



Preparing students for

life beyond the classroom

FOCUS ON PHOENIX

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Another year has passed for The Phoenix Center, and we have a lot to be grateful for—welcome to our “Reasons to S.M.I.L.E.” issue! In this issue, we’ll take you through all of the contributions made by and for our Phoenix families (students, families, donors, and friends like you)—from our critically important grants, to our annual Casino Night fundraiser, and to the press coverage we have received on the work that we do. Your support has enabled us to better See Miracles in Life Every Day.

I’d like to send a special note of thanks to our Casino Night 2019 Sponsors—Knights of York, DeMeola, Zawacki and Mingione, Edward Jones Investments, JB Autism Consulting, Inserra, Railroad Construction, Partners in Caring, Delta Marcliff, Kraemer Burns, Columbia Bank, Hudson Tank Terminals, McInttee, Fusaro, Del Corral and World Insurance Associates. Together, we raised over \$35,000 for the essential programs and services for our students. These contributions will enable us to continue to provide enhancements in the areas of instructional technology, leisure and recreation, and transition services.

Our *Staff Spotlight* in this issue is on one of our most integral staff members, Marc Restaino, who you will often see with a smile and a camera—but his ongoing and long-time contributions go much further than that. Please enjoy your summer and feel free to reach out to me directly if there is a topic, an individual, or an organization that you would like us to feature. We look forward to seeing you in September and spending another fabulous year together. Until then, be well, be safe, stay connected, and S.M.I.L.E.! 😊

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 Student Learning 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.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: GETTING TO KNOW MARC RESTAINO

It takes many strong hands and thoughtful minds to ensure The Phoenix Center runs smoothly and offers our students the very best experience. To better understand one of the myriad figures who uplifts our school daily, we're proud to introduce Marc Restaino, Integrative Technology Coordinator and co-manager of our vital Community-Based Instruction program. In this introspective conversation, we get to know the man behind the title, to hear about his favorite Phoenix tradition, what he hopes students walk away with, and how impactful he believes The Phoenix Center is in the lives of its students and their families.

Tell me about your journey—how did you get into special needs education?

I graduated college with an English Literature major with a concentration in Creative Writing. I moved to Philly because I wanted to live in a city, and I worked full time at Moriarty's Irish Pub. I figured I would eventually write a novel. I never did write my novel, but I did move back to NJ. My brother-in-law, who was in education, told me about The Phoenix Center. I happily filled out an application to be a paraprofessional, and I'm fortunate to say I was hired on the spot. I'm now in my fourteenth year!

I was 24 when I was hired, and every couple of years my role changed. I was an employment specialist, facilitated therapeutic programs like horseback riding and swimming, and assisted in the expansion of the Consumer Family Life Skills program. Then I went back to school for my masters degree (a dual certification teaching program from Montclair State University).

Currently, I chair our Program Committee, which is a cross-disciplinary set of professionals who focus on the expansion of existing programs or development of

new programs. In addition, I have a particular interest and love of technology and media. This interest brought me to my role as the Integrative Technology Coordinator and Social Media specialist. It's great because as a result of my role, I have a rich institutional knowledge and get to share our story and make connections beyond our immediate educational community.

What separates The Phoenix Center from others in how it supports and nourishes students with special needs?

The relationships that we develop with students, parents, families (extended and direct), and each other, is what sets us apart. Our educational community is truly a family. We are research-based but, when it comes right down to it, we love our kids and their families like they are our own. The love and relationships are palpable when you walk into the building.

Do you have a favorite school tradition or activity?

I love when Santa comes—I love seeing the kids happy as they receive gifts. But if I have to pick a true favorite it would be the annual Formal, our version of a "prom." I enjoy seeing how much the students like getting dressed up and being with each other; it's very special. That would probably be my favorite tradition.

Is there an accomplishment you're particularly proud of during your time at The Phoenix Center?

Through the program committee, I helped facilitate our Community-Based Instruction (CBI) program expansion. It was a huge leap because we were increasing our average time out in the community from once or twice a month to once or twice a week in most classrooms. In addition, we asked our staff to focus on academics and data collection while they were out in the community with the students. We are very multi-disciplinary and you will see a variety of our Related Service Providers out there in the community with the students, as well. This expansion to CBI really allowed Nutley and our surrounding community to “see us,” which was so important both for the school and for our students. It is great to have people in the community welcome our kids, which unfortunately is not always the case. We want to see our kids form relationships with the world beyond The Phoenix Center and be better for it.

After graduating, what do you hope your students take away from The Phoenix Center?

I hope our students deeply feel that they had a supportive environment here, and know that they always have a place to come back to if they need it. Most importantly, we hope former students are willing and able to make their mark on a new place, and I hope that they and their families still count on us as a resource.

How are parents integrated into the culture and education at The Phoenix Center?

We're lucky to have Partners in Caring, our parent association, that supports us by bringing assemblies to our school, holiday shopping opportunities for our students and a nice community of parents to build relationships with. We keep open dialogue with parents via a communication book that goes to and from school and home on a daily basis.

We also started doing home visits to help families who need specific academic and behavioral support in the home. Teachers, curriculum specialists, behaviorists, counselors, and more will partner with our families and make recommendations. This process really helps further our family-centered approach to education.

Lastly, we've got an incredible Family Night Out program that provides parent support and social events (both in school and off-site) throughout the school year—each year, more and more families take advantage of these opportunities.

As a not-for-profit school, how important are your donors and patrons?

