmar – Class 2

SAVE THE DATE

**FECA Goes to the
Top of The Rock!**
May 15, 2007 at 6:30 pm

**Pegasus at
30 Rockefeller Center, NYC**

Mark your calendars now for an event that is sure to be the talk of the town! FECA will hold its annual NYC Spring event at one of the most talked about places in town... 30 Rockefeller Center. Come and be a part of what is sure to be a memorable evening.

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

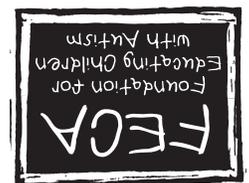
DMLC Students Instrumental In Westchester American Red Cross Disaster Preparation

Throughout the year, the American Red Cross in Westchester County responds to over 100 disaster incidents that result in a countless number of victims losing most, if not all, of their worldly possessions. Armed with supplies, including "Comfort Kits", Red Cross volunteers are able to bring comfort to these victims. This year, eight DMLC students – Jack Orlando, Matthew Pirraglia, Kelly Wedin, Mark Brailey, Brett Schaffran, Jaime Seven-Sky, Andrew Finder and Davey Bigelow – were instrumental in assembling the kits that were immediately distributed to the City of Mt. Vernon's Office of Emergency Management.

In addition to the disaster kits, DMLC students work weekly putting together handbooks, mailings and other preparedness materials and have become an essential part of the ability of the Red Cross to conduct its mission. Andrea Grimaldi, the Director of Community Volunteer and Blood Services, spoke of the contributions of DMLC students as going "beyond their material value" to instilling in the "hearts of each client the American Red Cross in Westchester County serves a sense of hope and reassurance for a bright future."



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Miracle Day Fundraiser 2006

Since the program started in 1984, CIBC has donated more than \$170 million to hundreds of worthy children's charities throughout the world. FECA has been very fortunate to receive more than \$200,000 from CIBC, since becoming a beneficiary of their generous philanthropic efforts nine years ago.

We already know that Miracle Day 2007 will be on Wednesday, December 5th, which is also the first day of Chanukah, so please mark your calendars! The ongoing success of CIBC's program – and certainly the size of FECA's individual contribution – is a function of institutional investment professionals doing some of their trading on that one day with CIBC. So if

you (or other institutional investment professionals whom you know) do an equity trade with CIBC on December 5th, 2007, you will benefit special needs children everywhere. And if you mention FECA by name when the equity trade is placed, then we'll get an even larger donation from CIBC.



DMLC Students are on the Move!

At each of our special events, FECA features a pledge board to enable our loyal donors to help purchase one of the items on the DMLC wish list. Wishes have been granted in the form of a Honda Odyssey Minivan in 2005, a new kitchen in 2006, and a second Odyssey in 2007 to transport our students to their jobs. Yes, their jobs!

Led by Neil Boyle, the students in the Vocational Training Program now contribute 350 hours per month, nearly a 28% increase over the past year, volunteering at community businesses and not-for-profit organizations. With two new classrooms at DMLC and the addition of sites which count on our students for support, more students are gaining varied work skills and making a difference in our community.

Two new non-profit job sites are the SPCA in Briarcliff Manor and the Muscular Dystrophy Association in Hawthorne. At the latter site, students

are providing bulk mail labor, taking a fundraising mailing from start to finish. At the SPCA, one student is training



DMLC Students Louis Vales and Andrea Badalato pose with Neil Boyle and Cindy Alterson in front of the new Honda Odyssey.

puppies to become therapy dogs. Several students are assisting with a fundraising drive for toys and food for the sheltered animals. "Donors to our latest Honda fundraiser can be proud that their support is reaching additional community members through our students' volunteerism and growth," states FECA president Jay Wedin.

Sad News From The Autism Research Institute

One of FECA's earliest and most stalwart advisors has died. Dr. Bernard Rimland, founder of the Autism Research Institute and the Autism Society of America, passed away in November. At a time when autism was still considered a hopeless diagnosis, Dr. Rimland was a staunch and highly effective advocate for early diagnosis and intensive behavioral intervention. In addition to being an early advisor to FECA, Dr. Rimland also spoke at several of our educational conferences and was the principal advisor to the movie Rainman. FECA will continue to honor Dr. Rimland's decades-long leadership and commitment to the autism community as an emeritus advisor.

"Night Of Too Many Stars" Raises Millions

At a raucous evening filled with comedy, laughter and music, the Comedy Central sponsored "Night of Too Many Stars" proved spectacularly successful, raising \$2.6 million for educational programs for children with autism. The entertainment provided a fun night of laughter for many FECA families. As a beneficiary of the event, FECA received \$150,000, which will go directly to supporting our vocational efforts.



As emcee of the event, Jon Stewart hosted an incredible array of comedians including: Stephen Colbert, Adam Sandler, Mike Myers, Dana Carvey, and much of the cast of Saturday Night Live and Comedy Central. Moby headlined the musical portion of the evening. The event was televised live on Comedy Central and supporters called in their pledges directly to many of the comedians on the show.

Remembering George Brazill

George Kingsley Brazill, of Bronxville, died on May 17, 2006. Husband of RuthAnn, father of George Kingsley Brazill, III (Trey), Susan Kelly, Lynne Murphy and Mary Beth Connor. George was also a grandfather of nine and brother of Eddie Baltz.

George was a dentist who retired after practicing in New York City for 51 years. He was an avid sailor winning four National Championships and was the former Commodore of the Larchmont Yacht Club.

All of us at FECA will miss George and we send our thoughts and prayers to our dear friends, RuthAnn and Trey.

