



Preparing students for

life beyond the classroom

FOCUS ON PHOENIX

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As the school year comes to a close, I wanted to thank our faculty and staff, our parents, and most especially, our students for yet another great year. This was a particularly memorable year for me, as it was my first year as Executive Director. My 23 years at The Phoenix Center has given me incredible perspective, training, and preparedness for stepping into the large

shoes of our Founder and former Executive Director, Dr. Gibbia, and I am grateful for this opportunity. I am honored to serve this educational community as the Executive Director and am excited to bring The Phoenix Center into the next generation.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all of you for your tremendous support, partnership, and contributions during this transition year and look forward to beginning a new chapter in our history together.

With gratitude,
Julie Mower, M.A.Ed.
Executive Director

The mission of The Phoenix Center, working in partnership with families and community, is to develop the potential of each student with developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum ages five through 21 and to provide customized, unique and individualized programs aligned with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. Promoting the development of the whole student, we care for, educate and empower our students and graduates so that they will develop life-centered skills which will prepare them for life beyond the classroom.



CASINO NIGHT



On Friday, April 28th, we hosted our Annual Casino Night Fundraiser with great success! Attendance was just over 200 people, and we were able to raise funds for The Friends of The Phoenix Center Foundation.

With your help, Casino Night generated funding that will go directly to the programs that are not covered by tuition dollars—the programs that make The Phoenix Center so special as they provide an all-inclusive educational environment for our students. Programs like our Consumer Family Life Skills, Community-Based Instruction, Horticulture, Pet Therapy, Horseback Riding, as well as our Leisure and Recreation programs will benefit from this fundraiser.

In large part, our title sponsors, [Nutley Kia](#) and the [Knights of York](#) made this event possible. Additionally, we were fortunate to have had [Columbia Bank](#) as our gaming sponsor, [DeMeola Zawacki Mingione & Co. LLC](#) as our evening and entertainment sponsor, as well as a dozen other wonderful benefactor, dining, and beverage sponsors.

“I have always had a soft spot in my heart for The Phoenix Center,” said Jim Russomano, President of [Nutley Kia](#) and Board member. He continued, “If you see the way they work with these students, you can’t help but be impressed and grateful.”

[Knights of York](#) Principals Ken Rein and Andy Cioffi were also on hand to support the event and have a little fun. Andy said, “The Phoenix Center is just a special place, serving some really great students that would never have this kind of experience and personal attention anywhere else.” Ken added, “Unlike other non-profits, we see exactly where our contributions go here.

It’s a great feeling to be able to make such a direct and significant impact on the lives of these students and on the organization that serves them.”

Thank you all for sponsoring, attending, contributing to, and working at the event! The saying “it takes a village” is about right when it comes to these events. The efforts and contributions of our Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers are so very appreciated. I’d like to acknowledge our Casino Committee, comprised of staff, community members, parents, and Board members. ■



*Members of our decorating committee with two Novartis volunteers who helped us get ready for our big night!
From left to right: Kim, Maria, Sinead, Leon, Kerry, Julie*

CASINO COMMITTEE Jonathan Andolino, Tim Carlen, Barbara Chiarieri, Elizabeth Copti, Jeff Hecker, Leon Morton, Julie Mower, Katie Passarotti, Marc Restaino, Andrew Schuck, Kerry Vara-Landolfi, Kim Wynbeek

NOVARTIS VOLUNTEERS Sinead Kelly and Maria Rolo

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: BILLY

The Phoenix Center's very own Billy, a 17-year-old student at The Phoenix Center, has been working with Eric Francais, the Founder of website design and digital marketing firm, [E-Outbox](#). Eric has volunteered to come to The Phoenix Center to work with Billy and share his wealth of knowledge in the field. During these weekly Tuesday visits, Billy is learning the basics of website design and development.

Eric was quoted as saying, "Billy has great analytical aptitude, as well as an interest in gaming and programming. I enjoy working with The Phoenix Center. It is a great organization that provides real-life outlets to youngsters and young adults with special needs. I enjoy giving back to the community that has allowed me to build a strong clientele. Mentoring Billy has been rewarding to me. He has such high potential."

Vinnie Sangemino, our supported employment coach, adds, "This is such a great "real-life" experience for Billy. We so appreciate the work that Eric does with him. I have seen Billy flourish and grow as he continues to learn valuable computer skills." ■

"This is such a great "real-life" experience for Billy."



NUTLEY JAYCEES AND PHOENIX HONORS JOHN MONACO

We are thrilled to announce that John Monaco, owner of [A Personal Touch Florist](#), located at 343 Franklin Avenue, Nutley, was recognized as the business honoree by the Nutley Jaycees, for their 2017 Distinguished Service Award on April 5th.

Our "businessman of the year" has been a long-time supporter of The Phoenix Center, coming to school to mentor our students and teach them the art of floral arrangement. As you can see by the wide smiles of the students in these pictures, this was a highlight of their school year. John reflects on his experience by saying, Working with the students "blows me away! I love seeing how excited they get. The joy we all feel creating something beautiful together is amazing. I love doing it." Thank you John for your time, talent, willingness to teach, and of course, your beautiful flower donations at our Casino Night! ■



COLUMBIA BANK GIVES OF THEIR TIME!

On February 24th, [Columbia Bank](#), as part of its community volunteer program, sent over 25 of its staffers, including Bank President, Tom Kemly, to The Phoenix Center to beautify our school. Columbia Bank has been helping make our hallways and rooms beautiful for the past 16 years. This year, they painted the second floor hallways and one of our conference rooms. We are so grateful to the Columbia "painting SWAT team" for their help and sense of community.



973.542.0743
info@thephoenixcenternj.org
thephoenixcenternj.org



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Thank you all in advance for your contributions to our Annual Appeal. Please visit our website and click on "[donate](#)".