

INSPIRATIONS

A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community

Spring 2009

Vol.1 No. 2



We want to hear from you!

Dear readers,

Welcome to the second edition of Inspirations. Response to our first publication in the fall was overwhelming. Unquestionably, there is a place for a special needs newspaper dedicated towards the Greater Montreal area. We are fortunate to have many experts to draw from as writers, most of whom fulfil important roles in the Quebec education system. With this in mind I welcome you to send in questions or story suggestions to inspirations@emsb.qc.ca. What issues should we be focusing on? Do you have a good idea for a profile? We look forward to hearing from you.

Mike Cohen
Editor



Easing the transition from school to work for special needs students

By Stewart Lazarus

Jonathan Colias, Allison Dunbar, and Matthew Harris-Bell know first-hand just how exciting and stressful CEGEP life can be. These three students balance schoolwork, while enjoying movie nights, playing sports, rooting for the Habs, and working at the Light A Dream candle store. They are part of the Lester B. Pearson School Board Cooperative Education Program (LBPSB Coop. Ed), which eases the transition from school to the world of work for John Abbott and Vanier students with special needs.

For many of these students, their shifts at Light A Dream are more than just work, it is an opportunity for them to enhance their communication skills, discover talents, boost their self-esteem and make friends.



Light A Dream students left to right: Jonathan Colias, Jeremy To, Jessie Falcao and Ali Assy.

Founded in 1999, Light A Dream is a non-profit retail candle and gift store located in the Point-Claire Village. The store is a popular place for LBPSB Coop. Education Program students to develop general work and life skills and engage in enriching activities.

Diana Crawford, store manager, explains what makes the store unlike any other.

"We provide the students with hands-on training and life-skills," she says. Matthew Harris-Bell, 19 agrees. He says that the hands-on training aspect is effective and motivating. He adds, "I enjoy hands-on learning better than learning on paper in a classroom." But the learning and camaraderie doesn't only take place in the store. It continues in the classroom. Jonathan Colias, 18, can barely contain his

excitement when talking about a typical day at school. "We all meet at our lockers, get our books ready, and once we get to class we all talk to each other until the teacher is ready to start teaching," says Jonathan, who enjoys learning math, science, art and music in school. Allison and Matthew are also interested in math. What the students do agree

(Continued on page 9)



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Briefly Noted

THE WAR AMPS: Students from East Hill Elementary School in Rivière des Prairies recently took part in an interactive War Amps Play Safe workshop that was presented by 18 year old War Amps Safety Ambassador, Vanessa Knight. The aim of the presentation was to spread awareness among students and encourage them to play safe. Ms Knight was a most engaging and excellent presenter. Her message was simple and to the point. "Be careful and aware. A small accident could cost you more than you'd expect."



Rachel Krecklo

East Hill level two student, Rachel Krecklo, assisted Ms Knight with the presentation, as she spoke to her classmates and peers about her prosthetic leg. While Ms Knight's message was important, it was Rachel who best demonstrated to her friends that she does not have a disability. She is very able and excels in most areas. The children can witness her success each and every day.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the War Amps Play Safe Program. The War Amps is a Canadian nation-wide registered charitable organization operating under the direction of war amputees. Since its inception, The War Amps has had, as its hallmark, the unique philosophy of "amputees helping amputees." In 1946, the Key Tag Service was launched, where war amputees could not only work for competitive wages,

but also provide a service to Canadians that would generate funds for the organization. The Address Label Service was introduced in 1972 to provide year-round employment for the disabled staff at the Key Tag Service.

The War Amps is able to operate its many programs for amputees solely through donations from the public to the Key Tag and Address Label Service:

- The **CHAMP** Program for child amputees provides financial assistance for artificial limbs.
- **PLAYSAFE** is a safety message from child amputees to other children.
- **DRIVESAFE** promotes safe driving to prevent injuries due to accidents.
- **JUMPSTART** provides computer training for multiple amputee children.
- **MATCHING MOTHERS** introduces a **CHAMP** family to the parents of a new amputee.
- The National Amputee Centre provides Canadian amputees with the latest information on artificial limbs and all aspects of amputation.

Anyone interested in a Play Safe workshop in their schools can contact the War Amps at the toll-free number 1-800-267-7487 or log on to www.waramps.ca.

SOCCER FOR SPECIAL NEEDS: The Super Sonic Soccer Kids, a soccer program for special needs children organized by the

Lakeshore Soccer Club, is gearing up for its summer season. Kelly Soutter, the manager of the Lakeshore organization, spearheaded the initiative which she calls "informal and non-competitive."

Soutter said that she first proposed the outdoor league for special-needs players after a neighbour approached her. "He said to me, 'with all your involvement with Lakeshore Soccer, do you offer anything for children with autism?' I was almost embarrassed, as the largest soccer club in Quebec that we didn't. But we had no budget or experience for this. We were flying by the seat of our pants. The Lakeshore Executive said, 'You're insane, but go ahead; and let us know how we can help.'"

Thirty kids with special needs registered for their first season of organized soccer. There was one family with three autistic children, and another with two. "We'll aim to cap it at 40 kids this summer," Soutter said.

Last year, Lakeshore Soccer signed an affiliation with the Special Olympics. For more information on the program, contact Soutter

at 514-697-6973 or at info@lakeshoresoccer.ca or log on to www.lakeshoresoccer.ca.

PARALYMPIC SWIMMER: Canadian Paralympic swimmer Benoît Huot was among the guests at the most recent English Montreal School Board Career Fair held at the St. Pius X Adult Centre in Ahuntsic.



Benoît Huot talks to a student at the EMSB Career Fair.

The Career Fair is supported almost entirely by corporate sponsorship, principally Jack Dym of Pipe and Piling Supplies (a great supporter of special needs organizations) and RBC Royal Bank, which sponsors Huot, who spent some time at their information kiosk and spoke to students. Huot's athletic dreams came true when he participated in the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games opening ceremonies. He has since competed in swimming events at three Paralympic Games and brought home 16 medals, half of which are gold. Last summer he competed in Beijing, China and won four bronze medals (men's freestyle - S10, men's 200m Individual Medley - SM10, men's 50m Freestyle -S10 and men's 400m Freestyle -S10). Hailing from Longueuil, Huot started swimming competitively at age 10, where he competed alongside able-bodied swimmers and competed at two Quebec Games, earning silver in 1997. Inspired by a swimmer who had a disability like his (a club foot) compete at the 1997 Paralympic Games, Huot tried out and qualified for the Canadian national team for Swimmers with a Disability. He made his international debut in 1998 at the International Paralympic Committee world championships, where he won two gold and four silver medals.

INSPIRATIONS

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Spiritual Community Animators focus on the special needs community

By Clarise Samuels

The job description of a spiritual community animator is unique, comprising a team of dedicated people who are found throughout the public schools of Quebec. Since 2001, in keeping with Bill 118, which was mandated by the Quebec Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports, every school board has had spiritual community animators. Spiritual community animation consists of a two-part effort—one part to focus on the inner lives of the students and the other to foster community involvement.

At the English Montreal School Board, through the creative and visionary leadership of Assistant Director of Student Services, Dora Cesta, the creation and structure of the spiritual community animation team became a concrete reality in 2001-2002. Irene Miller, who has a master's degree in theology, and studied to be a lay minister and certified spiritual director through the Ignatian Centre of Spirituality and the Diocese of Montreal, is the consultant at the EMSB for spiritual, religious, and moral education, and she coordinates the team's activities.

"On the spiritual side, we focus on deepening the student's inner life with a quest for seeking fundamental meaning in life, and we include all major religions," explained Ms. Miller, who is a calm and soft-spoken person with soul-searching eyes. "On the community side, we are focused on students taking action to help others as we strive to build a better world and a more harmonious society."

It is the part of the job that focuses on community involvement that has inspired a number of EMSB spiritual community animators to initiate community projects involving students with special needs. At Vincent Massey Collegiate, spiritual community animator Nancy Pasquini recently organized a shopping spree between a group of Vincent Massey students and a group of visually-impaired students from the Philip E. Layton School.

