

Children's Center

Winter 2010

NEWS

Junior Elliott is the 2009 Children's Champion!



Each year, the staff of the Children's Center select an individual who has gone above and beyond in their commitment to helping children and families. **Junior Elliott** was given the award for Children's Champion of 2009 for his many years of devotion to the Center and his active role in the first annual Spaghetti Dinner. "Junior deserves this award," says Executive Director Jonathan Leach. "He has always done whatever we need, whenever we need it."

Five awards for Friends of the Children's Center were selected by the Board of Directors for their extraordinary contributions to the Center in 2009. **Peter and Laura Benedict**, owners of the Red Barn Restaurant hosted a pancake breakfast which raised \$1,180 for the Children's Center. **Steve Kent** of Home Depot designed two beautiful gazebos to enhance the sun safety of the playground. **Roger Pomerleau** has been a strong supporter of the Children's Center dating back to the Capital Campaign, and this year, he printed the Children's Center's new brochures in full color. **Peter and**

Paula Quirion of Quirion Construction showed dedication to the Children's Center when they provided assistance and donated materials for the playground. **Toby Thompson**, recruited by his wife Kelly to help the Children's Center playground with the the Kennebec Leadership Institute, devoted an entire day to operating an excavator to create the new bike paths, digging the fall zones, and overseeing multiple other projects.

Louis



When Louis was 18 months old, he was speaking in full sentences. Shortly after, though, his mother Elena and his father Rich noticed that Louis had begun to play alone and to speak less and less. Friends and even doctors thought of many reasons for what they assumed was a temporary set back: perhaps he was reacting to the birth of a new sister; maybe it was the six months he spent in Spain where he was exposed to a new language; or perhaps it was the swimmer's ear he had recently overcome.

But his parents' intuition suggested help might be needed, and mom

and dad began to diligently seek answers and services for their son. "It felt to us like Louis was disappearing," Elena remembers. Noticing developmental delays like those of children on the spectrum,

Louis's pediatrician referred them to a psychologist, who recommended center-based early intervention. Louis entered the Stepping Stones classroom at the Children's Center, and has made dramatic progress in just a few short months. Louis's speech, occupational, and developmental therapy helped him communicate using full sentences once again. Louis was quickly moved into an inclusive classroom.

"Having peer models around him is making a difference," his mother says. "We feel like the Children's Center is bringing Louis back to us, one step at a time."



Early Childhood: Most Precious or Most Challenging?

For parents and caregivers, it's both. Come learn how you can support your young child's development.

Share and learn about:

- Developmental milestones that shape early childhood
- How to handle challenging behavior
- Sensory integration
- How to help your child master toilet learning
- Strategies for mealtime success
- Other families like yours!

2 Saturdays:
January 23rd
January 30th
9:30 - 1:30 at
Miss Kelly's
Learning Loft
48 S. Factory St.
Skowhegan, ME

This workshop is FREE for families. High quality child care and lunch for the whole family is also FREE.

To register, call Renee Randazzo at 626-3497 ext. 130

This series is sponsored by the United Way of Mid Maine.

Augusta Creates Its Own Good News



Rotary Club of Augusta



Knights of Columbus
Council 11543



Knights of Columbus
Council 334



Augusta Kiwanis Club



Mid-Maine Rose
Society



Maine Public Employees
Retirement System

There is a lot of bad news in the papers these days.

But for children and families receiving services at the Children's Center, hope keeps coming in from the generous and creative people of this community. People, businesses, and organizations are finding new and innovative ways to raise money for children.

Both the Augusta Kiwanis Club and the Rotary Club of Augusta awarded grants to the Children's Center to enhance their preschool and child care programs. The Knights of Columbus, both councils 334 and 11543, sold tootsie rolls to raise a combined total of \$2,657 for the Center. The Maine Public Employees Retirement System had "wear jeans Fridays," a bake sale, and a raffle to garner \$627 of support for Augusta children. The Mid-

Maine Rose Society turned growing roses into \$500 to help kids grow.

Businesses also found creative ways to encourage the people of Augusta to extend their generosity to the Children's Center. Hannaford at Cony Circle collected people's pocket change for the Center, and it added up. Barnes & Noble hosted the staff of the Center to wrap gifts in exchange for donations. Margarita's held Full Moon Madness celebrations to raise money for the young children served by the Center. Irving Energy selected the Children's Center as the winner of their "Positive Energy" sweepstakes, and are awarding the Center 1,500 gallons of free heating oil.

