

INSPIRATIONS

A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community

Winter 2010

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Wheelchair athletes show passion and drive for excellence

By Wendy Singer

Wheelchair sports have been a part of Quebec's culture since 1953 when the Wheelchair Wonders, a Montreal wheelchair basketball team, became the first Canadian team to participate in the Stoke-Mandeville games in England.

A non-profit organization, the Quebec Wheelchair Sports Association / Association québécoise des sports en fauteuil roulant (AQSFR) is the official governing body of wheelchair sports in the province. Working

in partnership with various athletic federations, the AQSFR strives to give its members (over 300 athletes) equitable access to provincial sporting opportunities while initiating programs that promote their health and well-being. "Participating in sports is more than just a simple activity for people with physical limitations," AQSFR's Director General José Malo explains. "It's a way of staying healthy, active and social, no matter what the level of performance. Playing sports can transform into a real passion and drive for excellence."



Centre d'intégration à la vie active's (CIVA) Montreal Mini Basketball Team celebrates their victory at the last Quebec Games.

For first-time readers, welcome to Inspirations !

Inspirations was launched in the fall of 2008 when the English Montreal School Board and other Montreal educational institutions determined there was a role for a newspaper geared towards special needs individuals and their families. We continue to publish twice annually (fall/winter and spring). Copies are distributed in the Greater Montreal area to English public school boards, private and religious-based schools, CEGEPs, universities, institutions dealing with special needs individuals, hospitals, CLSCs, doctors' offices, community organizations, the media and government. The newspaper is also available at many drop-off points across the island, including shopping malls, city halls, libraries and restaurants. An online edition of Inspirations can be viewed at www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations.

Inspirations aims to provide uplifting success stories in the area of special needs. We also have experts in various fields providing timely advice to parents. While the EMSB is the publisher of this magazine, the content covers the entire Greater Montreal area and beyond since we have the active participation of other educational institutions. Through the pages of Inspirations we regularly bring to our readers feedback from psychologists, guidance counsellors, speech-language pathologists, autism spectrum disorder consultants, behavior specialists, social workers and physiotherapists. We go into the classrooms of the intellectually and physically handicapped, as well as examine how the visually and hearing impaired population cope day to day. The underlining message is that all of these people continue to be "Inspirations" to all of us.

Mike Cohen, Editor



The AQSFR's major sporting programs include athletics, basketball, rugby, tennis and handcycling. Sports under development include fencing, powerlifting, archery, sledge hockey, sailing, and alpine skiing. "We are also very busy behind the scenes organizing and participating in lectures and clinics, meeting participants in rehabilitations centers and schools to evaluate their individual sporting abilities, stimulating young athletes who show an interest in sports, and sensitizing, nurturing and developing partnerships with potential donors," says Malo. "There are so many people who make this wheel turn, from the staff to the directors, the administrators, the athletes, the volunteers, the coaches and the public."

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Welcome



Inspirational Notes

By Mike Cohen

NEW WAR AMPS FILM: The War Amps has released a new documentary that tells the inspiring story of a Prince Edward Island boy who overcame a devastating injury in a farm accident to become an inspiration to others. *Mark, An Island Champ*, is a 30-minute documentary about Mark Arendz, 19, of PEI, who lost his left arm at the age of seven in a farm accident. Soon after, he attend-



Mark Arendz

ed a War Amps Child Amputee (CHAMP) Seminar, which was a positive turning point for both him and his family.

For Mark, it was a chance to meet and be inspired by other amputees. For his parents, it meant being embraced by the CHAMP "family" and the reassurance that there would be no limits to what their son could achieve. Mark fully adopted CHAMP's Winner's Circle philosophy, and is now a role model for the younger Champs and well-known as a volunteer Safety Ambassador in his island community.

"My amputation has helped me develop as a better person, and it gave me more drive to be the best that I can be," says Mark, who has not only developed his own way to enjoy the sports he loves – soccer, cycling and cross-country skiing – but is also pursuing his goals of becoming a high-level biathlete and a civil engineer.

Produced by War Amps CEO Cliff Chaderton, the documentary has been distrib-

uted to regular, specialty and community channels across Canada and is available at a cost-recovery price of \$11 (DVD) by calling 1-800-250-3030 or visiting waramps.ca. More information and a short clip of the documentary can be seen on The War Amps Web site at waramps.ca/champ/video/winners/mark.php.

QUALITY CARE AND SUPPORT: Bartimaeus has been providing support to families for over 20 years throughout Ontario and Quebec. They provide specialized care to children and adolescents who are experiencing behavioural problems as a result of emotional or psycho-social difficulties, acquired brain injury, neuro-integrative disorders, developmental delays or life transitions. Bartimaeus offers a wide range of services including behaviour programming and management, parental support, and respite services. Bartimaeus Associates are experienced, dedicated, and skilled child and youth care professionals, each with an average of 10 years of practice in their field. Services are provided in the home or at school and are delivered on a fee for services basis. For more information, contact Doug Brice, Director at (514) 991-7432 or dbrice@bartimaeus.com or check out www.bartimaeus.com.

SUMMER LANGUAGE CAMP: The English Montreal School Board's 2009 Summer Language Camp ran for two weeks at Honoré-Mercier Elementary School in St.



Students and staff at the Language Camp.

Léonard. The campers are young students who have completed kindergarten or Grade 1 and who have been identified as having a language difficulty. The primary goal of the

camp is to give the children an extra boost for the coming school year. The camp has been in operation for nine years and has a proven record for getting results. This year, five EMSB speech-language pathologists animated the camp: Elisabeth Christe, Katori Ohashi, Sophia Orfanos, Keren Shemesh and Susan Waite. Camp programming is designed to increase the campers' vocabulary and to improve their general communication abilities. The camp also focuses heavily on developing skills that support early reading development. Fourteen campers baked, sang, did arts and crafts projects, played board games and participated in a variety of other fun and educational activities. The last day of camp is always celebrated with a concert. This year, as usual, the performance was thoroughly enjoyed by parents and other family members in attendance. It is hoped that campers will begin the new school year with increased confidence in their communication and reading abilities!

COOKING FOR AUTISM AWARENESS: Two years ago, Côte Saint-Luc's Karen Dubrofsky, along with her friends Donna Rabinovitch and Heidi Gossack-Majnemer, published *Montreal Cooks for the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) Foundation*. Together with its French counterpart *Les Saveurs de Montréal*, the book has raised over \$700,000 for gynecological oncology at the MUHC. A few years earlier, she and a friend raised \$500,000 for the Centre for Colon and Rectal Surgery at the

Canada. "I travelled from Newfoundland to Victoria, and assembled this book," says Karen. "A year ago, while attending a health food show in Toronto, I met by chance David Patchell Evans. He is the CEO and owner of Goodlife Fitness I approached him with the idea of my book, but I did not have a final decision on who was going to benefit financially. It was in the baby stages. He looked me in the eyes and asked whether I would consider doing the book for autism. I knew right then and there that he had an autistic child, thus the Kilee Patchell Evans Autism Research Group. We sat down and talked for about a half hour. I guess we both impressed each other, because we decided to work out something. I went back to Montreal, did my homework on Autism in Canada, and when I realized the numbers of children with autistic disorders, the numbers were staggering. I realized the need. I was also very impressed with Patch (as he is referred to) and he became the major sponsor on the project, and provided me with a support staff that was extremely helpful in putting together the book.

"As a volunteer I worked alone, and the year's work was truly a labor of love. When I contacted my first chef, one of the best known in Toronto, I simply e-mailed him six lines telling him that I was a volunteer and that I was putting together a cookbook to benefit Autism Research. I had not even stated in the e-mail what I required from him. Within five minutes of sending the email, he called me and said he would do whatever I needed because his best friend's kid is autistic and it is the most underfunded disorder in Canada. The response has been amazing. As a volunteer, my passion is raising money for anything medical-related. Since I suffered for years from a rare autoimmune disease, I understand firsthand how when your health is not as perfect as we would like, life really does take on a different meaning."

"For me this was an unforgettable experience, I travelled with the photographer to every location in Canada. I got to experience the beauty of our country, and experienced food items not known in Montreal. I also met people along the way who supported the cause tremendously. Another chef confided in me that he had an autistic child, but asked me not to share that with anyone. I don't even think his fellow workers knew."

The book is now available at stores and online. Info: kdubrofsky@gmail.com

MUHC, Well, Dubrofsky is at it again with a sequel called *Cooking With Canada's Best* (www.cookingwithcanadasbest.com). This time the beneficiary is Autism Research in



Dreams Take Flight provides magical memories

By Stuart Nulman

The slogan that *Dreams Take Flight* (DTF) uses – which can also be its credo – is “magical memories for special kids.”