The objective of the trip was to buy holiday gifts for other students at Philip E. Layton. A bake sale and a can collection drive raised the money for the group to go on the shop-

ping trip at Carrefour Angrignon. "When we asked the Layton students how our students at Vincent Massey should prepare for the



Paul VI students (left to right) Rosaria Panza, Mitchell Kaminski, Alex Ferla-Coirazza, and David Wilkinson.

outing, they said, 'just tell them not to feel sorry for us, that we are just teenagers who happen to be blind, and that they should bring their sense of humour,'" recalled Ms. Pasquini. "The Layton students later said the experience was amazing."

At Paul VI, an EMSB special needs school for students with learning difficulties, spiritual community animator Gerald Westphal has his students doing community projects where they help others. One such project was to have some students help out at a local soup kitchen. "We are planning to send more groups like this one to participate in the future," Westphal explained. "The students got rave reviews from staff and patrons, and they were wonderful ambassadors for their school."

Paul VI student, Mitchell Kaminski, 16, remarked, "It was great giving soup and desserts to the patrons. I learned that serving people makes me feel useful." Paul VI student David Wilkinson, 16, noted "It was interesting and fun. I learned I could help people and that made me feel very happy and thankful for what I have—the food was very good, especially the soup, which was my favourite!"

At John Grant High School, an EMSB vocational school for students with learning difficulties, spiritual community animator Mi-

chael Donkers is proud of his boxing club. In honour of Black History Month, the boxers learned about the life of boxing champion Muhammad Ali. They studied his unique style, and they learned about how he refused to be inducted into the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War because of his religious principles. Mr. Donkers emphasizes the connection between sports and character development. "Boxing can be a very personal and spiritual experience, especially for students with special needs," he said. "It attracts students who prefer a solitary athletic activity, yet still enables them to be part of a group. It is a good metaphor for life."

At the EMSB's Mountainview School, spiritual community animator Rocco Speranza has socially and psychologically troubled children working in a special program where they do ambitious projects in woodshop under the guidance of woodshop teacher, Brian Ulric. The special needs students in this group have completed impressive community projects in various schools, including shelving units, executive tables, bathroom accessories and even entire kitchens. The program encourages the enhancement of self-esteem, and the faculty has noted, a dramatic reduction in anti-social behaviours.

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By Marina Bresba

Students dream about life after high school. Some look forward to a pre-university program, others to technical training, and still others are eager to get to work. Adam Taylor was a student who dreamed about attending CEGEP with his peers. As an individual with Down Syndrome, Adam had always gone to inclusive schools. But with the transition to post-secondary life fast approaching, he wondered whether he would be able to continue or go to college.

Adam's dream planted the seed. His mother approached the Riverside School Board about establishing an inclusive post-secondary education program at Champlain College in Saint Lambert. The dream soon was shared by others, and became a collective project. Two years later, the dream became reality. In August 2005, the Post-secondary Alternative Community-based Education (PACE) program welcomed its first students.

Now in its fourth year, this joint Riverside-Champlain project has provided 16 students with pervasive developmental disabilities, with an inclusive post-secondary option for education. Each of these students, aged 18 to 21, had previously attended one of Riverside's high schools and, upon graduation,

A dream becomes reality: Adam's PACE



Adam Taylor

wished to pursue new challenges. Adam's PACE Program seeks to prepare graduates for the independent pursuit of a successful adult life.

Each student works with a team to develop their individual plan and schedule. Three days a week, the Adam's PACE Program students are at Champlain, where they engage

in the academic portion of the program, including auditing one course per semester in a discipline which appeals to them. In addition, they strive to improve their functional academics, develop life skills, and learn work skills. It is important to note that the students of Adam's PACE Program are not just present at the college; they are part of it, participating in leisure activities and making friends. Helping out with the CCAA Men's National Basketball Championship, for example, was one student's best college experiences last year. Josh, a current student, recently commented about how much he enjoys participating in clubs with students who have similar interests: "We get to make jokes about the [video] games we like or dislike, and we get to be friends in the place where the games are. Overall in my experience, I've really enjoyed joining clubs for fun and may join more clubs [in] the future."

Two days a week, students participate in an on-the-job work study program throughout the community. The placements vary according to students' work interests and learning goals. This training period serves as an important extension of the classroom, and helps students gain valuable self-confi-

dence, learn new employability skills, and develop a better understanding of the world around them. Tristan wrote of a recent work-study experience: "My stage at Déco Découverte is awesome. I get to work with people and I get to work in the shop." In addition, students earn Attestations of Skills recognized by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports.

Sadly, Adam never had the chance to live this dream, having lost his long-time battle with leukemia. And yet, Adam lives on in the opportunity presented to the students of Adam's PACE Program. They, too, have their own dreams for their future, and thanks to Adam, they are one step closer to realizing these dreams. The students are very proud of their program and their accomplishments, and are eager to share their experiences with others. If you would like to read their accounts of activities and events, please visit our website at <http://pace.rsb.qc.ca>.

Marina Bresba is a program coordinator and core teacher at the Riverside School

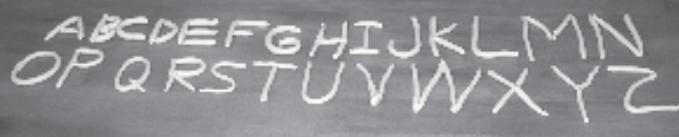
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The Shriners Hospital

An interview with Céline Doray

By Wendy Singer

Céline Doray is the administrator of Shriners Hospitals for Children – Canada in Montreal. Inspirations met with Mrs. Doray to talk about this unique medical institution.

Question: What are Shriners Hospitals for Children (SHC)?

A: A North American health care system of 22 pediatric hospitals that provide medical care at no cost to children with orthopaedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries and cleft lip and palate. Generally, SHCs are funded entirely by the Shriners Fraternity. As the only Canadian SHC, we benefit from additional funding from the government which in turn decreases costs to the Canadian health care system.

Q: What is your mission?

A: To provide the highest quality orthopaedic care to children by using an integrated approach, combining excellence in clinical care within a compassionate, family-centered, collaborative environment, innovative research and teaching of physicians and health care professionals.

Q: In what is your specialization?

A: Pediatric orthopaedic care and neuromusculoskeletal conditions. This includes the care of children and adolescents with osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), also known as brittle bone disease, scoliosis, cerebral palsy (CP), spina bifida, club feet and limb length discrepancy, to name a few.

Q: How many children come through your doors and from where?

A: About 12,000 patients yearly in our ambulatory clinic, a 15 percent increase since 2006 due to increased referrals. Perhaps we're no longer the best kept secret in Canada! We perform 900 surgeries per year here and 100 at the Montreal Children's Hospital. About 70 percent of our patients are from Quebec, 25 percent from other provinces and five percent are from other countries.



Céline Doray

Q: Have you seen any trends in disease activity over the years?

A: We see fewer children with spina bifida since folic acid is given to women during pregnancy and more CP due to the increased survival rate of premature babies.

Q: How do you differ from other institutions?

A: Families must apply first. When our evaluation indicates that the child can benefit from our services, we arrange transportation, accommodations and global care at no cost, thanks to the Shriners network. Everything is provided here, from surgery, physiotherapy and school for children who stay for long stretches. Children are living better, longer lives due to medical advancements. Our focus is to rehabilitate them to their maximum potential and ensure that services continue in their community when they return home. When a child cannot benefit from our care we try to refer them elsewhere.

Q: Can you tell us about research at the

SHC Canada?

A: Dr. Francis Glorieux, director of research, founded our research department in 1973 in collaboration with McGill University. He and his team have developed two generations of treatments for OI, the latest is called Aredia, preventing multiple fractures. Our research facility is amongst the most important in the SHC network and the most advanced worldwide in the research, treatment, identification and development of best practice guidelines for OI. We are involved in other exciting basic and clinical research projects, with a particular interest in clinical outcomes.

Q: The SHC will stay in Montreal and move to the Glen Yards in N.D.G Campus. What does this mean to you and your patients?

