



Message From the Board

By Geri Spencer

Everyone has a Larc story — a story about something or someone who has brought Larc into their lives. The stories are of challenges and triumphs, love and loss, courage and resilience. Here is my story.

I first met Ed McDonnell through my husband, Frank Spencer. Frank was a Camden County Freeholder from 1994 to 2000. In the political world there are plenty of campaign events I attended with Frank, and Ed was there. We were introduced and I liked him immediately, especially his wit!

In 1997, the McDonnell and Spencer families were facing tragedies—Ed's brother, Tom, 50 years old, was seriously ill with cancer, Frank's brother, John, 32 years old, was seriously ill with cancer, and my father, Tom O'Malley, age 69, was seriously ill with cancer. Tom McDonnell passed away in October 1997; Tom O'Malley in November 1997; and John in December 1997.

Ed visited Frank and me at our home shortly after John died. I can remember the three of us sitting at the dining room table just feeling so numb, sad, and exhausted. We talked and talked about our deceased family members and how they suffered. It

“What struck me the most as Susan and I walked the halls and peered into the classrooms were the smiles on the faces of the children. You could just tell that they were so happy to be there.”

was all very emotional. Then Ed said, “Let's talk about something happy!” And that was the beginning of my involvement with Larc!

We talked about our kids—my son, Sean, was in 4th grade at the time; Ed's daughter, Kate, was in her junior year of high school; and his daughter, Mandy, was at Larc. It was a great conversation, just bragging about them in a fun, positive way. I learned what Larc was all about. We talked about the golf tournament fund raiser that Larc has every year. Frank then started playing in the golf tournament and I would join him at the dinner. I got to see the same faces year after year and then I began to actually play in the golf tournament, too.

We were invited to the Appreciation Breakfast and that was the first time I was given a tour of Larc School. What struck me the most as Susan and I walked the halls and peered into the classrooms were the smiles on the faces of the children. You could just tell that they were so happy to be there. I remember watching the staff being so kind, loving, and helpful. And I remember there was a little boy being pushed in a wheel chair who stopped to tell Susan about something he did. He looked so proud! Susan smiled and congratulated him. Then Susan told me about the progress this little boy has made at Larc. I remember that after the tour I couldn't talk—I was just so moved I was speechless. It was shortly after that tour that Ed told me he wanted to expand the Board and asked me if I would be interested in serving.

Because our tragedies brought us together at my dining room table, I am here at Larc. I'm honored and proud to serve, and I thank you, Ed, for choosing me and giving me my story. ■



Jayden D.—All smiles!



Special Friend's Perspective

By Rob Parker

Camden County Department of Corrections

President, New Jersey State Police Benevolent Association Local #351

Each year, the the Police Benevolent Association Local # 351 chooses a community organization to celebrate at Christmas time.

In 2008, Stephen Gable, one of our members and a close high school friend of mine, suggested we do Christmas at Larc School. He took me there and Executive Director Susan Weiner gave us a tour of the School. What impressed me most is the warmth and commitment from everyone that works at Larc School. There is so much love for one another

This year we did something extra. We gave the teachers and their aides gift cards from Wawa. It was our way of saying thanks for all they do. The staff does so much more than their jobs require, and we felt they deserved to be recognized. When you are willing to put in that little extra effort because you love what you do, you stand out. And the staff at Larc really stands out for me!

We've been keeping this tradition with Larc going for several years now, and we want to continue it, not only because it's

“ What impressed me most is the warmth and commitment from everyone that works at Larc School. There is so much love for one another there.

there. You see it in how much love and care the staff give the children. It's wonderful to see that the children have a place like that. And you fall in love with Susan the minute you meet her.

Coming from a negative environment — working in a jail — It is so nice to come to a place where everyone enjoys their job. This completely different environment is uplifting for us, and working with the kids is very rewarding.

When we visit Larc at Christmas time, we bring the Bellmawr Park Fire Department and a local motorcycle club with us. The kids enjoy seeing Santa come in on a fire truck, and having their picture taken sitting on the fire truck. They also enjoy seeing the ambulance and the motorcycles.

such a good cause, but we want to do it for Stephen, who first brought us to Larc. He passed away on August 17, 2011, and we want to keep the tradition going in his memory. There isn't a day that goes by that we don't think about him. He was larger than life and always brought a smile to your face. Christmas was his favorite time of the year.