And since 1989, this Air Canada non-profit charitable organization has taken over 20,000 socially, intellectually and physically challenged children from across Canada for a magical day at Walt Disney World in Florida or Disneyland in California. It was started and is still run by volunteers, made up of current and retired Air Canada employees, including pilots, flight attendants, mechanics, grounds crew and office personnel. This ultimate day trip is a means of having these children enjoy some time away from their everyday hardships and challenges.

“Simply, *Dreams Take Flight* wants to put the biggest smile on every child’s face that DTF meets,” said Brian Roscoe, the president of Dreams Take Flight’s Montreal Chapter, which embarked upon its 16th anniversary flight in November. “Each child will have one of the best days of their lives, a day at Disney, not to mention flying in an airplane, meeting new friends or having a day away from doctors, hospitals, treatments and appointments.”

“It opens a window to a world they have never seen before and maybe this is enough to give them hope and get them to work hard and succeed in life,” added Rene Potvin, who serves as the Montreal Chapter’s treasurer. “For sick children who are unable to travel because of the need for extensive equipment and also the presence of medical personnel, we provide them with the support needed, and hope that this day gives them the courage to continue to fight for a better life.”

In order to be selected to participate in a Dreams Take Flight trip, a child has to meet the following six criteria: they must be between the ages of six and 12; they have to be financially unable to experience Walt Disney World; they have never been to Disney World or any other Disney theme park, and won’t be in the foreseeable future; they must be a Canadian citizen, and have – or must

be able to obtain – a valid birth certificate; they must be able to legally enter the United States; and be physically able to handle the long and very tiring day to and from Disney

for further reassurance.”

“All of our children must complete medical forms and based on the information



Mickey Mouse welcomes the Dreams Take Flight group to Disney.

World (which starts around 4 a.m. and can last about 20 hours).

Dreams Take Flight has a committee that reaches out to a number of agencies across Quebec, such as children’s hospitals, CLSCs, and other agencies that deal with child-related issues and matters. “This is the general rule of thumb, but we do have instances of special cases brought to our attention by specific individuals. If the child meets the above criteria, they are considered,” said Nick Papatheodorakos, the Montreal Chapter’s vice-president.

About one-third of the children who go on the flight do have special needs or specific health concerns, and Dreams Take Flight makes sure that everything is taken care of in order to make their experience a much more enjoyable one. “First, the agencies provide us with the names of children that meet the criteria,” Papatheodorakos. “Then they have to get medical clearance from their physician to allow them to travel and are able to withstand a long day away from home. Once they have medical clearance, we have our DTF doctors review each file

received, all of their special needs are recorded and we ensure that all measures are taken to address their needs,” said Potvin. “The medical support personnel and team leaders are made aware of the situation and will ensure that each child has the attention and care needed.”

The selected children are divided into groups that consist of up to eight children each, along with five or six adults that includes a group leader, escorts and nurses. A team of three doctors and up to 12 nurses travel to Disney with DTF. Also, the Disney World cast members and security staff are made aware in advance of DTF’s presence in the park with special needs children, and are constantly on the alert and ready to fulfill any special requirements and requests. Extra wheelchairs are also provided by the park for children who need them.

“These groups are formed depending on the child’s requirements,” said Beverley Cotton, the secretary of DTF’s Montreal Chapter. “In other words, some children require a one-on-one escort or nurse and they are taken to the areas of the park that are suited to their needs.”

INSPIRATIONS

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Coping with sexuality

A scary and stressful reality for those with an ASD

By Daniela Scoppa

For children and teens, coming to terms with their sexuality is normally a difficult feat. So many changes, both physically and mentally, occur at the same time that it can often be frustrating for the individual to understand how to deal with all the changes in an appropriate manner. For children and teens with special needs, their understanding and coping mechanisms are very different than other children's and dealing with their sexuality can be downright scary and stressful for them.

At a recent conference hosted by the Lester B. Pearson School Board's Centre of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), José Roy, a licensed sexologist specializing in assisting individuals with various intellectual difficulties, explained that individuals who have an ASD may experience many challenges when it comes to understanding both the physical and emotional changes that occur with their bodies. "Every individual is different and will, depending on their level of functioning, understand sexuality differently," Roy said.

Students with an ASD lack information about sexuality and about the social norms that come with this topic. Individuals with an ASD are often unaware of social cues and peer expectations and may behave inappropriately in public. For example, they may



Individuals who have an ASD may experience many challenges when it comes to understanding both the physical and emotional changes that occur with their bodies.

engage in inappropriate touching. According to Roy, they are curious like every other student but because they often have someone (a parent or caregiver) with them, they can't explore and get to know their bodies like other children/teens. "Many will seek

out physical contact but they don't understand the social norms," she said.

In today's times sexuality is not as taboo a subject as it used to be, however many are still very uncomfortable discussing the subject. "Even though we think we are open about sexuality, many people are not comfortable with their own sexuality," Roy said. "Many of the staff and parents [of those with an ASD] did not get much sex education when they were young or when they were doing their degree so this lack of model does influence the way they are presenting sex education to these students."

This lack of openness toward the subject of sexuality affects those with an ASD because the topic isn't being taught and discussed before curiosity about sexuality kicks in. "Educators are working more at a reactive

level instead of a proactive one where you would empower the person so they can make choices," said Roy. She said that a proactive attitude is imperative in helping autistic individuals better cope with their own sexuality.

"Individuals with ASD have a good memory and are visual learners, so those strengths can be used when teaching," Roy said. "The sexual education has to be concrete. Role playing and filming the individual are helpful and powerful teaching techniques."

When it comes to easing the stress often felt by students at any age who have an ASD and who have to come to terms with their sexuality, collaboration, on the part of both the parents and educators is essential.

Many programs are on the market to help parents and educators but, according to Roy, the level of the individual needs to be assessed before applying any new program. "Educators and parents are important because they are role models and they are the ones providing experiences for the individual," she said.

Daniela Scoppa is the communications officer at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Homework help for special needs students

By Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D.

Homework can be a challenging time for children with or without special needs. Here are some tips that may make homework somewhat less problematic.

Establish an appropriate homework area

Most children work best with an organized and well lit desk, in a quiet corner of the house. Some children with attentional issues may not only need a distraction-free spot and close supervision, but they may also need help remaining focused by chewing (e.g., gum or crackers) or drinking (e.g., water) while working.

Make sure that the child has all the appropriate material

Having all of the necessary supplies such as sharpened pencils, erasers, markers, etc. in a specified location reduces the need to leave the homework area.

Keep the agenda updated

The agenda is the critical communication tool between home and school. The child must have everything written in the agenda and parents must check it daily. Children who have fine-motor difficulties may need someone else to write in their agenda for them or they may need someone else's agenda photocopied and pasted into their own.

Getting homework back and forth from home and school

This can be a challenge for special needs students. Establish a color coded system for all material. Each subject should have its own colour for all its material. For instance, all mathematics related work may be in blue, while the English language arts are all in orange. Children who are colour blind may need alternatives such as different types of stickers on their binders (e.g., mathematics binders have the dinosaur stickers while the English have the star stickers). You should also establish a checklist system to ensure that the child brings everything that he/she needs. He/she may simply place a check

next to each item listed in the agenda and then he/she can cross it off once it is completed.

Have a Routine

Some children may need a break to refuel themselves before they start their homework. The child with attentional issues and who cannot sit still may need several physical breaks. Establishing a visual schedule of after-school activities, including breaks, and placing it in a prominent place can decrease some anxieties about what needs to be done.

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Take me to my high school

A look at a transition protocol for students with ASD

By: Tania Piperni M.Ed

Last year the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) piloted a transition to high school protocol aimed at assisting Grade 6 students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to prepare for high school. The goal of the protocol is to help facilitate this transition by making the new environment more familiar and predictable.

Several students participated. One from Our Lady of Pompei Elementary School in Ahuntsic visited John F. Kennedy High School in St. Michel. Two visits were scheduled and the student was able to see various venues in the school and to meet staff members. One student from Honoré Mercier Elementary School in St. Léonard and another from nearby Pierre de Coubertin Elementary School both visited John Paul I High School. The school was explored through a guided tour and an explanation of the various activities available in the school. Several students from Hampstead Elementary School, accompanied by a special education technician, spent some time at John Grant High School in Côte Saint-Luc.

The LaurenHill Academy (LHA) Junior Campus in St. Laurent went beyond the outlined transition protocol and created a fun-



This excellent program facilitates the transition to high school by making the new environment more familiar and predictable.

filled morning for Grade 6 students from surrounding feeder schools. The students had a variety of special needs, including, but not limited to, ASD. The students were welcomed by the resource teachers, Rachel Re-

itz and Joy Wagen, the vice-principals Pela Nickoletopoulos and Frederic Boudreault, and the guidance counselor Sherilyn Bell. After an exciting DVD depiction of school life at LHA, the students were ushered into

the resource room. Each student received a booklet containing a map of the school, a sample schedule, and pictures of the entire LHA staff. Then Grade 7 student mentors joined the group. The resource teachers decided to include this mentorship as a way to help the new students better ease into high school life. The mentors, who are now in Grade 8, greeted the new students on the first day of school and helped navigate them through the LHA halls. Thus, the students already began with a friend in the crowd in their new high school! Lastly, there was a guided tour of the school which ended with each student receiving a farewell gift.