A: We have been affiliated with McGill University and worked in close collaboration with the Montreal Children's Hospital for many years. We are recognized as a center of excellence, having attracted the best physicians, researchers and health professionals in the field. Staying in Montreal means that years of collaboration and joint expertise will remain intact. We are very excited about this. Our hospital is quickly becoming too small. The new construction on the Glen site will provide the space and resources we need to continue delivering excellent care with state of the art resources.

Q: Where can we find out more about the SHC?

A: You can visit our website: www.shrinershospitals.org and click on the Canadian hospital, or phone 1-800-361-7256. You can also find our hospital newsletter The Orthopedik on our website.



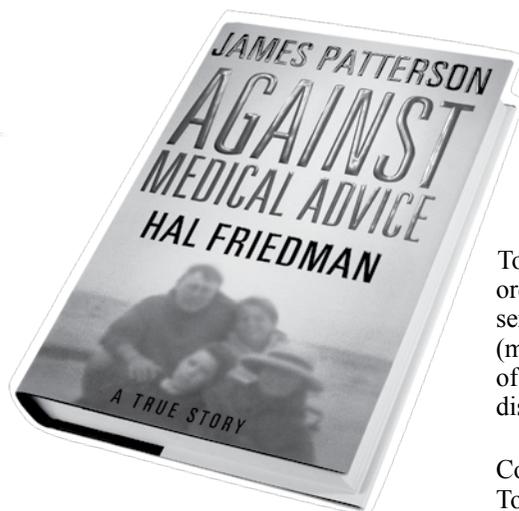
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Against Medical Advice:

A True Story by James Patterson and Hal Friedman (Little, Brown, \$29.99)

by Stuart Nulman

Tourette's Syndrome is a neurological disorder that has its victims endure an endless series of irrepressible tics and utterances (mainly profanity-laden) that just come out of nowhere, that are both distracting and disturbing for everyone involved.

Cory's ordeal to conquer his battle with Tourette's was an agonizing 13-year ordeal of experimental medications (and its devastating side effects) guinea pig-type treatments, hospital stays, not to mention the humiliation he suffered from being treated by others as an outcast.

Hal Friedman, Cory's dad, wanted his story told, and he enlisted the help of his friend James Patterson, the author of such best-selling thrillers as *Kiss the Girls* and *Along Came A Spider*. Their collaboration resulted in this very compelling, readable book, *Against Medical Advice*.

The first thing that immediately attracts the reader is Patterson's rather wise choice of

telling the story in the first person point-of-view ... but from Cory's point-of-view. By doing this, the author and the reader get a better understanding of what it's like to live with Tourette's if you see it from the eyes of person who has to live with it.

The book describes in harrowing detail the pain Cory went through as a Tourette's patient, physically, emotionally and medically (he took a total of 36 different types of medications in 13 years). And then there was the alcoholism, depression and self-destructive tendencies that went along with it.

But just when the reader thinks that Cory's ordeal would end in a complete breakdown, or worse, suicide, the last quarter of the book offers the proverbial "light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel." Thanks to a month-long stay at an outdoors wilderness intervention camp in the mountains of Wyoming in the dead of winter, a six-week stay at the Wellington Neurological Centre and above all, the love and support of his mother, father and sis-

ter, Cory managed to rise from the ashes of this affliction. The chapter when Cory and his mom meet with officials from his high school to tell him that he has to repeat his junior year, in which she boldly tells them what Cory has done on his own to conquer his condition and what he has achieved academically and career wise against all odds, is both eye-opening and an astonishing, reaffirming revelation.

Written in Patterson's familiar reader-friendly style (complete with the brief three to five page chapters that are typical of his thrillers), *Against Medical Advice* is a riveting account of one person's difficult struggle against a disorder that few understand, that many mock and laugh at, and that unfortunately remains a mystery to the general public. It also makes Cory Friedman a role model for anyone who endures the physical and emotional agony of a disease, and how through perseverance, love and support, it can be overcome.

Cory Friedman is quite the renaissance man. He started several of his own Internet businesses; he became an expert in Internet marketing; he lectured on computer marketing at Syracuse University's Information Studies School; and he even finds time to be the lead singer in a rock band in his native New Jersey.

It's quite an impressive resume for such a young man. But what makes it even more impressive is that Cory Friedman has accomplished all this while being afflicted with both Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Tourette's Syndrome.

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Camp B'nai Brith does it right for special needs

By Susan Freed

For six wonderful years (from 2000 to 2006) I had the privilege of serving as the Coordinator of the Special Needs Program at Camp B'nai Brith in the Laurentians. During those years I saw a program, which was unique from its inception, blossom and grow under the guidance, support and encouragement of Executive Director Frank Weinstein, who had the vision many years earlier to create a full integration Special Needs Program. Over my six years, the program grew from four to 45 campers!

The special needs program continues to offer a fully integrated camp experience to special needs children who might otherwise only be able to attend special needs camps.

Children with special needs are welcomed into a culture of acceptance and respect for differences which has been fostered over the years to such a degree that no one even questions the presence of special needs children at camp. These children participate fully in all aspects of camp life to the best of their ability. The presence of these children has helped other children and staff to learn tolerance and acceptance of individual differences and has broken down misconceptions and stereotypes.

The reason this program has been so successful is that there is a structured support



A culture of acceptance exists at Camp B'nai Brith.

system in place. The camp employs a special needs coordinator, who is an experienced professional in the field. The coordinator supervises a staff of special needs counsellors and support workers (shadows) who are attached to the children for one to one, 24-hour care. Another reason for the success of the program is that every child is assessed and screened by the coordinator to

establish his/her suitability for the program and as well to determine the specific support needs. No special needs child goes to camp without the proper support in place!

All camp staff receive training during pre-camp in understanding and dealing with children with disabilities and in developing strategies to include all children regardless of their difficulties. The coordinator is also there to discuss situations as they arise over the summer and to monitor and ensure the level of inclusion.

The special needs program at Camp B'nai Brith is supported by community agencies that provide financial support for families who need it. No child is refused on the basis of financial difficulty. Camp B'nai Brith also welcomes senior citizens and during the summer, some have volunteered to act as surrogate grandparents for special needs children who really benefit from that connection. Over the years, Camp B'nai Brith has welcomed children who suffer from developmental disorders, autism, blindness, hearing impairment, Down's Syndrome, intellectual disabilities and other difficulties. The children are ambulatory, although many do need assistance with physical activities and personal care.

In order to encourage reluctant first time

special needs campers, B'nai Brith set up a starter camp of two weeks and there have been many success stories of children who, although they only stayed at camp a few days, benefited tremendously from their time at camp and came back eagerly the following summer. Many parents of special needs children reported that the friendships their children formed during the summer lasted all year and some for much longer!

I have a lasting memory of an autistic child standing at a microphone during a lunch-time gathering in front of close to 700 campers and staff, encouraged by his counsellors who had heard him singing in a canoe that morning, and with perfect pitch and clarity, delivering a rendition of a popular song called Forever Young. You could hear a pin drop and there wasn't a dry eye in the crowd. The standing ovation at the end was overwhelming. This boy was the hit of the summer! When I later described this to his parents they were astounded and overjoyed! Such miracles do happen and they happen every summer at Camp B'nai Brith! For more information, log on to <http://www.cbbmtl.org>.

Susan Freed is a special education consultant and former guidance counsellor for the English Montreal School Board

McGill student does not let visual impairment stand in her way

by Valeria Nekhim

Nathalie Martiniello does not like it when strangers on the metro try to pray for her. She also hates it when random people approach her on the street and blatantly ask her what's wrong?

"I wish people would stop seeing my blindness as a problem," said Martiniello. "I can do almost anything anyone my age can do."

True to her word, the 24 year old McGill student and Dawson College graduate has not let her disability keep her from living a normal life. Instead of giving up, Martiniello deals with the challenges as they come, and there have been no shortages of them along the way.

