



# Focus on Phoenix

The Phoenix Center is a private nonprofit school committed to offering a well-integrated program focusing on the development and education of the whole child and his/her family. Our team approach provides diversified programming with the emphasis on student independence, social-emotional growth, career development and integrated employment opportunities. The Phoenix Center's primary goal is to assist students five to 21 years of age in developing skills which will maximize their adaptation to everyday life.

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## Student Spotlight

As we look back on how all of our students have grown over the 2008-2009 school year, we are proud to introduce Adolfo J., one of our all-star students, who will be moving with his family to Florida after being a part of The Phoenix Center community for 16 years.

Adolfo came to The Phoenix Center as a three-year-old boy on the autism spectrum who had limited verbal output. He initially communicated using picture symbols and was not able to answer questions or communicate his feelings easily. Now at the age of 19, Adolfo is a sweet, out-going, friendly young man who is active in many of The Phoenix Center's extracurricular activities including: the percussion ensemble, dance troupe, basketball team and drama club, where he often has a leading part in the plays. Adolfo also received the honor of being named Hero of the Month for his hard work, great attitude and desire to help others.



Nancy McDonald, Adolfo's speech therapist of 13 years shared how proud she is of Adolfo's academic and social growth. She said, "I've seen him come out of his shell. As a young child he was closed off, but now he even works as a volunteer at St. Mary's Hospital in Passaic making people feel at ease by handing out magazines. I know that he's worked in a doctor's office as well and has been praised for his politeness and friendly smile there. I've enjoyed watching him grow into a young man and wish him success in the future. I will miss him so much!"

Janna Fabris, Adolfo's teacher, says, "Adolfo wants to make everyone happy. He tries hard to make the right choices in each new situation and strives to immediately fix any mistakes he makes. He is proud to have his homework done on time and I just love having pragmatic conversations with him. I can really see him connecting with me through the conversation."

Adolfo is a huge Yankees fan as well as an avid video game player. He enjoys watching movies and knows just about every actor in every movie he has ever seen. Adolfo loves to draw and is a talented artist as well as an avid reader. He also enjoys math and is often heard to say, "Oh, I get it!" in relation to a new math concept. Above all though, Adolfo loves going to work at the hospital and being able to make others feel at ease by talking to them.

Adolfo's mother, Evelyn notices how he has grown since coming to The Phoenix Center as a little boy, saying, "His speech has developed tremendously. He spoke his first words at The Phoenix Center and I was so shocked. I never expected my son to be able to speak let alone read and write. He loves to work at St. Mary's Hospital and he's a big help to me at home now. He cuts the grass and takes out the garbage. His compassion comes across in all the he does. He's so enthusiastic about performing tasks and works hard at them. He's so outgoing now, he loves acting and painting and expressing himself creatively. He is such a blessing to our family; he has come out of his own world and into ours."

Adolfo plans to enter a new vocational/technical school in Florida as well as begin working in a new doctor's office. He has also been invited to participate in a drama club in his new community.

Adolfo often says that The Phoenix Center community is like his home and we definitely feel that he is and will always be a part of our family.

The Phoenix Center staff works hard to educate and empower every one of our students



**The Phoenix Center  
Administrative Staff**

**Geraldine Gibbia, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

**Douglas A. Berrian, Ed. D.**  
Education Director

**Julie Mower, M.A. Ed.**  
Assistant Principal  
Administration

**Audrey Poggioli, M.A. Ed.**  
Assistant Principal  
Curriculum and Instruction

“The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.”  
~Helen Keller

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Board of Directors**

**Rick Claydon  
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## A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of The Phoenix Center,

The 2008-2009 school year has come to a conclusion amidst a flurry of activity. Looking back over our 18<sup>th</sup> year, it is amazing to see all that The Phoenix Center has accomplished. Many of our new programs were made possible through generous donations from our foundation supporters. On behalf of The Phoenix Center, I give my heartfelt thanks to all those who have helped us reach our successes.