The Grade 6 students who participated in either of the transition to high school protocols greatly benefitted from the experience. Hopefully the process helped alleviate anxiety, filled the students with excitement and wonder, and created a valuable introduction to their upcoming high school life!

Tania Piperni is the Autism Spectrum Disorders Consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

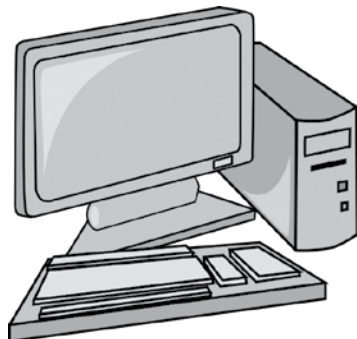
Up to date special needs database

By: Wendy Singer

The updated Inspirations special needs database is now available online at www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations, listing over 350 resources in and around the city of Montreal for children and young adults. Within its pages, you will find services for all special needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down Syndrome, ADHD, learning disabilities, behavioral difficulties, hearing and visual impairments. The table of contents will guide you through various therapeutic, counselling and support services from recreational activities, tutoring and vocational services, medical clinics, rehabilitation, adaptation and social integration, to resources for parents and professionals (such as associations and government organizations), camps, respite care, physical aid resources and other helpful information.

The database, compiled to fulfill a need voiced by both parents and professionals, provides pertinent information for each list-

ing such as phone numbers, links to email and website addresses, and a brief description of the service offered. This database is intended to be used as a guide. The English Montreal School Board recommends that you research these resources to determine if they are appropriate for the care of your child or young adult. If you would like to recommend a resource for this list, please contact inspirations@emsb.qc.ca.



What is Special Needs?

The term special needs has different connotations for different people, be they professionals or para-professionals, teachers or parents. In the school system 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. 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 indi-

viduals who support these students (classroom teachers, resource teachers, special-ists, 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.

"Special needs" is an umbrella term underneath which a staggering array of diagnoses can be wedged. Many organizations cater to individuals with special needs. Inspirations has compiled a comprehensive special needs data base, which is accessible at www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations.



Paralympic Games set for Vancouver this March

By Stuart Nulman and Mike Cohen

Soon after the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver and Whistler, B.C., the X Paralympics will take centre stage at some of the same venues from March 12-21 and showcase some of the world's best athletes with physical handicaps. About 650 world class athletes representing over 40 countries will compete in five paralympic winter events that are spread out in six venues: ice sledge hockey (March 13-14, 16-20) at the UBC Thunderbird Arena; wheelchair curling (March 13-20) at the Vancouver Paralympic Centre; alpine skiing (March 13-16, 18-21) at Whistler Creekside; cross-country skiing (March 14-15, 18, 20-21) at Whistler Paralympic Park; and the biathlon (March 13 and 17), also at Whistler Paralympic Park.



Benoit St. Amand in action

of South Shore St. Hubert, will suit up for Canada's sledge hockey team in the Paralympics. Benoit had his right leg amputated above the knee in 1997 after being diagnosed with bone cancer two years earlier. "I played hockey my entire life," he told Inspirations. "When I had my leg amputated in 1997, I took a few years to get my life back into order. I started playing sledge hockey in 2003 in Montréal and made the national team in 2004."

His advice to others in his predicament? "First off, don't let your disability stop you from doing anything," he said. "Having an active life is very important no matter your disability. Keep your mind and body active and you'll enjoy life even more."

The Paralympics has its origins with Sir Ludwig Guttmann, a neurosurgeon who was born in Germany but fled to England in 1939 as a refugee from the Nazis. In 1948, Dr. Guttmann put together an athletic competi-



Benoit salutes the crowd.

tion in the English town of Stoke Mandeville for World War II veterans who were patients at the town hospital's National Spinal Injury Centre, and suffered from a variety of spinal cord injuries. The competition, which was the first for wheelchair-bound athletes,

coincided with the 1948 Summer Olympics, which were held that year in London. He believed that utilizing sports would be a major type of therapy towards the total rehabilitation of his paralyzed patients.

In 1952, in the second edition of the games – which were called at the time the Stoke Mandeville Games – the participating British World War II veterans were joined by a group of former servicemen from Holland, thereby giving the games an international flavour to it. The games evolved into its current Olympic-style format (and first dubbed as the "Paralympic Games") in 1960, when 400 athletes with disabilities from 23 countries competed in Rome, Italy, in the same venues and facilities where the 1960 Summer Olympics took place. Today, the summer and winter editions of the Paralympic Games are recognized as the premier international sporting competition for world-class athletes with disabilities, with over 4,000 athletes from around the world in events that showcase their athletic abilities, as well as their courage, determination and how anything is possible.

Paralympics to get prime media exposure

After coming off a dominating World Cup season in which Canadian Paralympic athletes led the world with 29 gold medals, our nation's Paralympians are primed to own the podium in 2010. And Canada's Olympic Broadcast Media Consortium will be there as they go for gold, delivering a record 50 total hours of television coverage in English and French of the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games, taking place March 12 to 21 in Vancouver and Whistler. All coverage will be available in High Definition, marking the first time the Games will be produced entirely in HD by a Canadian rights-holder.

In addition to live events and daily highlights on television, the Consortium's multi-platform coverage includes results, updates, features and pre-promotional programming on radio, digital and print, marking the biggest and most robust coverage ever in Canada of a Paralympic Games.

"Canada's Paralympic athletes have excelled on the world stage. They are a huge source

of national pride and we are committed to giving them the recognition and credit they so richly deserve," said Keith Pelley, President of Canada's Olympic Broadcast Media Consortium. "Along with live event coverage and highlights, we will tell the athletes' stories of determination and accomplishments, as they go for gold in 2010."

Each day throughout the Paralympic Games, the Consortium will produce a 90-minute highlights show of all the day's activities, results and updated medal standings, airing in English on either CTV, TSN or Rogers Sportsnet and in French on RDS or RIS Info Sports. In addition, the Consortium will televise all Team Canada sledge hockey games in English (CTV, TSN, Rogers Sportsnet) and French (RDS, RIS Info Sports), with the gold medal game airing live on CTV and RDS. Canada is the reigning Paralympic Games champion in sledge hockey, having defeated Norway in the Turin 2006 gold medal game.

"Comprehensive coverage of a Paralympic

Games is a milestone in Canadian Paralympic history," said Carla Qualtrough, President of the Canadian Paralympic Committee. "The Consortium's coverage of the 2010 Paralympic Games will ensure that all Canadians get to share the experience of the fierce competition that will take place in 2010 as Canada goes for gold against the world's greatest Paralympians."

(Continued from page 1)

The AQSFR is excited about their many endeavors. Their wheelchair basketball program boasts many leagues in various regions, at all levels of play. The youngest league has five teams with children 16 years of age and under. The junior category consists of players ranging from 17 to 21. "Some of our players have made the Canadian Paralympic basketball team, like David Eng, Cindy Ouellet and Sabrina Pettinichi," adds Malo. "The Canadian woman's team brought home the gold medal at the 2000 Paralympic games in Sydney, Atlanta in 1996 and Barcelona in 1992. We look forward to more successes in Vancouver

2010!"

'Invitation Kiewit,' a sporting development program that opens doors for potential Paralympic athletes, takes place every spring at Camp Au-delà des limites ('beyond limits') in Ste-Thérèse. Hosting approximately 30 children, aged 10 to 17, with physical limitations, the participants play sports with well-known athletes, fostering a competitive spirit, friendships and discovery of individual abilities. "This structure and setting allow dreams to come true," she says.

"Playing sports gives you an opportunity to discover your passions and abilities, which may reach far beyond what you ever believed possible," notes Jacques Vermette, the father of paraplegic wheelchair athlete Karine, Jonathan and Philippe. "The important thing is to play. To play and have fun. The AQSFR is so helpful in making this happen."

For information in English or French contact: Association québécoise des sports en fauteuil roulant at aqsfr@aqsfrc.ca or (514) 252-3108 or visit www.aqsfr.qc.ca.



Services for special needs students on the rise at Marianopolis

By Teresa Prioriello

More five years ago, the Office for Students with Special Needs was a new service at Marianopolis College. Ten students would register for the academic year and the assisting specialist was not present at the college on a regular basis. At that time, students did not receive the extensive follow-up they have today.

Since that time the service itself has greatly evolved, growing in tandem with the Learning Resources Centre. For the 2008-2009 academic year 75 students accessed the service, with 66 having an identified disability that could have an impact on their learning.