When she was five months old, Martiniello lost most of her vision due to glaucoma. To complicate matters, she was also diagnosed with neurofibromatosis, a rare genetic disorder of the nervous system that often causes tumors to develop on nerves and can lead to abnormalities like skin changes and bone deformities. In Martiniello's case, a benign tumor started growing right outside her skull, causing the area around her eye to thicken.

Growing up, Martiniello had over 20 surgeries to try and restore her vision, and to remove the tumor. However, by the time she was 15, the doctors realized that surgically removing the tumor only made it grow

faster, so they put the then Grade 10 student through a year of chemotherapy.

"The most important thing at the time was that I really fought to go to school," she said. "I didn't want to put my entire life on hold while on treatment, because I really wanted to graduate with my peers, and I had worked so hard until then."

With individual help from her teachers, Martiniello's wish came true and she graduated from Laurier Macdonald High School in St. Léonard in 2001 with her classmates. In pursuit of a higher education, the unstoppable 17-year-old got accepted into the

language and literature program at Dawson College.

"Every term I would tell the disabilities center what books I needed and they would either scan them onto a CD or get them for me in Braille. I was able to get everything I needed provided that I was proactive about it," said Martiniello.

Martiniello's knowledge of Braille and her talking computer helped her get through Dawson, but it was her guide dog Shirby that really made a difference. Before Dawson,

(Continued on page 12)



Vitamin D for DRAW!

Picture Talking helps autistic children learn and communicate through drawing

By Jason Goldsmith

Nothing is more important than speaking your child's language. This is the reason I started Picture Talking.

It all began when I was too busy to notice my son's requests for a hug. Ellis has autism. Because his words were not working, he drew a hug on his chalkboard so I would notice his request. Since then, I've learned my lesson well: if you listen, communication will come.

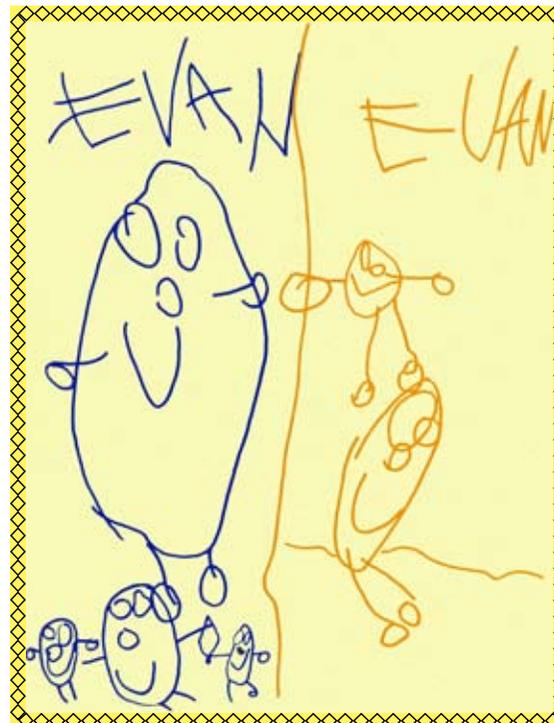
The mom of another boy named Evan learned this first hand. Like so many children diagnosed with autism, Evan thinks in pictures. Evan and his mother draw together. Words make more sense to Evan when they are accompanied by pictures. Evan is a graduate of the Picture Talking Program at the Donald Berman Yaldei Developmental Centre.

Picture Talking helps in two ways: It de-

velops the social and emotional competencies of young autistic and language delayed children and it helps parents become better guides in the lives of their children.

Evan's mother worked with me to create a tailored program to meet the needs of her whole family. I watched drawing become an everyday routine for Evan. He drew to express himself and mom used drawing to explain emotions and to clarify routines. He understood more of what others were saying so he became more confident and cooperative. In fact, because he understood more, he began to talk more. It was "the missing link to help Evan move towards fluent speech... we saw so much growth".

I call it vitamin D for Draw. For a child who has not mastered words, drawing stimulates comprehension and supports growing expression. It even helps caregivers feel more confident because they are better understood. Because basic stick figures are all that is needed to get a message across, anyone can draw. It's quick, affordable and can be



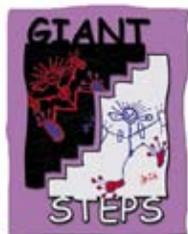
In this drawing, Evan tells mom that after she spends time with his sisters, he wants some quality time with her too.

done anywhere to express anything. In Picture Talking, we use it like a visual sign language that supports all of our learning and communication goals.

Sophia is one of my clients at Yaldei. We pretend play and practice social interactions. We use drawings to plan our activities and review our play sessions. This helps Sophia organize her thoughts which makes her feel better about activities that would otherwise cause her anxiety."

To find out more about Picture Talking services and workshops, Jason can be reached at 514-342-3331 or log on to www.picturetalking.com.

Jason Goldsmith is an autism consultant and parent coach. He can be reached at jgoldsmith@thebigbluehug.com.



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This interactive hands-on workshop takes place at the Donald Berman YALDEI Developmental Centre at 2100 Marlowe, 5th floor. To register, please contact Jason Goldsmith at 514-342-3331.

More information is available at www.picturetalking.com or email info@picturetalking.com.



Transition to high school for students with ASD

By Tania Piperni

“High school will be...exciting. ... new. ... scary. ... fun. ... freedom. ... confusing. ... more work.” These are the answers given when a group of Grade 6 students were asked to describe the upcoming high school experience. Clearly, their emotions vary quite significantly.

The transition to high school is anxiety provoking for many students. They depart on an emotional roller coaster ranging from fear of the unknown to excitement of new privileges. For a student with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), emotions can play a large part in this transition. The move involves leaving the elementary school cocoon-like environment, along with familiar peers and teachers. High school often encompasses an overwhelming milieu with many different subjects taught by a number of teachers in a variety of classrooms, all within a maze like building. Anxiety can quickly increase for the student with ASD, even before entering the high school walls.

For these reasons, a transition protocol during Grade 6 can ease the student into the move to high school. The Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) has implemented such a procedure for over seven years. According to Patricia Assouad, an ASD Consultant at the LBPSB, “This protocol has helped facilitate the transition of the students by creating a sense of predictability and familiarity before such a big change.”

The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) has implemented a similar procedure during the 2008-09 school year. It was developed by the Autism Task Force Committee through the EMSB Student Services Department. They embarked on implementing this transition protocol in order to address the challenges facing students with ASD during the move into high school.

At both school boards, the protocol creates a link between elementary school and high school. Furthermore, parents are involved in the process. The schools coordinate and organize visits to the student’s chosen high school. During the high school visit, the students get a clear visual of the building itself, they identify important venues such as the cafeteria and library, and they meet significant school personnel such as administration and guidance counsellors. Stories



are created for the students in order to prepare them prior to the visit, as well as after to help retain pertinent information until the actual first day of high school arrives. Photos can be included to make the trip more memorable. These stories are read again with the student at school and at home. As explained by Ms. Assouad, “it helps get everyone involved in the process, including parents.”

By implementing a transition protocol into high school, the student with ASD can become more familiar with the new environment which, in turn, helps alleviate some anxiety. This leads to a more positive move into Grade 7. Thus, a well structured procedure to ease this transition from elementary to high school functions as an important support for students with ASD towards their next step in education. Not only is the student better prepared for the transition, the high school is better informed about the students they will be receiving. Thus, the entire process can decrease challenges and anxiety for everyone involved: students, high schools, and parents. Ultimately, it acts as a guide to help students with ASD get through what could be a very stressful moment in their lives and make it a more positive, predictable experiences.

Tania Piperni is the Autism Spectrum Disorders Consultant at the English Mon-

(Continued from page 1)

on is the best part of their classes: no homework (unless of course they ask for some). The LBPSB Coop. Education Program is a joint-program at John Abbott and Vanier Colleges. Each year, approximately 20 to 25 students join the program. LBPSB Director of Student Services Cindy Finn ensures that both the academic and work-studies aspects are engaging for the students. “In Quebec, students have the right to be in school until the age of 21,” says Ms. Finn. “What is so important about this program is that it gives the students the necessary academic and life skills to continue working when their school careers are complete. Through the program, students are placed in different working environments, depending on their interests. Tim Hortons, The Bay, and Dollarama are some of the popular choices along with Light A Dream.”

