

News



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

Hundreds Gather at Bryant Park to Celebrate FECA's Accomplishments

Despite the continued sobering news of the economy, over 350 friends, family and supporters turned out to celebrate another year of accomplishments for FECA, including the anticipated launching of the adult program in partnership with Devereux.



David Bigelow, FECA event co-chair announces the honorees

After several years in the aerie of the Rainbow Room, FECA decided to celebrate spring once again and return to the bright and airy space of Bryant Park Grill, opening the doors onto the park. The early spring flowers, which were just about to bloom, were a metaphor for the adult program, which was set to open with its first class of five adults in July.

A fantastic array of silent auction prizes ranging from sporting and theatrical events, memorabilia, hand crafted jewelry and more, presented beautifully under the artful stewardship of FECA Board Members Elise Orlando and Gina DeCaprio. Corporate and individual sponsorships listed in the evening's program and a wonderful raffle, that included theme park passes and a fabulous trip to Cancun, boosted the evening's success. In total, the event raised over \$200,000.

Event chairs David Bigelow and Phil Orlando spoke movingly of FECA's continuing purpose

to serve over 50 children at our partnership school, DMLC. They also cited the numerous other FECA supported programs including annual conferences which bring together experts in the field to serve the larger public and a scholarship program that has assisted in the further education of dozens of teachers.

The event was held deep into baseball season and provided an excellent opportunity to honor a unique group of FECA supporters who were designated our "Bullpen of Angels." Their steadfast support and generosity year after year has sustained and strengthened FECA's ability to carry out its mission. The honorees included: Leslie Borow and Peter Anguilla, Connie and Mike Cataldi, Mary Beth Farrell, Jill and Peter Fisch, George Hall of International Paper, Pat Morrissey Contracting, Lisa and Chris Parlo and Susan Varsames. To acknowledge their contributions, each of the members of the "Bullpen of Angels" was given a beautifully framed plaque that was signed by all of the students at DMLC.



FECA Silent Auction Co-chairs Elise Orlando and Gina DeCaprio with FECA President, Melanie Schaffran (middle)



The 2009 FECA "Bullpen of Angels" and their friends

Devereux, in Partnership with FECA, Launches Adult Program in July

On July 13th, 2009, five young men with autism took their first steps towards the world of work outside the safe harbor of their school programs. In so doing, they began the next chapter of their lives. They were able to do so though a day habilitation/enhanced supported employment "without walls" model that was developed by the Devereux Foundation through the inspiration and leadership of FECA Board Member Terry Pirraglia. Terry spent over two years researching, planning and negotiating with state agencies to help launch the adult program which is the first of its kind in Westchester County devoted solely to adults on the autism spectrum.



Matthew Pirraglia working at Sportstime in Elmsford

The participants, all recent graduates from various Westchester schools and the Devereux Millwood Learning Center, are employed at local businesses ranging from a financial services firm to a deli and pizzeria. In addition, each participant volunteers at a local nursing home and works on his personalized daily living and recreational skills. The methods of applied behavior analysis are the primary support and instructional tool for this cutting-edge program.

The unique supports, robust staff training and data based accountability are all designed to incorporate and respect each individual's unique combination of skills, interests and potential. The program is expected to grow with each graduating class as students, many of

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**FECA Friends
Gather at
Bryant Park Grill**

Building Success with our Grant-Seeking Partnership Program

We are pleased to acknowledge the supporters on this page who have partnered with our students on their road to success. Our funding partners provide the extra financial support needed to bring students into the community for award-winning volunteer experience, outreach and social expansion.



FECA parent David Kimmel thanks Angel Motisi, Executive Director of Futures and Options for Kids, for their continued support. At the Foundation's Annual Grant Recipients Ceremony, FECA received \$7,500 toward a multi-year grant from this long-time partner.



The MBIA Foundation has continued their loyal support with a \$12,500 grant. At a site visit (l to r) student Brett Schaffran introduced MBIA Charitable Foundation Committee Members Ed Janson, Kimberly Osgood and Joyce Clark to fellow students Adam Rivera and Farjana Kali. FECA board member Theresa Pirraglia and recent DMLC graduate Matthew Pirraglia joined the tour and expressed FECA's appreciation for a third straight year of funding from MBIA.