Our donors are so incredibly important to the work we do and the mission we serve. We want to provide as much as we possibly can for our students and families, and without our donors and constituents we just wouldn't be able to do all of it! The support is fantastic, and the acknowledgment by the community that we are doing something so meaningful is very encouraging. ■



JULIE MOWER REPRESENTS THE PHOENIX CENTER

Julie shared best practices and recommendations about how to approach summer planning with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

- FOIS1 News interviews Stacey Cermack & Julie Mower to provide us with summer tips for kids with autism spectrum disorder. Watch the full feature at FOIS1 News: <https://bit.ly/2XTKMj3>
- Sarah Lee Kessler interviews Julie Mower on summertime tips for kids with ASD: <https://bit.ly/2WCWBs9>
- Julie Mower shares summer tips for parents of kids with special needs with Chris DeBello on Issues & Ideas Radio: <https://bit.ly/2MY6YHM> ■



A special thanks goes to Neil Conlan of Investors Bank and five of his colleagues for volunteering to decorate for the event.

From left to right in green: Dan White, Luisa DaSilva, Angelos Kouzinos, Maricela Martin, Stacey Goldberg, and Neil Conlan



CASINO NIGHT

On Friday, May 3rd, our Annual Casino Night fundraiser was another great success! Attendance was over 150 people, with 13 sponsors, 45 prizes, and 16 silent auction items that resulted in over \$35,000 of funding for The Friends of The Phoenix Center Foundation!

What an amazing night this was! Many of the programs The Phoenix Center offers are not covered by tuition dollars (i.e., Consumer Family Life Skills, Community-Based Instruction, Horticulture, Horseback Riding, as well as our Leisure and Recreation programs). They, among other programs, will benefit from this fundraiser.

In addition to the sponsors listed earlier in this newsletter, we send special thanks to Doherty Enterprises (The Shannon Rose, Spuntino and Chevy's Fresh Mex) as our Dining sponsors, Villalobos as our Fiesta Cocktail Party sponsor and Andy's Corner Bar for being our Beverage sponsor.

Thank you all for sponsoring, attending, contributing to, and working at the event! The efforts and contributions of our Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and the community at large are so very appreciated. We'd like to acknowledge our Casino Committee, comprised of staff, community members, parents, and Board members as listed below. ■

CASINO COMMITTEE

Ashley Agresti, Jonathan Andolino, Jeff Hecker, Theresa Losi, Leon Morton, Julie Mower, Mayra Pastore, Katie Passarotti, Marc Restaino, Andrew Schuck, Carolyn Sharaway, Kerry Vara-Landolfi and Kim Wynbeek

THANK YOU TO OUR GRANTORS

As a not-for-profit school, we rely on the generous contributions of our sponsors, grantors and individual contributors to provide our student population with state-of-the-art equipment, environments and programs. We would like to give special thanks to the following contributors:



COLUMBIA BANK FOUNDATION awarded The Phoenix Center a \$30,000 grant to enhance our school security. It enabled us to construct a new security entrance and install a new, state-of-the-art visitor management system. Our new secure lobby provides us with well-needed peace of mind. In addition, we thank Sionas Architecture, located in Montclair, NJ, for generously providing the design for this beautiful new space.



Recently, Jane Kurek, Executive Director of Provident Bank Foundation, along with Al Giobbie, SVP/Regional Manager and Michael Kahn, VP/Market Manager of Provident Bank, presented Provident Bank Foundation's Major Grant to The Phoenix Center!



DANIEL G. GALORENZO FOUNDATION supported the development of an interactive technology program to honor the memory of Danny Galorezo. The Daniel G. Galorezo Foundation was founded in 2003 by Mr. Allen Galorezo, in honor of his son, Danny, and is a steadfast supporter of The Phoenix Center. With its own dedicated room that includes a projected interactive floor experience and Photon robots, we will utilize coordinated therapy treatments while strengthening social skills and enhancing our current Robot-Humanoid-Interaction (RHI) program.

PROVIDENT BANK FOUNDATION helped us acquire best-in-class hearing and testing equipment. The Phoenix Center used the grant to purchase a Welch Allyn Spot Vision Screener and an Oto-Acoustic Emissions (OAE) Screener.

This equipment will enable us to deliver hearing and vision screening services to our students and comply with the New Jersey Department of Education screening standards. Vision and hearing screenings and treatment are important for the proper development of speech and language. With early and accurate detection, treatment outcomes are significantly more successful and participation in the learning process is greatly improved! ■



ASAH ART AWARDS GO TO ISMAEL & ZACH

On May 17th, ASAH, a non-profit organization for private schools and agencies in New Jersey presented their annual art awards. Several artists among the 145+ schools for exceptional students from all over the New Jersey area were recognized for their talent.

The Phoenix Center was proud to have two students (Ismael & Zach) represent us in this wonderful program. We are so proud of you both! Keep drawing, painting and creating! ■



8TH ANNUAL TRANSITION & RECREATION SERVICES FAIR

On Friday, March 29, 2019 we hosted our 8th Annual Transition & Recreation Services Fair at The Phoenix Center. This event was created for parents, caregivers, advocates, district case managers, child study teams—anyone working or living with students ages 5-21 that will at some point need transition services in preparation for “life beyond the classroom.” The event featured 36 exhibitors and many attendees, along with Dr. Jim Ball, Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA-D) who presented on “Transition and the Young Adult with Autism.” ■

NEW VAN FOR TRANSITION PROGRAM NEEDED

As part of our transition program, The Phoenix Center is in need of a new van to bring our students into the community. Thus far, we have raised \$6,000 of the \$40,000 needed to purchase this additional vehicle.

You can help by contributing to this worthy cause by donating at <https://bit.ly/2wKwCEA> or emailing Carolyn Sharaway at csharaway@thephoenixcenternj.org.



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