For us, the Larc visit embodies the spirit of Christmas. We love going to Larc and working with the children. And the kids give so much back to us. You see how hard they work and how hard the staff works.

Everyone at Larc greets you with a smile. This doesn't happen everywhere. It's a very welcoming environment. It is always a very fulfilling experience. ■

Technology Opens New Worlds For Larc Kids

Many of us use technology everyday — we check our email or the weather on our computers, iPads and tablets. We shoot a quick text message to a friend or loved one on our smart phone. It is hard to remember how we got along without all that technology.

For **Angelina P.**, a thirteen-year-old at Larc School, it's hard to remember not being able to “talk”—even though she is non-verbal. Angelina talks through technology. She uses a speech generating device (SGD), also known as a *talker*. Talkers are computerized devices that often use pictures—icons—to represent words. A student can touch the icons to create words and phrases, which are then “spoken” out loud electronically by the computer. Talkers can give students like Angelina a voice. In fact, they can give students more than a voice—it can open up a whole new world.

“ Angelina is so smart ... She blows my mind with the things she is able to say through her talker.”

Angelina doesn't remember, but when she first came to Larc School as a pre-schooler, she didn't have a talker. She would not stand, walk, wear her glasses or feed herself at school. It wasn't because she couldn't. It was because she was frustrated. Angelina does all those things and more now that she is free to express herself—both her likes and dislikes.

“Angelina is so smart,” said Kelly Adams, Angelina's one-on-one assistant and a Occupational Therapy

continued on page 5

Wednesday, April 16, 2014

Appreciation Breakfast, at Larc School

Friday, June 6, 2014

23rd Annual “Help the Kids” Golf Tournament, at the Pennsauken Country Club

September TBD

Young Lawyers Lobster Bake

Sunday, November 2, 2014

2014 Cooper Norcross Run the Bridge Presented by AmeriHealth New Jersey

calendar



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Listed above are contributions from July 1, 2013 through December 31, 2013. Please let us know if a name was omitted, and we'll be sure to print it in our next issue.

Long Live The Bake!

An interesting fact about lobsters: they continue to grow as long as they live.

This amazing ability might serve as a metaphor for the relationship between Larc School, the **Young Lawyer Committee (YLC) of the Camden County Bar Association**, and the yearly **Lobster Bake** event benefitting Larc School, presented by the YLC each year since 2010.

“Every year, we bring a few more Young Lawyer members to Larc School. After visiting Larc, they become very involved with the Lobster Bake,” said **Rachael Brekke, an attorney with the New Jersey State Board of Public Utilities**. “And once our attorneys become connected to Larc, they want to bring their colleagues.”

A Camden County Bar Association-Young Lawyer Trustee and chairperson of the 2013 Lobster event, Ms. Brekke said the YLC would like to see the event open to other bar association members, bringing more attorneys to see Larc School. “Meeting the children and going into the classrooms with them, you can feel the impact of your efforts,” she said.

Since the first Lobster Bake in 2010, the event has grown each year. About 200 guests enjoyed a sumptuous lobster dinner at **The Tap Room**, in Westmont, this past September, culminating in a contribution of \$18,585 to Larc School from the YLC. The gift is to be used for whatever project Larc chooses.

As the event grows, so does sponsorship. “Our success can be attributed to the efforts of Mike Dennin,” said Ms. Brekke.



Presenting the proceeds from the 2013 Lobster Bake—in the form of a giant check—to Larc School Executive Director Susan Weiner (center) are: (left to right) Camden County Bar Foundation President Louis Lessig; Camden County Bar Association Trustee Michael Dennin; Camden County Bar Association President Gary Boguski; and Young Lawyer Committee Chair Rachael Brekke.

“The lobster bake is a way to give back to our community and those in need. It’s our charitable highlight of the year,” said **Michael Dennin, an attorney with the Law Offices of Vincent J. Ciecka, P.C., Camden County Bar Association Trustee, former Young Lawyer Trustee, and chairperson of the 2012 Lobster Bake**. “This past year we added a sponsorship level—the Claw sponsorship. We also gave out favors to guests—a shindig drinking glass displaying the names of sponsors.”

“We thank Larc School for embracing us as part of the Larc family, and we’re very excited about the upcoming 2014 Lobster Bake,” said Ms. Brekke. “It’s important to build on our relationship with Larc, so we can grow together.” ■



Angelina P. (left) and Liesl R. (middle) applaud Daymion J. (right) as he shows off his Team Board skills.