Upon registering with the service, the learning specialist develops the student's learning profile, based on the available documentation that confirms the student's particular situation. Students with special needs can be placed into one of four basic categories: behavioral disorders (Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger Syndrome), physical disorders (hearing, vision, motor disabilities), learning disabilities (dyslexia, language and visual processing disorders) and emotional disorders (generalized anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). The disability is identified so the student's strengths and weaknesses can be mapped out. Subsequently, an individual plan for academic success is generated by the student and the specialist. The learning specialist provides assistance to students and consults with other campus personnel on their behalf. When



Learning specialist Diane Tremblay works with a student.

the student's documentation provides insufficient information to ascertain accommodations or a psycho-educational evaluation is not available, the learning specialist does additional testing.

An important program goal is to reach out and to serve a wider section of the college community. Links have been made with the academic advisors and the Learning Resources Centre staff in order to discuss mutual concerns about the student's progress. In addition, effective instructional strategies and informational handouts on various learning disabilities are available for faculty and staff. Over the past few years policies have been put in place to deal with eligibility of accommodations and confidentiality and access to the service. Procedures are also

in place for accessing support services and referrals are often made to other campus services such as the counseling services and the Learning Resources Centre.

The most frequent requests from students who want to improve their academic skills are for help with time management strategies and scheduling, note-taking skills and

better reading techniques. Also, many special needs students require help with the breakdown of long projects and essays into manageable steps. Specific testing accommodations for special needs students include quiet testing rooms, electronic readers, large print editions of tests, calculator use, computer use with grammar and spellchecker and repeated/rephrased instructions. Learning accommodations include early registration, reduced course load (four, five or six courses instead of the usual seven) in addition to taking only one to two courses with heavy reading and writing demands for the semester, technical aids (text-to-speech software, voice recognition, dictaphone, palm pilot, calculator, closed-caption systems), note-takers for classes, tape recorded classes and/or tutoring sessions with the teacher's permission, preferential class-

room seating (front, away from distractions or near a study partner), use of a laptop in class, large print for handouts and advanced reading lists. Students can also receive help from peer tutors and the CEGEP's writing professional.

At the college level, the progression of students with special needs is monitored closely. As the student becomes more independent with his or her schoolwork, he or she must also become familiar with the technical aids that can help him bypass certain academic weaknesses. The student should meet with Marianopolis' learning specialist, Diana Tremblay, at the beginning of the term to review his learning profile and accommodations, as well as to analyze his learning style. Students with special needs are also encouraged to join school clubs and participate in activities where they can make friends with whom they can share both their frustrations and successes. While the emphasis on independent learning is substantial, the college experience is not entirely a one-man show. To quote the African proverb, "It takes a community to raise a child." It is with the help of his parents/guardians, teachers and school specialists that each student receives the education that brings him steps closer to achieving his life goals.

For more information, log on to www.marianopolis.edu.

(Continued from page 4)

Reinforcement

Have Work Broken Down

Work may need to be broken down. For many children, especially children with special needs, they are overwhelmed by the simple sight of having 10 math problems or reading questions to do. Thus covering, with a piece of paper or cardboard, all but one or two problems or questions may be helpful in getting them started.

Ensure that the work is appropriate for the child

If homework is taking too long or is overly challenging for a student then parents must speak to the school personnel to address the issue (e.g., the amount of homework may be decreased to focus on the quality of the work as opposed to the quantity).

To remain encouraged with homework, many children need a reward. Some may need small and frequent rewards (e.g., a sticker after completing a few problems), while others can manage with less frequent rewards (e.g., computer time after all work is completed), while others will need to build on these skills (e.g., they must bring home all their books three out of five nights to receive time on the computer).

As children become older they should become increasingly independent with their homework, however the child with special needs will likely need closer supervision and more support longer than others.

Despina Vassiliou is an EMSB school psychologist.

Share your "Inspiring" stories

Have you got an "Inspiring" story to share? Do you know of a teacher or caregiver of special needs children who deserves some recognition? Please email your suggestion to inspirations@emsb.qc.ca.





Occupational Therapists Tackle the Challenges of Special Needs

By Clarise Samuels

Occupational therapists (OTs) in schools work to enable students with special needs to develop skills that increase their independence in daily school life. The goal is to help clients have independent, productive, and satisfying lives

“As we begin the occupational therapy service we are working primarily as consultants,” explains Claudia De Luca, who has been recently hired on a permanent basis as an OT for the English Montreal School Board. “Using a problem-solving approach, we collaborate with teachers, parents and other staff members in developing an intervention plan for those students who are experiencing difficulties in school-related tasks. As OTs, we evaluate a student’s performance within the context of the school en-

vironment, taking into consideration characteristics of the environment which may hinder his or her performance. We then formulate school-based intervention plans, provide adaptive aids when necessary, and whenever possible, reduce or eliminate barriers in the environment.”

In addition to De Luca, the EMSB has hired two more OTs, Amanda Vivona and Ann Zilberbrant, to service the entire school board.



EMSB occupational therapist Claudia De Luca works with a student.

At the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, Lina Ianni has been an OT for a year. Their program was established several years ago, and the two therapists who are employed by that Board work with teachers and staff to provide assessments, consultations, and recommendations. As with the EMSB program, Ianni and

her colleague, Melissa Di Fruscia, observe gross motor and fine motor skills, self-help skills, in-class functioning, sensory processing skills, mobility and reading-writing skills.

“We would eventually like to see OT-based recommendations implemented in the classroom and facilitated either by the OTs or by resource teachers,” Ianni explains. “For example, for handwriting, there are two very good handwriting programs out there right now—Handwriting Without Tears and ABC Boom! We are now recommending these suggestions and programs to teachers who would like to use these strategies in their classroom to enhance the overall learning experience.”

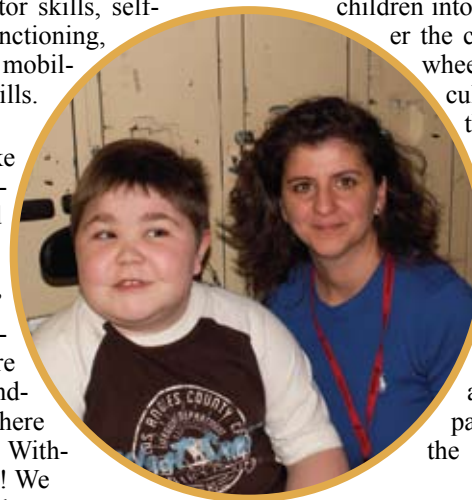
At the Lester B. Pearson School Board, Vicky Stuhec has been an OT for six years. “Since we are a full integration board, my

goal as an OT is to integrate special needs children into the school—whether the child is autistic, in a wheelchair with a muscular disorder, or anything in between,” she explains.

As with the other school boards, Stuhec works as a consultant to assess, evaluate, and recommend. She also works with the parents to improve the home environment. “We do this a lot with sensory diets, where certain students get breaks from movement

and constant stimulation,” she says. “Over-stimulated children are pulled out of class for anywhere from five minutes to half an hour for quiet time and sensory-type activities. Sensory diets work well with autistic

(Continued on page 12)



Lester B. Pearson School Board OT Victoria Stuhec and student Sean Tomalty from St. Thomas High School in Pointe Claire.

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All the world's a stage — theatre companies cater to special needs performers

By Wendy Singer

There is no better place to develop confidence and social skills than on the stage. This is precisely why two local theatre schools have created drama programs for children with special needs.

The Children's Theatre was founded by Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters in 1933. In January 2009, co-directors Danusia Lapinski and Erin Downey Silcoff introduced Starlight Players, a program for children aged seven to 17 with high functioning Autism or Asperger's. Staffed by teachers experienced in working with autistic children and in the theatre, their first session included 17 children split into three groups by age.

"These children can feel comfortable being themselves here, and are encouraged for it," explains Lapinski, a drama teacher and certified drama therapist. "We don't focus solely on scripts and structure. We introduce them to the world of dramatic play by using body movement, imagination to create stories, pretend play and a big dose of laughter. It's hard work, but after two or three weeks they catch on. At the end of the 12-week work-



Youngsters in the DTF's Better Behavioral Enhancement Through Theatrical Expression and Release program at Dynamic Theatre Factory

shop the groups prepared fabulous shows."

Melanie Brook enrolled her eight year-old son Matteo in Starlight Players in hopes of improving his confidence and speech. She also thought it would be an excellent social opportunity. "The directors and Matteo's teacher Vanessa Rigaux have a special way

of making the kids feel comfortable," says Brook. "The classes improved Matteo's memory and sense of responsibility. Autistic children tend to be solitary. Matteo learned how to be part of a group. When you hear that your child is autistic, you

don't expect to see him accomplish something like this."

Anik Matern founded the Dynamic Theatre Factory (DTF) in 1998. In 2007, with funding from The Foundation of Greater Mon-

tréal, DTF implemented The B.E.T.T.E.R. Esteem Program (Better Behavioral Enhancement Through Theatrical Expression and Release) for children aged six to 12 with ADD, ADHD, high functioning Autism or Asperger's, Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), learning disabilities, and extreme shyness.