The students’ work responsibilities can create a sense of independence. “Most of them use public transportation,” says Ms. Finn. “After practicing with the work-studies coordinator, students take the bus to work by themselves. The students know they must get to work on time. Some are so enthusiastic that they even show up to work two hours early. While that enthusiasm can act as a complement, we teach the students how to be punctual: not too late and not too early.” In addition to the independence and responsibilities, students practice their communications and stress management skills through their work. “We remind the students to greet customers politely in person and on the phone, to look them in the eye, and we show them how to deal with the usual stressors at work in an appropriate way,” says Ms. Finn. As the Light A Dream Store is a non-profit organization, fundraising plays a crucial role. Students take an active role in fundraising by planning events that would

interest fellow students. Jonathan enjoys selling lollipops at Vanier to raise money and says that a cookbook entitled, “Personal Favorites,” is in the works. Some of the money raised will go towards the students’ much anticipated year-end trip to Ottawa. A testament to the program’s success is its strong alumni and parent involvement. Ms. Finn says, “After graduation, many alumni share their stories and serve as mentors to incoming students.” Ms. Crawford sees this strong alumni support at Light A Dream. Michael, a 2000 graduate, still visits Light A Dream and helps out with the candle preparation and motivating new students. Ms. Finn emphasizes the importance of parent involvement. “We are lucky to have willing parents who provide input, plan activities, and assist with fundraising,” she says.

Like most CEGEP Students, Jonathan, Allison, and Matthew are also thinking about what they will do after graduation. Jonathan is looking forward to working with animals, Matthew is interested in working as an electrician, and Allison, 20, will continue working part-time at Light A Dream, Artisan, and Blockbuster. Ms. Finn adds that after graduation many students find full-time employment and exciting volunteer opportunities.

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Philip E. Layton School, a blessing for the visually impaired

By Stuart Nulman

Since she became principal of Philip E. Layton School in September of 2008, Patrizia Ciccarelli marvels how the students and staff are more than just a school community to her ... they are like a big family.

“There’s a real sense of community here,” she says. “Although the services the students receive here are unique, they benefit from being together and not being isolated. They connect with other students with similar needs and it’s a great way to foster friendships. The best thing about that is that they feel they are not alone when they face their disability.”

Located on Sherbrooke Street West in N.D.G. in the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre facilities, Philip E. Layton School, named after the man who founded the Montreal Association for the Blind in 1908, has a student body of 45 children ranging from pre-K to high school. The purpose of the school is to teach their students to learn how to function with their disability while giving at the same time and conforming to the curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports (MELS).

There are lessons on how to write and read in Braille, as well as sensory stimulation and rehabilitation programs. Students get to enjoy special recreational programs out-

side of the classroom. One of them is the Skating Buddies program, which is now in its third year. Funded by RBC Royal Bank, Skating Buddies takes place once a week at the Lower Canada College (LCC) arena, and pairs Philip E. Layton students with students from LCC and St. George’s School to teach them the fundamentals of ice skating. There are also outings with students from Vincent Massey Collegiate, which are organized by Spiritual Community Animator Nancy Pasquini.

What also makes Philip E. Layton School such a special place of learning is their two sets of dedicated staff who handle the rehabilitation and educational operations, including a group of students from Vanier College’s Special Care Counselling program, who do stages at the school twice a week. One staffer who has really stood out is Francine Gravel, who has been teaching at Philip E. Layton for 30 years. Ms. Gravel, who is a homeroom teacher for students in Cycle I, II and III and is also a Cycle III math

teacher, can understand what her students go through, because she has been visually impaired since birth, and is the only visu-



Students work on Braille typewriters

ally impaired teacher with the English Montreal School Board. And her pride in her job matches that of her sense of enthusiasm.

“I love teaching here, because I keep on re-inventing myself to meet the challenges that the kids present year after year,” she said. “I put a lot of creativity in my lessons and I never get bored when I teach. I find it very gratifying that when I teach them how to read in Braille, and then they take a book to read at home; that’s when I know that I have

done my job.”

One of Ms. Gravel’s satisfied students is 11-year-old Gregory Krychman, who has been attending Philip E. Layton for five years. “I like going to this school because I get the chance to hang out with some of my friends,” he says. “I also like learning how to write and read in Braille in Ms. Francine’s class. Because of that, I got to learn about dinosaurs and reptiles.”

Gregory also likes taking drama therapy class with other students his age because they get to act out stories based on what has happened in their everyday life. An avid Montreal Canadiens fan (his favourite player is Carey Price), Gregory hopes to follow his love of sports as a career move by becoming a professional sports announcer.

Although she has a straight education background, Ms. Ciccarelli believes that her years as an administrator at Philip E. Layton School has been stimulating and challenging, “I enjoy it here very much. The children here have the power to let you understand a whole other side of life, especially for someone who didn’t usually have the opportunity to be in contact with people who have special needs.”



Depression in children and adolescents

By Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D.

Depression has been recognized as occurring in younger children. Children with special needs are at particular risk. In fact, depression has been found to occur more often in children with learning difficulties, anxiety disorders, and conduct disorders, among other needs. Because of the challenges they face, children with special needs are more likely at risk because their difficulties lead to low self-esteem and perceptions of low self-worth. For these reasons, it is particularly relevant for parents of children with special needs to be sensitized to depression and to know how to look for the signs in order to act more readily.

Depression, in general, is characterized by a number of symptoms, not simply one. Even though childhood is a time of change, the most important symptoms to look for in

children involve any significant changes in their behaviour. One of the most characteristic symptoms of depression in children is a loss of pleasure in things that they once enjoyed. Changes in appetite or sleep, whether increased or decreased, should be monitored. Other symptoms include, but are not limited to, irritability, low energy, poor self-esteem, withdrawal (i.e., tends to be alone more often), extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure, thoughts of suicide and/or self-harm; changes in or difficulties with friends, physical complaints (e.g., headaches) and difficulties in concentrating.

When such symptoms are noted, then a parent must speak to the paediatrician to determine an appropriate course of action. Usually a physical examination is needed to

ensure that there are no medical conditions affecting the child (e.g. virus or thyroid) and to discuss possible medical options. Psychological therapy is another vital component which may differ depending on the circumstances of the child (e.g., age of child, severity of depression) and the environment (e.g., traumatic experience, family constellation). For instance, younger children, or children with weak verbal skills, are likely best served with less verbal forms of therapy such as play or art therapy. For children with depression, the family plays a vital role. The family will need to become informed about depression and may be asked to participate in the therapy portion of the treatment.

Depression is highly treatable, and almost everyone treated effectively can be helped. However, if left untreated, a depression may

lead to further dysfunction in the child that may have long-term consequences, such as increased risk of re-occurrence, suicide, and other difficulties. In Quebec, we have one of the highest rates of suicide in youth in the world. Therefore, we all must be particularly attentive to our children and adolescents.

For more information on depression visit: <http://www.nasponline.org/>, <http://www.aacap.org/>. To find a psychologist near you for treatment consult: <http://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/>

Dr. Despina Vassiliou is an EMSB school psychologist.



Support for the LD/ADHD Student

Achieving Success Through a School Team Approach

By Elizabeth Shoiry

Just recently, a young 22-year-old female student was referred to me. She had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder-Inattentive subtype. A learning disability was also suspected, hence the reason for the referral. She arrived for her appointment rather apprehensive and anxious. As standard procedure, an intake developmental, family, educational and health history was taken.

The young woman indicated that this was to be her fifth year in CEGEP, and she was not yet sure if the CEGEP she attended would allow her to complete her studies. You see, in the four years of studies, she only passed four or five subjects, although for the most part she was a full-time student. With tears flowing down her cheek, she confided that she had a “nervous breakdown” and was under psychiatric care only a year or so ago for depression and anxiety. Sense of shame and embarrassment was evident, as she reported years of difficulty in school, both academic and social.