This school year's new and extended programs, including the Consumer Family Life program and the Restaurant Program's Advanced Training Class, stemmed from student needs our staff identified at the May 2008 planning retreat.

Another focus area that arose from that planning retreat was family support. This year we chose to expand and create new programs that support the families of our students. Such opportunities help parents and siblings improve their interactions with their child or sibling in public and offer opportunities for success for the whole family. From this idea, several family oriented events developed this year including: Family Bowling Night which featured 23 families and nearly 100 people, Overnight camping at Camp Bernie, three other family night out events, a pasta night and the Transition Fair to help students transition to life after they graduate from The Phoenix Center.

Our expanded programs have really taken off. Our Restaurant Program continued its Advanced Training Class, filling the need for our most interested and capable students to take the knowledge and skills they acquire in our Restaurant Program into real restaurants. Two of our staff members Joe Poggioli, who heads up the Restaurant Program, and Laureen Protomastro, our Transition Coordinator, go to the students' work sites to learn the skills that will be required of them and are then able to provide advanced training to ensure that The Phoenix Center's students are well prepared for their jobs in the community.

Our Consumer Family Life (CFL) program has been able to utilize three custom created rooms to learn valuable life skills. Our laundry room, kitchen, and dorm room enable students to practice and generalize hands-on learning techniques they can take to other settings outside The Phoenix Center. As a result of the CFL program, we now have two students working at Courtyard Marriott and Homewood Suites using the laundry skills they have learned.

We were able to purchase new curriculum, Educational Associates Project Discovery, and now have four classrooms using their Adapted Curriculum Kits on the topics of cleaning and maintenance, grocery clerking and table service. This curriculum is tied to our transition program where basic skills in food service assistance and office assistance are taught. These kits meet the Department of Education's Core Curriculum Content Standards and will help our students after they have left The Phoenix Center.

Christine Saladino and I presented with Theresa Caggia-Roth at William Paterson University's AccessAbility 2009 Conference on May 18<sup>th</sup>. We facilitated a roundtable discussion addressing the individual and family needs associated with Alternative and Augmentative Communication.

Additionally, our students began swimming in the Wayne, NJ facility of Pediatric Rehabilitation of North Jersey, we continued our bowling and basketball teams and our therapeutic horseback riding.

I am proud to say that our staff at The Phoenix Center goes above and beyond by volunteering their time to ensure that our students and their families enjoy leisure activities. Members of the staff came out in great numbers to support our First Family Pasta Night and our Second Family Bowling Night. Additionally, a large number of us marched to support the annual *Autism Speaks Walk*.

With everything that we accomplished this year, we have set the bar high for the 2009-2010 school year, but I know that we can achieve as much as we can dream. We could not have accomplished all that we have if it were not for the generosity of all of you. As I wrote during the holidays, "Faith is believing in something when commonsense tells you not to," my favorite quote from *The Miracle on 34th Street*. I believed in you and even in this tough economy, we have not been let down.

Thank you,

Dr. Geri Gibbia



## Knights of York Adopts The Phoenix Center



The Knights of York, a nonprofit organization with a mission is to help children in need has adopted The Phoenix Center. Thomas Petersen, the president of the Knights of York says, "The Phoenix Center gained our attention as a school to support because of the great work the teachers, counselors and therapists are doing everyday as well as the direct positive impact on the children resulting from new programs and extracurricular activities."

The Knights of York host several fundraisers a year. On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 there will be a Cigar Night at Aleo's Restaurant located at 7 West 20th Street in New York City. The Cigar Night will feature an open bar, full buffet dinner, raffles and 50/50 drawings. The event is geared toward having great fun, great food and great friends, and will run from 6pm to 10pm. Tickets cost \$125.00 per person.

## Transition Fair

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, the First Annual Transition Fair was held at The Phoenix Center. The theme of the fair was "Life After 21" and it was developed to be an interactive workshop to help students and their parents learn more about transitioning students from The Phoenix Center to adult life. Students graduating in 2009 and 2010 were invited to attend along with their parents. In order to serve our graduates-to-be, presenters from three different organizations spoke for approximately forty minutes each to inform students and their parents on the necessary steps to assist the transition to adult life.