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

Assemblyman Gregory Ball *(see related story on page 3)*
 Assemblyman Adam Bradley
 CVS Caremark Charitable Trust
 Hudson Valley DDSO Family Support Services



FECA is proud to have been selected as a 2009 Grant Recipient by the Autism Speaks Family Services Community Grants Committee. Mark Roithmayr, president of Autism Speaks, and his wife Christine visited the school recently to discuss our award-winning Vocational Training Education Program. They shared the latest news from Autism Speaks, the nation's leading advocate for children and adults on the spectrum. Shown (l to r) is Cindy Alterson, DMLC principal, FECA Board Members Terry Pirraglia and Melanie Schaffran, Mark Roithmayr, FECA Board Member and Autism Speaks volunteer Susan Murray and John O'Keefe, executive director of Devereux New York.

FECA and DMLC Tapped as Keynote Speakers at AS Walkathon Luncheon



Dr. Cindy Alterson, DMLC Principal and Melanie Schaffran, President of FECA, were asked to keynote the annual luncheon to kick off the highly successful

Westchester/Fairfield walkathon sponsored by Autism Speaks. The event, held at the Renaissance Hotel in White Plains, is held prior to the walk to both publicize and thank volunteers and highlight the supported programs. FECA has been a recipient of walkathon fundraising, which has supported the ever-growing vocational program.

First FECA Founding Family Student Graduates



Matthew Pirraglia, son of Terry and Joseph Pirraglia, one of the original founding families of FECA, graduated from DMLC in June. His graduation marks the closing out of his career as a student that began on the day the school opened in July of 1996.

Matt was the first DMLC student to participate in a vocational program at the nearby deli back when the only option was to walk to an opportunity. Since that time, FECA has purchased eight vans to transport students, including Matt, to a wide variety of opportunities.

Fellow students, teachers, parents, and Matt's brother, Joseph, Jr. all attended the graduation ceremony. Matt has now become the first participant of the newly created Devereux adult program, which opened in July of 2009. Matt's mother, Terry, was instrumental in the creation of the program that provides supported employment opportunities to young adults. Congratulations and good luck, Matt!

Creativity Abounds Within Community of FECA Supporters

Ivy League Polo Tournament Site for Assemblyman Ball Donation



Assemblyman Greg Ball (second from right) presented FECA with a check for \$20,000 at the Ivy League Polo Event fundraiser on May 31. Shown accepting the award (L to R) is Cindy Alterson, principal, DMLC, FECA board member Terry Pirraglia, Polo Event organizer Brett Johnson, Assemblyman Greg Ball, and FECA president Melanie Schaffran.

New York Assemblyman Greg Ball presented a \$20,000 check to FECA at the annual Ivy League Polo Tournament held on the sumptuous grounds of a Greenwich, CT estate. The tournament, which features teams from each of the Ivy League colleges and universities, is held annually as a venue to raise funds for various charitable causes. FECA board members Terry Pirraglia and her husband, Joe, Andrew and Melanie Schaffran, and DMLC Principal Dr. Cindy Alterson, were on hand to receive the generous donation that will help fund vocational programs at the school.

Purple Passage Boutique Donates Autism Tee-Shirt Sales

The Clarfeld Family, who own and operate Purple Passage, a new boutique in Mt. Kisco that features beautiful clothing and accessories for the young and hip, is donating 50% of sales of their exclusive "Support Autism" tee shirts to FECA. The tee shirts, which come in three different styles, were created by Signorelli for Autism Speaks. Twenty percent of any other purchases made along with the tee shirts purchased will be donated to the Foundation. Purple Passage is located at 41 South Moger Street in Mount Kisco.

One Meaning Selects FECA As Charity of The Month

Ingrid Hobbs and Karen Fontana Chesleigh sent their One Meaning Butterfly to land on the shoulder of FECA as its charity of the month. One Meaning has not only publicized FECA on their website, but has donated over eight percent of all proceeds from the sales of their beautiful jewelry and apparel for people and pets from the month of June. They plan to honor FECA again next April for National Autism Awareness Month. Go to www.onemeaningcouture.com to browse their collections of one-of-a-kind pieces. Thank you, Ingrid and Karen.