During our conversation, I noted that certain words were not pronounced correctly. She seemed to have difficulty with certain sounds, both expressively and receptively. Her parents had sought out professional

help during her elementary years and the solution to her problem was to have her repeat a grade level, which she did.

The young lady reported that she managed to graduate from a rather challenging private school, despite her difficulties. But now, regardless of her efforts and determination, she was failing. If this were an isolated case, it would not be cause to worry.

When the Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec approached me to give a talk on achieving student success, I jumped at the opportunity. You see, working extensively with families, I have found that parents too often do not know what steps to take if their exceptional child is failing to achieve success in a regular classroom.

Elizabeth Shoiry is a licensed psychologist and guidance counsellor, currently in private practice and employed as a school psychologist at the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. To read this entire story, please go to www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations and click on Support for the LD/ADHD Student.



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Child Living with Down Syndrome inspires the community

By Wendy Singer

Atara Stolovitsky's brilliant smile and energy are nothing short of infectious. She was born with Down Syndrome, or trisomy 21, a chromosomal disorder caused by the presence of all or part of an extra 21st chromosome, resulting in physical and cognitive disabilities.

Thirteen-year-old Atara communicates with American Sign Language and photographs, using minimal English language. She attends Summit School, which services over 450 students ranging in age from four to 21 with cognitive and developmental disabilities. “We always look for what kids can do, not what they can't do,” says the school's director Gloria Cherney. “We strive to awaken

their potential. Atara's needs are easily met at Summit, with a plethora of classes and the school's multidisciplinary team of therapists. She has learned important life skills such as keeping pace while walking with her group and following a pictorial recipe. We love having Atara here and watching her develop and grow.”

Summit School also continues to grow, having introduced a creative arts program and satellite classes at various EMSB schools. When speaking of Atara, Down Syndrome is used only as a diagnostic tool. It does not define who she is. “Her accomplishments are measured in her enjoyment of life,” says her mother Erica Tencer “It's in her smile, the look on her face. If we suggest a stop for a croissant and that's what she wants, her excitement is palpable. That's all the success we need.”

Every weekend, Atara's parents document their activities with photographs. One highlight for Atara is showing her classmates these photos. Atara is living a vibrant life as a contributing member to society. As her father Jonathan Silver eloquently expresses, “It takes a community to raise a child. In Atara's case, a child is raising a community.” This was evident last December, when Atara had her Bat Mitzvah, an unprecedented event in her community. Atara recited prayers in American Sign Language while her peers read from the Torah on her behalf. For this milestone to occur, Atara's mentors and teachers refocused the curriculum from reading Hebrew to logistics and lessons that would be meaningful to her. In return, this stu-



Atara Stolovitsky

dent's joy, commitment and determination touched all, reinforcing how much she has to give and teach, and how much we can accomplish together if we are open and creative.

Always on the go, Atara takes advantage of the many resources available, be it the Friendship Circle, Y Cycle for Special Needs, Camp B'nai Brith, or rhythmic gymnastics, horseback riding and track and field, which maintain her muscle strength. Several years ago, Atara inspired her mother to make a career change. Tencer, who used to be a photographer, is now a therapeutic recreation specialist. “I want people to know that there are children living with Down Syndrome who have good, full lives,” she notes. “Nobody should feel alone. That's why I want to share our experience, our passion, our joy.”



Family maintains positive attitude despite devastating disease

At a time in their lives when they should have been proudly cheering on their young sons' first steps, Roger Laforest and Lucie Boudreau were instead sadly puzzled as to why Francis and Simon kept falling with each attempt to walk. It seemed to be a milestone they could not reach.

"When we took the kids to their pediatrician to ask why they could not learn to walk, he suspected Morquio disease right away," says Roger. "The disease was confirmed after a visit to the genetics department of the Montreal Children's Hospital of the McGill University Health Centre."

For Francis, now 16 years old, and Simon, now 14 years old, their diagnosis was just the beginning of a life filled with operation after operation and struggles most other children their age would not face. Morquio Syndrome is a very rare genetic disease. It is estimated to occur in one out of every 200,000 births. As with other recessively inherited genetic disorders like cystic fibrosis or phenylketonuria, both parents have to carry the same defective gene to pass the condition on to their child. The chance of having a child with this disease, if both parents are carriers, is one in four. Roger and Lucie have an older son who did not inherit the disease.

Morquio disease comes in two different forms, but the basic premise is people with this disease lack an enzyme that breaks



Rogers Laforest with his sons Francis and Simon

down certain sugar molecules, therefore abnormally large amounts of that complex sugar build up leading to mostly skeletal involvement in type A and combined skeletal and neurodegenerative involvement in type B. Symptoms usually start between ages one and three and these can include mildly coarse facial features, a large head (macrocephaly), short stature with a particularly short trunk, misshapen hands and feet with hyperextensible joints.

With time, spinal, cardiorespiratory and

corneal involvement will be observed. Both boys are about one metre tall. Francis weighs 23 kgs and Simon, 30 kgs, about the size of your average six-year-old. "Simon is currently in a wheelchair because of his bowed-legs, which make it hard for him to walk. He is also a bit heavy now, so his frame can't hold the weight," says Roger. "Francis recently had an operation to straighten his legs so he is walking on his own but

because he is still growing they will most likely revert back to being bow-legged."

The boys also have strength and motor problems with their ankles and wrists, which causes difficulty with opening jars, going to the washroom and dressing themselves. Over the past 15 years, together they have undergone 25 operations to correct bone structure, heart problems, eyesight and more. Each time they have an operation they lose two to three months of school, so they are currently a bit behind. The disease does not affect their mental ability, it just limits them physically. Because they are small in stature, their father says they play like 10 year olds, preferring games for smaller bodies. "They play some sports, like hockey in their wheelchairs and they love to swim," says Roger. "They also play X-box, watch movies and they have an electric tricycle. It goes up to 20 km/hr and Simon usually goes that fast—he is not afraid of anything!"

For more on this very special story, please go to www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations and click on Morquio disease.

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(Continued from page 7)

she relied on a white cane to help her navigate, but the college's massive size sparked a need for a guide dog. Furthermore, by that point, Martiniello had lost all of her vision following several unsuccessful surgeries. Watching Shirby snoring on the floor next to Martiniello, it's hard to imagine that this golden Labrador knows her way around Dawson, and now McGill, better than most students there.

"I just give her directions and she will get me there. She really memorizes her routes well. By the second day of McGill, she knew how to get to all my classes," said Martiniello.

Despite it taking six years for Martiniello to graduate from Dawson's two year program due to health and heavy course work, she

didn't give up on her dream of attending McGill. She began there in the fall and is majoring in English literature and minoring in education. Her dream is to be a teacher.

"I don't know what kind of teacher I want to be yet, but I know I want to work with a higher age group," said Martiniello.

When asked what she likes to do in her free time, Martiniello smiles and says that during the semester she just tries to "keep up" and balance school, friends, and her part time job as a research assistant at Dawson. Her job entails looking at how technology and other learning tools help or hinder the ability of postsecondary students with disabilities to learn. As a future teacher, Martiniello has some personal advice to offer. "Teachers have to realize that there's a lot of diversity among students with disabilities," she says.

"Speak to the student and try to see what's best for them individually."

Although it depends on the disability, Martiniello thinks that integration into the regular school system is vital for students with disabilities. In terms of parenting, she thinks that parents need to teach their children to be independent from day one. "Parents have to make sure that while they're trying to help their kids succeed, they're not trying to do everything for them," she said.

At the end of the day, when it comes to children with disabilities, Martiniello says it's all about having the right attitude. "It's the attitude that really makes or

breaks who you are," she says. "As soon as you label someone as not being able to do something, you're automatically closing a lot of doors for them."

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Student does not let Muscular Dystrophy stand in his way

By Stuart Nulman

For 19-year-old Gift Samuel Tshuna, who has been living with Muscular Dystrophy since birth, having hope and courage are important when it comes to going through life with a disability.