The presenters, Frank DeLucca, from Project Hire, Darren Garansi and Mike Cestero from Allies Inc. and Heather Smith from Access Link spoke about the services their organizations offer including: community-based vocational assessments, job shadowing and sampling, job placement and coaching, professional transitional consultation, case management and broker services, residential services, supported employment services, community based day programs, self-determination, transition services, recreational services, creative housing services, and transportation services.

The Transition Fair was a big success. Parents, students and employment specialists learned valuable information on the transition process which will be tremendously helpful in assisting everyone involved in future student transitions to adult life. As a result of the information provided at the Transition Fair, the mother of one of our students was able to secure transportation for her son to his job at Mike's Feed Farm. Because of this connection, her son Dashon will be able to continue to work now that he has graduated from The Phoenix Center.

As a result of the positive feedback we received from students and their parents, we have scheduled three transition fairs for the 2009-2010 school year. Next year's three transition fairs will be held on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 and April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

## Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2009!



The Phoenix Center is proud to present our graduating class of 2009! This year 10 students are saying goodbye to The Phoenix Center and will be starting new and exciting lives in the adult world. Our students have each grown so much since we first met and we are proud to have been a part of their lives and achievements. Since they began attending The Phoenix Center, these students have learned such fundamental skills as walking, speaking, reading and writing as well as skills that make them valuable to employers such as food preparation, laundry skills, office document filing, shelf stocking and customer service.

Because of our expanded focus on life after the Phoenix Center, we are happy to report that more students than ever before have placements after graduation.

Nicole B. will be attending a vocational program at the Arc of Union. Tyler R. will be attending the Journeys Program. Pedro C. will be working at a local restaurant in Passaic. Allen K. will continue to work at the Five Below in Morris Plains. Mitchell E. will continue to work at the Stop and Shop in Clifton. Dashon H. will continue to work at the Shannon Rose and Mike's Feed Farm. Adolfo J. is transitioning to a new program in Florida where he is moving with his family.



## Focus on Phoenix

### Fundraising/Development

- **GoodSearch.com:** Go to [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com). Designate The Phoenix Center as your charity. Set [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com) as your Home Page on your home and work computers and use it for all your web searching.
- **Annual Fund & Memorial Gifts:** Annual fund and memorial gifts from individuals are especially important to The Phoenix Center. If you haven't already done so, please consider making a gift. Printable donation forms can be found on our website at [www.phoenixcenterinc.com](http://www.phoenixcenterinc.com).
- **United Way:** Fall United Way Campaigns are just around the corner. If you have a campaign at your worksite, please designate The Phoenix Center as a recipient of your donation.



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#### THE PHOENIX CENTER CURRENTLY SERVES STUDENTS FROM EIGHT COUNTIES IN THE FOLLOWING NEW JERSEY SCHOOL DISTRICTS:

Belleville, Bergenfield, Bloomfield, Boonton, Butler, Carlstadt/East Rutherford, Cedar Grove, Clifton, Cranford, Dover, East Orange, Fair Lawn, Glen Ridge, Hanover Park, Harrison, Hasbrouck Heights, Hawthorne, High Point Regional, Hoboken, Irvington, Jersey City, Kearny, Kinnelon, Lakeland Regional, Livingston, Lodi, Long Hill Township, Manchester Regional, Middlesex, Millburn, Montclair, Montville, Morris Hills Regional, Morris School District, Mt. Olive, Newark, North Arlington, North Bergen, Nutley, Park Ridge, Pascack Valley Regional, Parsippany, Passaic, Passaic Valley Regional, Patterson, Perth Amboy, Pequannock Township, Pompton Lakes, Ramapo/Indian Hills, Ramsey, Ridgefield, Ringwood, Rochelle Park, Rockaway, Roselle, Roxbury, Secaucus, Tenafly, Union City, Vernon, Wayne, West Essex Regional District, Westfield, West Milford, West Morris Regional, West New York, West Orange, Westwood Regional