"Our mission over 14 weeks is to improve the child's self-esteem, focus and well-being based on reinforced accomplishments," says Matern, a graduate of John Abbot College's Professional Theatre Program and an accomplished actress. "Working with a psychologist, we tailor this experience to each child. We first assess strengths, weaknesses and social abilities. We then gather their ideas, integrating original music, rhythm, movement, storytelling and acting. We shape these ideas into a script, which the kids present as a final show. Various sizes of black boxes are used as set pieces, challenging actors to use their imagination. We see tremendous growth from our students. Even the shyest have stepped up and surprised us!"

(Continued on page 10)

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High School grad with Asperger's Syndrome thanks her guardian angels

By Amanda Zavos

High school is a time that many teens see as a fresh new start and a chance to really bring out their inner character that stays hidden while in their elementary years. High school is just one of the big stepping stones on the road of life. As there are many roads, there are many new and wonderful things to discover. Yet, there is always the occasional dead end or detour but, hey, no one said that the road would always be smooth. There are definitely bumps along the way.

My first experience walking through the doors of Centennial Regional High School in Greenfield Park, part of the Riverside School Board, was, for the most part, not such a bad feeling. Of course at first, as any new first experience, I had the sensations of butterflies in my stomach and my heart racing. This was a very big step for me. As I look back, I remember the many joys waiting in those halls as well as the many challenges that took me by surprise. One of the biggest challenges I had to face was not only the fact that I was a young teen beginning high school; I was a young teen with a social disorder (Asperger's Syndrome) beginning high school. In many ways this held me back, of course primarily socially.

The first year of high school was an adjustment. Little did I know that there was an angel waiting for me in the C-wing. I very proudly say Ms. Libbie Roberts was definitely my very first guardian angel at Cen-



Amanda Zavos is grateful to some very caring faculty members who helped her spread her wings.

ennial. Her kind and caring ways made me feel so safe and secure. Ms. Roberts was someone who believed in me. She began to pave the way to the road of success and not only gave me guidance, she gave me courage to stand on my own two feet, even when I felt it was impossible. From there, I went on to star in the junior play. This was a huge accomplishment for me.

As you might know, socializing and eye contact are huge factors when you are faced

with AS. From there, it was all uphill. I met some very caring faculty members who helped me spread my wings. I went on to landing the leading role in the senior play and, that same year, I was one of the top 10 in the famous public speaking contest. God bless Ms. Rosemary Petrusa, yet another angel who gave me the pep talks and the support I needed to keep persevering. During that same year, I also won the academic achievement award for Canadian History. The angels seemed to continue following

me. I then fell upon my next guardian angel, Ms. Suzanne Alleyn. She would be there to guide me through the last two years of high school. If not for her, Math 416 and 514 would have been yet another challenge. Her unselfish heart and time made all the difference, allowing me to graduate high school with 89 percent as my final mark. This was an angel who truly believed I had what it took to succeed.

Most of all, my experience in high school was fantastic. There were ups and downs, which is a part of life. Nothing or no one is perfect. We would not learn if we did not have challenges. I am sure that I had an impact on many people's lives and if they learned from me as much as I learned from them, then it was all worth it.

I have fond memories of the many faculty members who never gave up on me. There are too many to mention, but I thank them all from the bottom of my heart. I truly will never forget the time at Centennial Regional High School. I one day hope to be back in high school, not as a student, but as a faculty member having the opportunity to give back to the community. I hope to help those students who are challenged to believe in themselves and to persevere and never give up. I hope to be someone's guardian angel and help them to earn their wings as I continue to persevere and earn mine.

Amanda Zavos is a 2008 graduate of Centennial Regional High School in Greenfield Park.

(Continued from page 9)

Cheryl, the mother of six year old Michael who has been diagnosed with PDD recounts, "Michael embraced this challenge. The supportive environment at DTF allowed him to shine. To see your child finally come home with a smile, attentive, confident and happy to be alive, is priceless. The teachers have a real talent for allowing every child to be heard, welcomed, loved and motivated to learn and play. Michael's self esteem went off the charts!"

All children are interviewed prior to acceptance to both programs.

For more information contact The Children's Theatre: (514) 484-6620, info@childrens-theatre.ca, www.childrens-theatre.ca or the Dynamic Theatre Factory: (514) 591-6994, info@dtfonline.com, www.dtfonline.com.

Disabled adventurer amazes Bialik students

Students at Bialik High School in Côte Saint-Luc were captivated by speaker Warren Macdonald when he visited recently. Macdonald lost both of his legs in 1997 after climbing to the summit of one of Australia's tallest peaks and becoming trapped beneath a one-ton boulder during a freak rock fall. He told the students that just 10 months later he climbed Tasmania's Cradle Mountain using a modified wheelchair and the seat of his pants. In February 2003, he became the first double above-knee amputee to reach

the summit of Africa's tallest peak, Mt Kilimanjaro (19,222 ft). His appearance was part of Bialik's annual sensitization program to those with disabilities, the brainchild of staff member Lainie Smajovits, who first began the project over 25 years ago. Near the end, one student asked him if he ever thinks about life before the accident, or if he's had any regrets along the way. "Life is short at the end of the day, and for me life only goes in one direction—forward," he responded, claiming that walking is overrated."





John Grant High School is a special place for students

By Susan Freed

The following is a transcript of a speech Susan Freed gave during the graduation exercises for John Grant High School's class of 2009. John Grant is a special needs high school located in Côte Saint-Luc and part of the English Montreal School Board. The speech gives a picture of what John Grant is all about and how students' lives are affected in a very positive way by their experiences here.

I have known all of you as your guidance counsellor at John Grant for two years. This past year I have been working at the school board and I just have to tell you how much I have missed each and every one of you!

I loved working at John Grant and I will tell you why.

Every day I would come to work and no matter how I was feeling you always brightened my day. I would see you in the halls and in the classrooms and you smiled and greeted me. You came to see me in my office and talked about your difficulties and your challenges and your successes and your failures. Whenever I walked into your classes you were eager to show me your work. Your teachers always welcomed me

Grant because here, everyone is accepted for who they are.

I remember when you first started out. You were shy and nervous and worried about what it would be like and whether you would succeed at John Grant. You wondered if you would be accepted and if you would make friends. Your parents wondered whether they had made the right decision in sending you to John Grant and they were so anxious for you to be happy and to succeed in school. For many of you, school had been a real struggle for a long time and you were feeling that you would never succeed.

I know how much you have all struggled over the years. I spent many hours talking to you about your hopes and dreams, as well as your disappointments and frustrations, and I want to thank you for letting me into your world and sharing your thoughts and feelings with me. I know how far you have come! You listened to your teachers and your parents when they told you to keep on trying and you never gave up and you kept on trying even when you got discouraged - and look at you now - you have succeeded!

John Grant has taught you to be a good citizen, to care about and respect others, to be a reliable and hard working employee, to know that asking for help when you need

it is a sign of strength and not of weakness, accept and have confidence in yourself, to keep a positive attitude and to laugh often (even at yourself). You have made friends here and you have felt accepted for who you are and for your very special qualities.



Students at the graduation ceremony.

in and I was invited to all the special occasions - like the birthday parties organized in class by your teachers, the science presentations, the spring dance, talent shows and the student-staff sports competitions where the teachers always lost! I loved seeing the amazing relationships that developed between you and your teachers. I loved John



The John Grant Class of 2009.

What Can You Bring to the World?

I am so very proud of all of you. You are graduating from John Grant today and you have become independent young adults who know how to behave and who have developed so many skills and strengths. You have so much to offer. The world out there needs you! We need employees who are dedicated and enthusiastic and willing to learn and to work hard and who respect and get along with others. That is you guys! It was so cool to watch you come out of your shells and blossom into the wonderful young adults you are today.

So What Is Next?

There are many pathways to success and they are not always direct. Many of us change directions quite often and there is nothing wrong with that! So now you just have to choose the path you want to take next. Some of you will decide to continue your schooling in Adult Education while others will go out and find a job so that you can support yourself and live independently. And there are those who will come back here and enrol in our work study program. explore the different jobs and find out what you are interested in doing.

John Grant High School, an alternative special education vocational centre, is devoted

to the needs of students with mild to severe learning difficulties and offers a warm, supportive, multicultural environment and small class sizes. The school's goals vary according to the ability of the students involved: to assist students in developing their life and academic skills to the fullest and promote entry into the regular work force via extensive vocational and work study programs. Students who demonstrate academic ability and promise are encouraged to pursue further education in the Adult Education Sector. Several of our programs prepare students for independent living.

John Grant offers a modified academic program. Students receive a full range of non-credited academic subjects in the arts, science and technology, history and citizenship, languages as well as physical education, health and wellness and home economics. There is also a fine arts program (music, art, dance and drama), vocational programs such as building maintenance, food services, grounds keeping and horticulture, hairdressing and early childhood care are offered and linked to work studies in the community. For more information call 514-484-4161 or log on to www.emsb.qc.ca/johngrant.