“You shouldn’t let people get you down, but then again, you shouldn’t have to sit at home in your wheelchair and cry about your disability,” he said. “Life is full of challenges, and you have to keep on striving forward, because there are people who are facing bigger problems, but they always manage to overcome them.”

Born in Zimbabwe, Gift and his family moved to Montreal eight years ago and currently reside in Point St. Charles. A graduate of Westmount High School, Gift never allowed his disability to prevent him from enjoying a full, active life as a student there. He took an active role in the school’s leadership and music programs, and sang at several school events. He also spoke to students at the Mackay Centre’s satellite school about the importance of perseverance, as well as to Westmount’s Grade 7 students about what living with a disability is all about. Last fall, Gift was one of the 16 graduating high school students who were selected by



Gift Samuel Tshuna is congratulated (left to right) by Westmount High School Principal Michael Cristofaro, EMSB Regional Director Paola Miniaci and Chairman Angela Mancini. (photo by Howard Kay).

the English Montreal School Board to each receive a \$500 scholarship for perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds and personal difficulties.

Gift currently attends Dawson College,

where he is enrolled in the Law, Society and Justice Program, and hopes to study immigration law at McGill University after he completes his studies at Dawson. He spends four days a week at Dawson’s downtown Montreal campus – usually between 8 a.m.

and 4 p.m. – and attends classes with a scribe provided by the school, who helps him take down notes during the lectures. The school also accommodates Gift with his studies by scanning his textbooks, so that he could read them on

the computer, as well as providing him with voice recognition software and an on-screen keyboard. He also gets around the campus in an electric wheelchair, complete with a cell phone and an attached small screen that monitors the chair’s speed and battery power.

When he’s not in the classroom, Gift also spends his time at Dawson as vice-president of the Access Club, a group that gives students with various physical disabilities a chance to interact with each other and students who are not disabled through a series of programs. The club held a scavenger hunt this past Valentine’s Day and plans to have a wheelchair awareness day in April, in which non-disabled students spend an entire day getting around campus in a wheelchair. The purpose of this event is to sensitize them to what it’s like for the disabled to use a wheelchair as their only means of mobility.

Although Gift is a very friendly, sociable person who has made a lot of friends both at Westmount and Dawson and has easily adapted to student life at a CEGEP, he does experience some instances of prejudice due to his disability, and does whatever he can to break down the barriers. “During my first semester at Dawson, when I went to my first class, some of the other students began to feel a little uncomfortable when they saw me in my wheelchair,” he said. “That’s just human nature, so I let them know who I am, so I can get people’s minds to open up. You have to show people that you’re the same, that you’re not that much different.

“In a way, we are all disabled, although not necessarily physically disabled,” he added. “That can extend to gossiping, yelling and raising your voice to people, and many other little things. It’s okay to be curious and ask about people with disabilities, but we have to do away with what people assume about disabilities and what they don’t know about it.”

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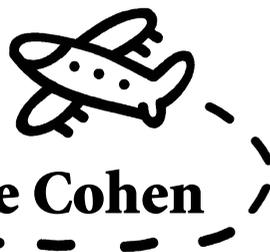
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Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



Greater Fort Lauderdale area bids Spring Break image adieu

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla - A destination once famous – or infamous – as the top U.S. Spring Break haven, Greater Fort Lauderdale today stands as South Florida's transformation story and one of the most revitalized destinations in the country. During its peak in the mid-1980s, Spring Break in Greater Fort Lauderdale attracted some 400,000 college students over a six-week period, a non-stop party where motel railings were used as pool diving boards and the area's beautiful golden sand beaches were left littered with beer cans and cigarette butts.

It took a dedicated effort to bid Spring Break adieu. Despite concerns from local businesses that thrived on the annual phenomena, a public and private sector initiative was created to rid the destination of Spring Break for good. The hospitality industry expanded, modernized and improved. Millions were spent on new hotel developments and upgrades. New facilities such as the Broward Center for the Performing Arts and the 600,000-square-foot Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center were built.

Performing Arts Centre is Accessible

At the Broward Centre, Assisted Listening Devices are available for all performances at the Guest Services Center, located in the Pacers Lobby Main Entrance. There is no charge for the device, but a valid major credit card is required. Special seating locations for persons with disabilities may be arranged in advance by calling (954)

462-0222. A TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) number is open during regular box office hours: (954) 468-3283. Open Captioned (OC) and Audio Described (AD) performances are offered for selected Broadway shows as are sign language interpreted performances. Wheelchair-accessible restrooms are located on the upper and lower orchestra levels, the lower mezzanine and the lower balcony in the Au-Rene Theater, as well as the upper lobby level of the Amaturio Theater. Companion restrooms are available on the upper and lower orchestra levels of the Au-Rene Theater.

Airport is Most Welcoming

Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport – which now stands as the fastest growing large airport in the U.S. over the past decade – was greatly expanded and Port Everglades emerged as the country's top luxury cruise port.

If you are travelling with special needs children, the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport is most welcoming. Special care has been taken in the design and construction of airport facilities, including parking garages and terminals, to ensure safe, convenient and easy access for travelers with disabilities. The airport provides an innovative feature at all parking facilities for passengers with upper body mobility limitations. This unique feature allows patrons to access the parking lots without pulling a ticket. Vehicle information is recorded via speakerphone and remote camera and parking charges are calculated upon exit. Once inside, all on-site garage facilities feature clearly designated disabled parking spaces, high-top van parking, curb cuts, ramps, level entrances, elevators and automatic doors, elevator control panels, incorporating Braille, with adjusted height requirements and terminal shuttle buses (with boarding areas conveniently located close to disabled parking spaces) that are wheelchair accessible and operate continuously throughout the day.

Travelers with special needs have numerous ground transportation options at the airport. Yellow cab taxis provide transportation for passengers with folding wheel-

chairs at no additional charge. Wheelchair accessible vans are also available at no additional charge, but advance notice is recommended.

GO Airport Shuttle provides wheelchair lift-equipped vans at no additional charge. With advance notice, most car rental companies provide rental cars equipped with hand controls. Tri Rail feeder buses and Broward County Transit (BCT) buses accommodate riders in wheelchairs.

For passengers who are hearing impaired, visual paging monitors are available at the lower and upper levels of each terminal. All public restrooms in the ticket lobbies, concourses and baggage claim areas are wheelchair-accessible. Amplified telephones are located in the ticket lobbies, concourses and baggage claim areas.

You can download a copy of the Broward County Disability Guide at <http://www.broward.org/disability/eoi00207.pdf>.

Greater Fort Lauderdale Transformed

Today, Spring Break has been transformed into beach chic. Greater Fort Lauderdale's Blue Wave beaches – so certified for their outstanding beauty and cleanliness – have been complemented by upscale hotels and a wide variety of top attractions and activities. Casual, yet sophisticated, Greater Fort Lauderdale is South Florida's renaissance story. Trendy boutiques and luxury retailers line Las Olas Boulevard, Greater Fort Lauderdale's unofficial "Main Street," and the upscale Galleria mall is the result of a recent \$100 million renovation. More than 60 golf courses make the destination a golfer's paradise. Attractions such as Butterfly World – the largest butterfly aviary in North America – and the natural wonder of the Everglades bring visitors in touch with nature and native culture. A three-tiered coral reef system and more than 75 wreck sites draw novice and expert scuba divers, while kayaking, parasailing, kiteboarding and snorkeling entertain those looking to



This is one of several services for people with disabilities.

stay above water.

Need proof of Greater Fort Lauderdale's transformation? Just head to the Intracoastal Waterway, where some 42,000 registered yachts make Greater Fort Lauderdale the yachting capital of the world. Or see an acclaimed exhibit at the Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale. Or dine at one of the destination's trendy nightspots or chic restaurants.