So while the challenges of this economy continue to impact crucial services to children and families, and nobody can predict to what extent, amazing things are happening on a local level. People are taking responsibility to provide support where it is needed most, just by buying a tootsie roll, wearing their jeans, or even enjoying a margarita with friends.

What will happen to the 3,400 children throughout the state who rely on early intervention services for growth and development in the first five years of life? Nobody can answer that right now. But because of the good people of Augusta, we know that Louis will get the speech therapy he needs to learn how to make a friend. We know that Kim will get the occupational therapy she needs to learn to feed herself. We know that Judah will get the developmental therapy he needs to make eye contact with his mother. For each small contribution, a small child meets a goal. Hope keeps coming in.

Learnings

By the time this newsletter reaches you, the holiday season will be over; I hope you all had a loving and joyous time, with the people you cherish.

My own holidays were clouded by a series of visits from spectres: imminent emergency changes in the regulations governing special education services, cuts in MaineCare reimbursement rates in the Governor's proposed budget, the possible repeal of Section 27 Early Intervention services...I could go on, but the ghosts that visit me in the night are not happy ones.

It seems like I spend an ever-increasing amount of time preparing testimony, attending meetings to defend services, and advocating for the future of the children and families we support. The membership I hold in the Maine Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities (MACECD), my leadership of the Children's Services Coalition of the Maine Association for Community Services Providers (MACSP), and all of the other hats I have chosen to wear are commitments above and beyond the day-to-day management of this agency. And they require a lot of energy. In tough economic times, the most fragile among us are easy targets.

Is it all worth it? The headaches, the heartaches, the meetings, the battles, the stress?



When was the last time you were visited at work by a princess?

Jonathan

Holiday Fun



The holiday season is a special time at the Center. Families attended a Make It and Take It event where children, siblings, and parents created holiday crafts to bring home. Lessons about the traditions of Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa were taught in every classroom, and reinforced with craft activities including paper menorahs, popsicle-stick reindeers, and handprint kinaras.

One snowy winter day, the children of the Children's Center made gingerbread cookies. They practiced early math skills when they measured the ingredients, and fine motor skills when they sprinkled the sprinkles on top. Then much to the children's surprise, the gingerbread boys and girls had all run away! "Where could they have gone," the teachers asked? The children, who are very very smart, practiced their problem-solving skills and searched the Center high and low. They found tiny footprints and followed them down the hall. The cookies had run all the way to the lobby, and the children rejoiced when they found them! "Silly cookies," they said, and they brought them back to the classroom.



The Giving Tree in the Children's Center lobby collected gifts for 8 children who are touched by the Center's services.



Target donated two Christmas trees to Children's Center families, which we delivered to their homes.



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**Children's Center
1 Alden Avenue
Augusta, ME 04330**

Miss Kelly's Learning Loft

In 2010, the Children's Center will begin providing early intervention and family support services in Somerset County, based at Miss Kelly's Learning Loft in Skowhegan. The Loft, owned by Kelly York, opens the doors of its new beautiful building at 48 South Factory Street in January.

Kelly and her staff will provide child care for children of all abilities, and the Children's Center will provide specialized instruction and pediatric therapies onsite to children with special needs. In addition, case management and parent education from the Children's Center will be available for Skowhegan-area families at Miss Kelly's Learning Loft.

9th Annual Chili Chowder Challenge



Save the Date! The Children's Center's 9th Annual Chili Chowder Challenge will be held on March 20th at the Augusta Armory from 11:00 - 1:00. There are so many ways to participate in this fun-filled event. Local businesses sponsor the event and donate auction items. Local restaurants cook delicious chilis and chowders. Families come to enjoy the food, music, kid's activities, and auctions. Mr. Norm Elvin does it all!

"G & E Roofing and The China Dine-ah believe the Children's Center does very good work in our community. As a co-chair of the United Way campaign in 2001, I had the opportunity to visit the Center. I saw some of the children interacting with staff members and it was truly amazing given the challenges the children face. G & E Roofing supports the Chili Chowder Challenge because we want the G & E Roofing name associated with organizations who help others in our community."

-Norm Elvin