Susan Freed is the former guidance counsellor at John Grant High School. She is currently performing those duties at Lauren Hill Academy.



St. Raphael's Centre: A Second Chance at Success

By Lori Rubin

It is 8:30 on Monday morning and Dylan (a pseudonym), an eight year-old student in Grade 3, has started off the day on the wrong foot. After an unsettling evening at home, which involved continuous arguing with his mother about his non-stop teasing of his younger sister, Dylan came to school in an agitated state. During his first period math class, he was argumentative with his peers, uncooperative with his teacher, and threw his books on the floor when he was confronted about his incomplete homework assignment.

Unfortunately, these behavioural disruptions are more the rule, rather than the exception, for Dylan. Diagnosed with both ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and O.D.D. (Oppositional Defiant Disorder), Dylan has proved to be an ongoing challenge for his teachers and family. As a result of his fighting and domineering play-style, his peers are starting to reject him, and over the past few months he has started bullying younger students.

Dylan's teachers and the special education technician who has been working with him, have tried a variety of strategies in order to reduce some of his disruptive behaviours. A behaviour modification chart has been designed for him with the hope of motivating him to be more compliant by earning rewards for appropriate behaviours. He has been part of a small anger management group, and the adults who work with him have agreed to use frequent verbal praise when he demonstrates pro-social behaviours. Although there has been some improvement, it has been inconsistent, with emotional outbursts occurring frequently. The staff feels that they can no longer tolerate Dylan's behaviour, particularly as it prevents the other students in his class from learning. In a meeting involving school board professionals, Dylan's teachers, principal and his mother, the option of having Dylan go to another school specifically for



Students at St. Raphael take part in a dance class.

students with serious behaviour problems, is discussed.

St. Raphael's Centre, part of the EMSB, is a school for students who have not been successful in their community school as a result of their dysfunctional behaviour. The centre is comprised of three sections: an elementary level with approximately 38 students, a high school level with 36 students, and the Second Start Program, a separate entity within the school for students with more serious behaviours, consisting of a junior and senior elementary class with 11 students in total, each with their own teacher and child care worker.

Social skill training, behaviour modification, anger reduction techniques, and conflict resolution programs are an integral part of the daily curriculum. Small class sizes, along with consistent support from five special education technicians and a full-time school psychologist, contribute to a specialized learning environment designed to motivate, regulate and stimulate children and adolescents with behavioural challenges. In addition, a daily physical education program, art and music therapy and school outings may be offered to create a well-rounded and diverse learning experience. Most of these students go on to be integrated back into a regular school setting once they have acquired the tools and skills to do so.

Lori Rubin is a behaviour management specialist at the English Montreal School Board.

Advice from a special needs Centennial Regional High School Grad

By Vipasa Jivan

Editor's Note: Vipasa Jivan is a 2009 graduate of Centennial Regional High School, part of the Riverside School Board in South Shore Greenfield Park. She is an 18 year old student with bilateral moderate-to-severe sensorial hearing loss, wears two hearing aids and uses an FM system at school. She has been in an inclusive setting for her entire school career and now attends Dawson College. Here she provides tips to students of how to navigate the five years of high school. On June 19, 2009, she was the recipient of the Robert Charles Mercer Hobbs Memorial Bursary.

Secondary I: It's a new school, but don't worry, everyone struggles. The important thing is that you try your best. Remember, never share lockers with anyone. The cafeteria can be very noisy so there are quieter rooms that you can go to. Ask for help when you need to.

Secondary II: Well, you passed your first year. That's great! Now you have experiences, but the problems don't go away. Stuff gets harder. You should ask for help when it does get hard, so you don't fall behind.

Secondary III: You are now used to the school. Don't be surprised. There are subjects (and teachers) that you won't like. You have to deal with it.

Secondary IV: This is where they see how much you've improved and how well you are doing. It's going to be stressful and hard. I won't lie to you. They will make you work harder than normal! Remember you have family, teachers and friends to help you.

Secondary V: This is grad year and the end of high school. You've made it! Choosing college or anything else you want is going to be hard, but you have to try. This is the year to prove that you are worthy of graduating and getting your high school leaving diploma. Don't give up!

What should teachers know about having a hearing-impaired student? It will teach you something new. Students need to face their teachers when they speak, to sit in the front, to have sub-titles on all movies and

wear an FM system. Personal frequency modulation (FM) systems are like miniature radio stations operating on special frequencies assigned by the Federal Communications Commission. The personal FM system consists of a transmitter microphone used by the speaker and a receiver used by the listener. The receiver transmits the sound to a hearing aid either through direct audio input or through a looped cord worn around the neck.



(Continued from page 8)

children, and parents can do it at home."

At the Riverside School Board, Sylvie Laplante, works at REACH, a special needs school for children with intellectual handicaps. She uses such intervention methods as sensory integration, motor control, social stories, relationship development intervention, and others. "My wish," she says, "is that every child with cognitive impairment, developmental delays or disorders, should have access to specialized rehabilitation services quickly, easily and throughout their lifespan."



Inspirational Book Review

I'll Scream Later by Marlee Matlin (Simon Spotlight Entertainment, \$32.99)

By Stuart Nulman

"I had never intended to become the most famous Deaf person in the world. If anything, I'd work long and hard to make sure my deafness didn't become a barrier to my dreams. I fought against anyone using my deafness to define me, to limit me. I was a lot more than Deaf."

This one paragraph can best describe the grit, determination and ambition that was the life and career of actress Marlee Matlin, whose achievements in both movies and television have been an inspiration to hearing impaired in particular and disabled people in general around the world.

Yet behind the Golden Globe and Oscar she won for her performance in the 1986 film *Children of A Lesser God*, her memorable performances on *The West Wing* and *Seinfeld* (and even her turn as a contestant on *Dancing with the Stars*), and her efforts to increase the awareness of the plight of the Deaf and hearing impaired, there were plenty of problems, dysfunctions and criticisms that Matlin endured that would have easily broken down the most strong-willed human being.

But this never-give-up attitude is the overly-

ing tone, as Matlin "breaks her silence" in her recently-published memoir *I'll Scream Later*.

Deaf since the age of 18 months, Matlin discovered at an early age that the way to channel her energy was on the stage. It all started with the lead role in a production of *The Wizard of Oz* by the Centre on Deafness and the Arts in her native Chicago, and then at the age of 12 as a member of *The Traveling Hands*, a group of young girls who performed songs in sign language. But it was thanks to some motivation, encouragement and friendship from Henry "The Fonz" Winkler that prepared her for the role that would forever change her life.

Matlin, who originally performed a small part in the Chicago stage production of *Children of A Lesser God*, convinced director Randa Haines to cast her in the female lead of Sarah, the angry Deaf school employee when the film version was about to shoot in New Brunswick. It also led to the relationship with her co-star William Hurt that nearly destroyed her.

The relationship was a dangerous mix of passion, dysfunction and drug addiction (in



Marlee Matlin

fact, following the Golden Globe Awards in early 1987, Matlin went straight to a rehab facility), not to mention a great deal of insults and personal hurt. One glaring example of the latter occurred after the 1987 Oscars, when Matlin won her Best Actress award.

On the limo ride following the ceremonies, instead of offering congratulations, Hurt told her "What makes you think you deserve it? There are hundreds of actors who have worked for years for the recognition you just got handed to you. Think about that!"

However, thanks to the unwavering support of friends, family, her faithful interpreter Jack, as well as her husband Kevin Grandalski and her four children, Matlin bounced back and carved out a career for herself as a respected actress, not to mention as an advocate for the deaf and the hearing impaired. One major achievement was her endless lobbying that resulted in the passing of the Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990, which paved the way for making close captioning for TV programming more widely available.

I'll Scream Later is a heartfelt, brutally honest, yet uplifting memoir of this remarkable woman who didn't use her deafness as a crutch, but as a means of expression for herself and for the hearing impaired. Marlee Matlin has a reason to scream out loud, and after reading this book, we're glad that her voice resonates loudly through these pages.

Preparing for CEGEP life

By Teresa Prioriello

The transition from high school to CEGEP is perhaps one of the most challenging for students and more so for those with special needs. The two most frequently mentioned differences between high school and college life are reduced amount of in-class time and increased independent study time, as well as fewer opportunities for direct teacher contact.

Students with learning disabilities often have to invest considerably more time than their peers in their studies. The rule of thumb is one to two hours of study for one hour of class time. Like all students, the increased level of personal freedom is one of the biggest adjustments a student with disabilities must make when entering college. There is an emphasis on independent learning as students are expected to monitor their own work and combine information from a variety of sources rather than to parrot isolated facts.