Tandem Biking for the Visually Impaired

The Broward County Parks and Recreation Division's Special Populations Section develops and implements a wide variety of year-round recreation and leisure programs, special events, and services to meet the interests and needs of children, teens, adults, and seniors with disabilities. Programs are designed to develop, enhance, and/or maintain leisure skills, motor skills, socialization, and overall well-being as well as to promote fun and enjoyment. The Tandem Bicycle Program, for instance, is designed for adults who are blind or visually impaired. This six-week program offers basic biking skills, leisure rides, fun, and socialization. Call Special Populations at 954-357-8160/8170 to find out when the next program is scheduled.

Mom of Special Needs Child Lauds Wannado City

Two of my favorite Greater Fort Lauderdale destinations relate to shopping. Sawgrass Mills at 12801 W. Sunrise Blvd. is simply Florida's largest retail and entertainment center, featuring 350 name-brand stores, outlets, restaurants, cinemas and entertainment venues and home to Wannado City, America's first indoor role-playing theme park for kids! Here is what one parent of a special needs child observed from her visit.

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Suzanne, whose son has a language deficit, disability was amazed when she found him playing the role of anchorman during a field trip to Wannado City. While tackling the cue cards, he was cheered on by his friends who often help him communicate and have come to motivate one another to overcome their personal disabilities. "There are no labels here, so there is no judgment made," she said. "These children really take pride in watching each other strive and learn."

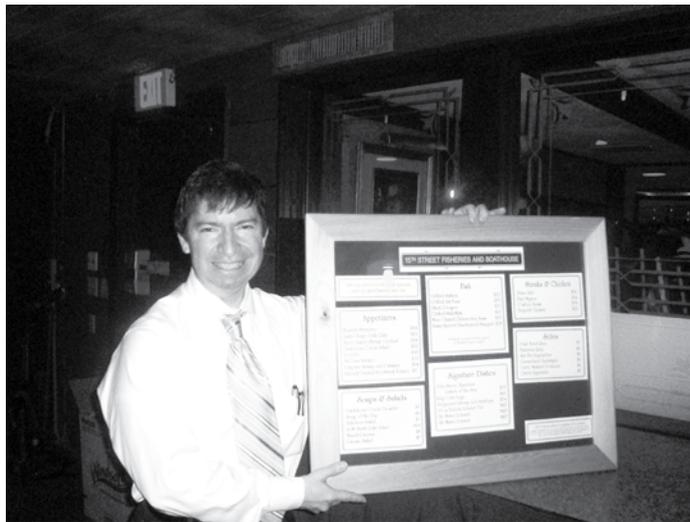
For the Sawgrass Mills itself, wheelchairs are available at Customer Service Entry 2 (near the Rainforest Café) and Entry 3 (near Burlington Coat Factory). Non-electric wheelchairs are available at no charge on a first come, first serve basis.

The Swap Shop, at 3291 W. Sunrise Blvd is the largest indoor-outdoor flea market in South Florida, featuring an air-conditioned entertainment and food court area and a 14 screen drive-in theatre.

The new Greater Fort Lauderdale is a vibrant, year-round destination offering more than 33,000 hotel rooms at a variety of hotels, resorts, and Superior Small Lodgings, plus several new upscale resorts opening soon. More than 10 million annual visitors enjoy Greater Fort Lauderdale's 23 miles of Blue Wave Beaches, 300+ miles of inland waterways that run from the Intracoastal to the Everglades, 4,000 restaurants, top shopping, and a thriving arts and culture scene. For more information, contact the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau at (800) 22-SUNNY or visit www.sunny.org

15th Street Fisheries

Many people I know have been raving about the 15th Street Fisheries (www.15streetfisheries.com), a Fort Lau-



Guillermo Puthon of the 15th Street Fisheries displays the restaurant's trademark menu board.

providing a spectacular view of the Intracoastal Waterway. In addition to their world-famous award-winning cuisine, the location is by far one of the best in South Florida. You just can't get closer to the water or to the nautical history of the area. Dine here above the docks where a daily parade of boats keeps the vistas fresh. We sat in a room called "The Porch." Manager Guillermo Puthon, who just a few years ago worked on the cruises, pointed to some large fish swimming below. The large tarpons are fed by customers throughout each day. This is quite a sight, especially at night. Lights have conveniently been installed at the bottom of the water. There are some other pretty fish to view upon your entry. And just in case you wondered, there is no fishing permitted here.

Against miles of open water and sky, the nautical show unfolds. Gulls tip their wings to yachts sailing the calm waters of the Intracoastal. Giant silver tarpons leap along the dock. Boaters in the know tie up at the pier, a favorite table in sight. Winter, spring, summer and fall, the 15th Street Fisheries - just a water taxi ride away - always feels like home.

Emphasizing seafood, the restaurant offers a casual dining environment on the lower floor, featuring sandwiches, oysters and peel and eat shrimp. Upstairs dining is more formal, with an abundance of seafood appetizers and entrees, along with steaks, ribs, prime rib, and chicken as well as exotic foods from around the world and local specialties.

Homemade breads, a specialty, come with a cheese-and-chive spread and they are served by a "bread girl." Grilled mahi-mahi and alligator are among the more than 50 entrées. Our servers Rich and Veronica

were superb, welcoming us with a unique menu displayed on a large billboard. Rich provided detailed explanations of each dish. We began with salads and some clam chowder and then decided to share an order of stone crabs as an appetizer. For the main course, three of us split a pair of two pound Maine lobsters which were beautifully pre-cut making the dining experience that much easier. The key lime pie for dessert was outstanding.

The restaurant is handicapped accessible, with an elevator on the ground floor. If you wish to dine on the ground floor, there is plenty of room to navigate a wheelchairs

in the different stations as well as directly on to the dock. The 15th Street Fisheries is located on SE 15th Street (of course) in the heart of Fort Lauderdale. From I-95, take I-595 east to US-1 (Federal Highway). Travel north on US-1 for 1.5 miles to SE 15th Street. Turn right and go all the way to the end of the street. You'll find them inside Lauderdale Marina. Reservations are required for dining upstairs. Call 954-763-2777. Valet parking is free.

Vancouver Update

Further to my travel column in the last edition about Vancouver, the Tourism Bureau sent me a bit of an update. They wish to inform readers that Vancouver (and all of British Columbia in fact) are working hard

to become the most accessible travel destination in North America. Through 2010 Legacies Now, Tourism Vancouver is currently "taking an inventory" of all our hotels, restaurants and attractions to determine accessibility levels for people with physical, visual or hearing impairments," says Amber Zoe Sessions, a travel media relations specialist with the Tourism Bureau. Log on to www.2010legaciesnow.com/accessible_tourism and www.tourismvancouver.com/visitors/travel_tips/accessibility#icons.

Mike Cohen's email address is info@mikecohen.ca. Log on to his travel advice column at www.sandboxworld.com/travel.

Special Needs: A Layperson's Definition

By Lori Rubin

The term special needs has different connotations for different people, be they professionals or para-professionals, teachers or parents. At the English Montreal School Board the term special needs generally refers to students (from pre-k to age 21) who, because of certain deficits, disorders or challenges they may face, require additional support, resources or materials in order to be successful within their school setting.

A Grade 4 student with a learning disability who requires adaptations to her weekly spelling test; a Secondary II visually-impaired student who needs access to large-print material; a Grade 6 student with behavioural difficulties who participates in an anger management program; run by the special education technician in his school; and a kindergarten student with autism who relies on the daily sup-

port and supervision of his child care worker, are all examples of children with special needs.

The degree of difficulty that these students experience is as varied as the differences found within the "regular" population of students. Likewise, each of these students has strengths and areas of interest that are unique to them. The challenge that exists for the individuals who support these students (classroom teachers, resource teachers, specialists, school board professionals and child care workers), is to try to determine which method, tools or programs are the best "fit". This would serve to reduce the frustration the students may encounter as a result of their academic, behavioural, social, developmental, cognitive and/or physical delay, while enhancing their learning experience in their school environment. It is heart-warming to see the gains that so many of our special needs students make when the right elements fall into place. Each one of these students can learn and succeed in their own way, at their own pace, and it is in recognizing this fact that we can make a significant difference in the lives of these very special kids.

Lori Rubin is a behaviour management specialist at the EMSB.



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