DMLC Hosts Its First Prom

Donning suits and beautiful party dresses, the students of Classrooms Five and Six held the first-ever DMLC prom in the traditional site of proms... the school gym. Teachers and staff transformed the gym into a festive disco, complete with party lighting and dance music. Refreshments were provided and formal portraits of the students were taken. Students twirled and parents beamed at what is expected to become an annual and much anticipated event.



Pratik and Andrew take a break from the dance floor.

FECA Advisor Ted Carr Killed in Car Crash

Long-time FECA Advisor and esteemed professor of psychology from SUNY Stony Brook, Edward Carr and his wife, psychologist Ilene Wasserman, were killed in a crash caused by a drunk driver in June. Dr. Carr was an internationally renowned expert on autism, pioneering several widely used treatments. He had spoken at a number of FECA's annual conferences and had offered his support to FECA early on when we were struggling to open a school. Their only son, Aaron Carr, who is attending the University of Connecticut, plans to study psychology and continue his father's work in autism.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to Aaron and the Carr family.

DMLC Students Receive Volunteer of The Year Awards



LEFT: Award recipient Jack Orlando (L) and Neil Boyle, DMLC vocational program coordinator, display the American Red Cross Good Neighbor Award.

RIGHT: Award Winner Brett Schaffran and DMLC staff member Nicole Gabay enjoy dinner prior to accepting the evening's prestigious honor.



Students at DMLC once again are being applauded for the tremendous contributions they make to their volunteer missions. This year, both the Bethel Nursing Home and the American Red Cross in Westchester County honored DMLC students who volunteer their services at both sites by completing mailings and coordinating various materials critical to the success of their host programs.

In June, Bethel Nursing Home treated the students and their parents to a lovely luncheon, as the students received individual awards and recognition from Bethel Volunteer Director Jean Kulesa. Also in June, the Red Cross held a dinner banquet, and DMLC students attended with Vocational Director Neil Boyle, as they represented their classmates and received the American Red Cross in Westchester County Good Neighbor Community Partnership Award.

Launch of Adult Program in July *continued from page 1*

whom had demonstrated remarkable skills and potential through the vocational program at DMLC, seamlessly make the transition to the adult world and the larger community beyond. Through this program, their opportunities for a productive future are now boundless.

DMLC Produces First School Play: "Tacky The Penguin"

Heading for a possible run on Broadway, actors and directors from DMLC first opened their production of "Tacky the Penguin" on the great white way of Millwood, New York on May 1, 2009. The production was the brainchild of the students of classrooms seven and eight who created the costumes and the sets and played all of the roles. The story follows the adventures of Tacky, a young penguin who marches to the beat of her own drum, or in this case, likes to dance to her own style of music, at times



The ensemble cast portrays a typical day in the life of a penguin in Antarctica.

when the other penguins prefer to do other things. An ensemble cast of penguins, wildlife indigenous to Antarctica and a band of antagonistic hunters tell the story of the relationship that exists among penguins, the environment and mankind.



Lulu (as Tacky) walks the Red Carpet prior to the performance.

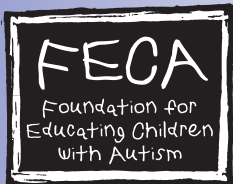
Audience members were treated to a day at the theatre, complete with a Will Call Ticket Window, a Red Carpet to welcome the stars, a Playbill with cast



The Hunters, portrayed by Vivek, John and Owen, interrupt the peaceful existence of Tacky and her friends.

biographies, and a VIP Lounge to mingle with the performers once they exited the Stage Door.

"What I love about this play," commented Susan Murray, mom to Hunter cast member Owen, "is that it gives the kids and parents an opportunity to participate in an activity that they would experience if they attended a neighborhood school." Tacky brought all aspects of a theatrical education to our students and gave audience members a taste of the arts within our school walls.



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Support for FECA Continues to be Critical as Incidents of Autism Rise

Two new government studies indicate about 1 in 100 American children have autism spectrum disorders – higher than the previous estimate of one in 150. While "greater awareness, broader definitions and spotting autism in younger children may explain some of the increase," Dr. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, said, "The concern here is that buried in these numbers is a true increase."