Marianopolis College is student centered and promotes independence by assisting

students in mastering learning and study strategies as well as developing self-advocacy skills. The college's learning specialist provides brief diagnostic screenings and academic support that can include learning strategy training and, if need be, ADD coaching. Research shows that strategic learning and study skills instruction can change the functional impact of a disability or allow for more independent ways of coping.

Diana Tremblay is the learning specialist at Marianopolis. She taught Grade 12 psychology and sociology at a private high school for four years and also acted as a mentor to many of her students. Ms. Tremblay, in her teaching, recognized that some of her students struggled with the subject matter, for reasons she believed were related to learning disabilities. At first, Ms. Tremblay grew frustrated as she was unable to help them. It was this circumstance as well as her sister's late diagnosis of dyslexia that motivated Ms. Tremblay to return to school and take several courses in educational psychology, a graduate program. Ms. Tremblay then moved on to work at the Learning Associates of Montreal as a clinician and

coordinator of a remedial tutoring service, training those willing to tutor students with special needs. She is also a member of the Association of Educational Therapists, which sets standards for the practice of educational therapy in schools.

Ms. Tremblay's personal experiences with learning disabilities, in addition to her training, allow her to play a dual role as the learning specialist at Marianopolis. She can assess the student's learning difficulties and teach them how to become better readers, manage their time and also provide them with effective study skills. Ms. Tremblay meets the special needs students when need be and also encourages them to visit to speak about their plans for university, as many chose to continue their educational careers after college. Ms. Tremblay has been in the field for 18 years. Smiling, she says, "It's a great job, the students are special people." She invites future Marianopolis students with learning disabilities to visit her.

An estimated 20 new students with learning disabilities are attending Marianopolis this year. Demographic data shows that the number of special needs students identified each year continues to increase. By the end of

the 2008-2009 academic year, 66 students at Marianopolis College were being followed, this was an increase from previous years and represents approximately four percent of the total college population. However, there are quite a number of students who are not identified by the time they register for classes. One reason may be for fear the student will not be accepted into his program of choice. In actuality, in accordance with the college's mission statement, students are not asked to disclose a disability until after acceptance to the college. If a student chooses to not disclose, he cannot receive extra support. In some cases this can lead to the student falling on academic probation, should their grades not meet CEGEP standards. Although the Marianopolis retention rate for students with special needs is 82 percent, there is still a percentage, however small, who cannot cope with the demands of college life and drop out. As the Learning Resources Centre continues to expand and the special needs program continues to take shape, bridges will be built to ensure these students, just like the regularly-abled, can achieve all their academic endeavors.

For more information log on to www.marianopolis.edu.



Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen

Maine Beaches tourism industry sensitive to special needs

For years people told me what a great holiday destination the State of Maine was, particularly the Southern Beaches area. So this past summer we followed what seemed to be a convoy of Quebec license plates to the communities of Portland, Freeport, Kennebunkport, Old Orchard Beach, Wells, Ogunquit and York.

Like any other vacation spot, travellers with special needs must do as much advance research as possible to assure that their requirements will be taken care of. The Maine government website (<http://www.maine.gov/portal/visiting/accessrec/index.html>) contains listings of facilities and organizations that have made an effort to create physical and/or programmatic accessibility to the greatest number of people -- including people with disabilities, elderly, and others. Accessibility is often thought of in terms of wheelchair access, but can include much more than that. It means incorporating "universal" access and creating opportunities so that people with a wide range of needs (deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired, etc.) can also enjoy the wealth of leisure activities that Maine has to offer.

This Accessible Recreation, Arts and Leisure guide presents information about recreational opportunities available to people with disabilities in Maine. Calling ahead for specific accessibility information is highly recommended.

Eric Dibner, Accessibility Coordinator for the State of Maine, notes that all places of public accommodation should open their doors to visitors, as called for in State and federal law, regardless of disability. "So, if an individual has a special need, the proprietor is required to provide accommodations, particularly in modifying policies and practices," he says. "The point is, people should base their decisions about where they want to go based on what they would like to see. That said, facility accessibility may be an issue for some visitors, so I recommend that they call ahead to the specific places they want to go, and find out whether their individual physical or accommodation needs can be met. Many facilities are fully accessible, but many are not. Older businesses, amusements, and towns may present barriers, so call ahead to the place you want to visit."

The State of Maine provides online listings for its State Parks, historic sites, and boat launch facilities. These have detailed accessibility info. In each list, you must narrow your search by region or park, then dig down to obtain the detail. www.maine.gov/doc/parks/accessibility/access_guide.html. The State beaches have beach chairs available, although calling ahead will ensure the equipment is on hand when required.

Boat launch facilities are listed at www.maine.gov/doc/parks/programs/boating/sitelist.html and you can break it down by lakes/rivers and saltwater ramps: www.maine.gov/doc/parks/programs/boating/sites/tidal_and_freshwater.html.

Lodging, restaurants, stores, and entertainments often provide accessibility on their own web sites. You can get some information from the respective offices of tourism websites. The regional airport, the Portland Jetport, is very accessible. But some flights land at gates without jetways (level tunnels) so flyers may need assistance to get to the elevator. Additional questions can be directed to the airport at <http://www.portlandjetport.org/contactus.asp>.

Portland

When we first began making plans to vacation in Maine, our search for accommoda-



The Portland skyline.

tions started in Old Orchard Beach. Very quickly, however, I realized that the offerings there were overpriced and lacking any of the name brand properties. It was then that someone from the tourism industry pointed me in the direction of Portland, only 20 minutes away and an excellent base. There were also some excellent hotels to choose from, with the Embassy Suites heading the list.

Portland (www.portlandmaine.com) is Maine's business, financial and retail capital and the largest city in the state. With a metro population of 230,000, is home to almost one quarter of Maine's total population. The city itself has 64,000 residents. In the Old

Port, great brick buildings, once warehouses for local merchants, now hold a myriad of original shops, galleries and restaurants. Portland boasts a thriving arts scene and an exclusive Downtown Arts District.

We highly recommend you make advanced accommodation reservations, especially, if you plan to visit between mid-June and mid-October. The Embassy Suites Portland, Maine hotel (www.portland.embassysuites.com) recently completed phase two of a multi-million dollar renovation, with the construction of all new guest suites, a revitalized lobby/atrium and restaurant.

Centrally located and right next to the Portland Jetport, the Embassy Suites is just four miles from the famed Old Port, where a number of restaurants, shops, bars, and nightclubs provide endless entertainment -- and a short drive from factory outlet shopping in Freeport, Maine. Moreover, the hotel is just a few miles from Maine's beaches and scenic walking, hiking, and biking destinations. More importantly, it is an easy five minute drive to the beautiful Maine Mall, Border's Bookstore and known chain restaurants such as Ruby Tuesday's, IHOP, Friendly's and even a Tim Hortons.

All accommodations feature two flat screen televisions, a refrigerator, microwave oven and coffee maker, complimentary wireless high-speed Internet access, two telephones and a comfortable work area with desk.

While relaxing at the hotel, take advantage of the indoor swimming pool and whirlpool, a state-of-the-art hotel fitness center, a hotel business center, meeting rooms, onsite dining at Café Stroudwater, complimentary parking, a complimentary cooked-to-order breakfast, a nightly hotel manager's reception and a complimentary shuttle to and from the Portland International Jetport. The hotel is located at 1050 Westbrook Street.

The hotel has a generous number of handicapped parking spots right near the entrance and easy wheelchair access from the sidewalks to the front door. During the renovation period, special needs were taken into consideration. Even the front desk was redesigned to include a cut out to make it easier for customers in wheelchairs. Five accessible suites were added, bringing the total to seven. They are closer to the elevators, have smaller counters, lower peep holes and larger bathrooms, some with roll-in showers. There are TTY Text Telephones, a device that lets people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired use the telephone to communicate, by allowing them to type messages back and forth to one another instead of talking and listening. A TTY is required at both ends of the conversation in order to communicate.

Greater Portland offers a robust selection of restaurants, specialty foods and brewpubs, totalling over 200 dining choices. The amount of money spent in restaurants per capita ranks third in the country, behind

San Francisco and New York. Local foods are featured at century-old outdoor farmers' markets, a new year-round public market, and at a variety of smaller specialty stores that offer a blend of prepared, imported and local foods. The microbrew industry is well represented in Greater Portland with nearly 20 breweries, some recognized nationally.

For several years, the Portland Lobster Company (www.portlandlobstercompany.com) has offered the very freshest Maine seafood, live entertainment and the best view in all of Portland. The restaurant was recommended to me and this place was a real surprise, the most unique "lobster" eating experience in my life for sure. When we arrived, manager Ethan Morgan explained the procedure. He handed us small menus and pointed towards the specials of the day on a board. Inside, you get in line cafeteria style and place your order. Once that is done you are given a larger beeper shaped like a lobster and asked to find a picnic table on the outdoor tented dock overlooking the Portland Harbor in the heart of the Old Port. It was not a long wait. The menu here includes "Maine's Best Lobster Roll," lobster dinners, steamers, fried claims and chowder, salads and wraps, appetizers and local desserts.

The lobsters were terrific and nicely cut up, served with fries. They also make a nice caesar salad and crispy fried Maine shrimp. The fried scallops are also highly recom-



A mouth watering dish from the Portland Lobster Company.

mended. Located on the waterfront on bustling Commercial Street, there is usually live music as well. Of course, this is mainly a warm weather destination, open from May until late November. This is completely wheelchair accessible as the main entrance is at street level and leads you directly to the covered dock. Wheelchairs fit nicely at the picnic tables.

As far as beaches go, our original plan was to commute to Old Orchard Beach. But then our hotel recommended Crescent Beach, a mere eight miles south of Portland on Route 77 in the suburb of Cape Elizabeth. This is a popular family swimming beach with fine sand, picnic tables, a snack bar and washrooms. There is plenty of parking, albeit for a nominal fee, but it is fine spot to relax and take in the sun. For those in wheelchairs, it is a bit of a challenge to get on to the sand. You can manoeuvre the wheelchair easily



on the grass and then to a walkway, but it stops short of getting you directly to the beach. There are handicapped parking spots in the front of the lot.

Old Orchard Beach

It's almost impossible not to have fun at Old Orchard Beach (www.oldorchardbeach-maine.com). The low surf makes this a favorite spot for swimming, sunbathing, and making new friends. When the kids get hungry they can explore the boardwalk for pizza, french fries, hot dogs, cheeseburgers and even poutine, or you can choose from the many family style restaurants around town. Try your luck on the video games, jump on a ride, treat yourself to an ice cream or a cold soda. Thrills, chills and frills-take your pick or do it all.

Catering to tourists and families is a way of life in Old Orchard Beach. The beach, the arcades and amusement rides, nightly entertainment, auto races and harness racing are favorite activities in the Old Orchard Beach area. Old Orchard's Pier is the center of the recreational activities.

While Old Orchard's seven-mile long stretch of wide sandy beach is understandably the major attraction, there is a full range of other things available to see and do in and around the area. Palace Playland (www.palaceplayland.com) is New England's only beachfront amusement park. It features a giant arcade, beautiful carousel, a kiddieland, a gondola ferris wheel and the



Old Orchard's main drag. (photo, Paul Golder)

galaxi coaster. It is open Memorial Day to Labor Day and features fireworks every Thursday night by the Pier. I particularly enjoyed the view from the ferris wheel, while the bumper cars were a lot of fun as well. What's great about this place is that you do not have to pay for admission, just for the rides. This can be done by buying tickets or a wrist band for unlimited access. There is no particular entrance or exit, so you can take a break anytime you want and explore the Old Orchard beach strip of shops and restaurants or take a walk on the Pier. Every effort is made to accommodate special needs patrons. The park itself is easy to navigate in a wheelchair. Individuals with a physical handicap will be given special access to rides when possible.

Kennebunkport

I first heard about Kennebunkport, like most others I know, as the place where for-

mer U.S. President George Bush Sr. had a summer home known as the Bush Compound. This is an astoundingly picturesque town, with a population of less than 4,000. Kennebunkport's Dock Square is the commercial centre of town and is certainly worth an afternoon shopping adventure.

Maine has more than 5,000 miles of coast and some of the most beautiful beaches in the entire state can be found here in the Kennebunks. We frequented Mother's Beach where the water is cold, but not unbearable. One activity we had planned, but did not succeed in experiencing due to the weather was a 90 minute trip on Kylie's Chance (<http://www.firstchancewhalewatch.com/kylieschance.php>). The boat tour gives you a chance to see how Maine Lobsters are caught. You also get a nice view of former President Bush's estate and seals in their natural habitat on Bumpkin Island.

The Kennebunkport Inn (www.kennebunkportinn.com) is a charming intimate hotel, with 49 guest rooms in the Victorian Mansion, Riverhouse or Wharfside buildings right in Dock Square. The Wharfside family suites are large enough to fit at least six people. I cannot remember when I last felt this comfortable away from home. It features standard rental style furnishings, three bedrooms, a large living room with sleeper sofas, kitchen facilities and a private bath. The Wharfside is a short walk across the street from the main building, which contains the One Dock Restaurant, the piano bar, patio dining, an outdoor pool, spa services and a guest library. There is a delicious complimentary deluxe continental breakfast served each morning and private off-street parking.

If you are physically handicapped, make sure to notify the Inn about this when making your reservations so that they do not book you in a building which has access only by stairs. There is a handicapped ramp into the Inn itself.

As for restaurants, Bartley's Dockside Dining (www.bartleysdining.com), located right by the bridge at 4 Western Avenue and Mabel's Lobster Claw at 124 Ocean Road head the list of "must stops." Both are wheelchair accessible, the former with handicapped parking. Bartley's air conditioned restaurant, situated only moments away from the Kennebunkport Inn, boasts of having the freshest lobster. The baked stuffed lobster here is superb. This house specialty involves the chef first splitting and cracking open the lobster. After breasting is added to the inside it is cooked for 20 minutes in the oven and served so easy to enjoy. The lazy man's lobster is another favourite. Here all the work has done before you, with the lobster meat taken out of the shell and served on a casserole dish with butter. It is so beautifully prepared, even the kids will enjoy it. Other choices include the caramelized salmon, haddock ala Dockside and steaks. Save room for their famous Blueberry Pie.

Mabel's is legendary in Kennebunkport. In the summer season, with its terrace, about 70 people can be seated at a time. The place



Dock Square in Kennebunkport.

is always packed, so be sure to make reservations (207-967-2562) in advance. Owners Robert and Stephanie Fischer bought the place 12 years ago and take a real hands on approach. The night we were there, we were told President Bush dropped by for ice cream a few days earlier. Then Robert brought over a special guest to the table, award winning composer Marvin Hamlisch. He had just finished his meal and was quite a gentleman.

The menu here is pretty comprehensive, with everything from lobster and a variety of fish selections to chicken, beef and pasta. There is a special children's menu of chicken, fish, burgers, spaghetti and even hot dogs. The lazy lobster is a favourite. I sampled the sword fish and it was absolutely out of this world. Their homemade clam chowder is superb as are the fried scallops. For dessert, try one of their pies (made fresh daily) or the chocolate cake topped with hot fudge sauce.

Ogunquit and York

Known to the Abenaki tribe as "beautiful place by the sea", Ogunquit (www.ogunquit.org) is a beautiful town of Maine featuring a world-class beach and magnificent coastline that attract visitors from around the globe.

Located just South of Ogunquit Village at 42 Main Street, surrounded by pastoral fields and scenic woods, the historic Ogunquit Playhouse (ogunquitplayhouse.org) continues to create some of the most vibrant and exciting summer theatre in the country. One of the few remaining summer stock theatres of the legendary straw hat circuit, the Playhouse continues its 76-year tradition of bringing the biggest and best shows of Broadway to the beach. Each summer the Playhouse produces a five show subscription series along with its unique and growing Children's Theatre Program.

The 2009 roster featured A Chorus Line, Shout! The Mod Musical, Guys and Dolls, Singin' in the Rain and the Elvis Presley filled All Shook Up. We had the good fortune of seeing Guys and Dolls, starring Tony award winner Christian Hoff and Richard Kind of TV's Spin City fame. Performances

are Tuesdays through Sundays, from Memorial Day to Columbus Day weekends. The facility is handicapped accessible and there are assisted listening devices for the hearing impaired.

If you are looking to catch a quick dinner before the show, then make a stop at the Old Village Inn (www.theoldvillageinn.net) at 250 Maine Street. The varied menu offers a blend of creative and traditional American and Continental selections, all prepared to order. You can choose one of their many delicious entrees or go to the pub menu for something quick and convenient. We arrived less than two hours before show time and our waitress assured us we would be served in plenty of time and could certainly choose from among their more popular dishes. That is what our party did, from the lazy man's lobster, to some grilled shrimp served with pasta and an outstanding and crispy roasted half duck. For dessert we saved room for the



Exciting Palace Playland. (photo, Paul Golder)

chocolate lava cake, made with warm melted pudding and some vanilla ice cream.

York's Wild Kingdom - Zoo and theme park (www.yorkzoo.com) is located in York Beach and features hundreds of exotic animals from around the world. We spent an enjoyable day there and would highly recommend it. Especially fun was the butterfly exhibit and the elephant show where we met Lydia, the 59 year old 9,000 pound elephant who can actually paint and play the harmonica. The family of lemurs were so entertaining to observe, we did not want to leave their presence. A look at the lions, tigers, bears, monkeys and zebras was a thrill. And who does not enjoy walking through a sea of beautiful deers who just want you to pet and feed them? There is also a small amusement park, featuring different rides. This includes a carpet slide, bumper cars and my favorite - the go karts. Save time to visit the arcade. The walkways are all wheelchair accessible.

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