Larc student **Daymion J.** had a striking response to the Team Board, an interactive, touch-screen teaching aid that allows Larc students to show what they know and learn by touch. Acquired in 2008, the 77-inch, interactive whiteboard can be found in the library and a mobile, adjustable Team Board is used in the classrooms. With its lights, colors, and interactive features, the Team Board is an enticing device, as evidenced by its effect on Daymion.

“When I first met Daymion, he could not walk or stand on his own,” said Gina Gambone, Daymion’s first teacher at Larc School. “Throughout the year, I looked for motivators for Daymion and found he was very motivated by the Team Board.”

Daymion would stand in front of the Team Board while holding a staff member’s hand. After a while, he used the Team Board as a support. “Then one day, while I was holding his hand across the room, he let go and took off toward the Team Board. He was so proud of himself,” said Ms. Gambone. “Each week, we moved his chair further away from the Team Board, and each week he succeeded in walking that distance!”

continued from page 2

student. “She blows my mind with the things she is able to say through her talker. Some students need to think about what to say and how to say it using their talkers, but Angelina is so fast with her device and knows how to say what she wants even when the icons for a specific word are not available to her.”

One of Angelina’s fellow students shares a similar experience. **Liesl R.** came to Larc School as a teenager. She was also non-verbal and had not used a talker at her previous schools.

“Thanks to her talker, Liesl has become a much more mature and social person,” said Liesl’s mother, Elizabeth Dalzell. “She can arrive home and talk about her day. She can ask for favorite foods, request activities, or express thoughts and happenings that made her happy or sad. When her grandfather passed away suddenly, the talker helped her express her thoughts of sadness, confusion, and anger.”

“Everyone wants his or her child to fit in, and now mine does,” Ms. Dalzell said. “Liesl now has the power to talk with her classmates, friends, and individuals in

the community. The talker also allows her to tell people if they are bothering her. Instead of acting out in an inappropriate manner she can just press her annoy button. We should all be so lucky!”

“**Having a communication device has allowed Liesl to truly be Liesl.**”

“Having a communication device has allowed Liesl to truly be Liesl,” said Stacie Halscheid, who taught Liesl previously. “Liesl is much more comfortable in her own skin now that she has a way to let us know she has a lot to say. Because of this device, we have found out that this child has an extraordinary sense of humor and understands the world around her.”

While talkers can provide an out-loud voice to students, other technologies can provide something less concrete, but no less valuable—motivation.

Rachel Saunders, Daymion’s mom, credits Larc School Staff with his tremendous progress. “When Daymion started at Larc, he had issues. He wasn’t walking and he wouldn’t let me touch him, brush his teeth or hair. But Larc Staff got him to touch everything. They worked with him and would not give up,” she said.

“And when Gina introduced him to the Team Board, it motivated him enough to get up and walk,” said Ms. Saunders. “Larc opened up a whole new world to Daymion. Now he’s curious about everything!”

As with the talkers, Team Boards are expensive. Larc’s Team Boards were realized through a grant from the Camden Home for Children & S.P.P.C. Purchase of the school’s talkers and many other devices are funded in part by Larc’s Annual Golf Tournament, Annual Run the Bridge Event, and other activities so generously supported by Larc Friends and Families.

The Larc Staff and Families are most grateful to Larc supporters for the opportunity to be able to secure these technological marvels and open new and wondrous worlds for the deserving students at Larc School. ■



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*Julius E. looks up at Santa
with eyes filled with wonder.*

Larc Santas Went To Jared... And Delivered The Goods To Larc!

Each year around the holiday season, Larc School is visited by several Santas. Representing **Harcourt Brace Publishing**, **Camden County Corrections Officers**, and **Pellegrino Auto Group**, each Santa brings his own special delight to Larc students, along with gifts and good cheer.

Among the gifts are stuffed animals—dozens of them—donated to Larc School by **Jared the Galleria of Jewelry**, in Deptford, and delivered to Larc students by Larc's Santas. The animals start their journey to Larc by helping another charity—St. Jude's Hospital for children. "People buy the animals to benefit St. Jude's. Then many deposit them in a box at Jared stores. From there they go to various charities," said Sara Yang, general manager of the Jared store in Deptford.

"When I took over the Deptford store two years ago, it was suggested we donate our animals to Larc School," said Ms. Yang. "I visited Larc, and Executive Director Susan Weiner gave me a tour. It melted my heart. I thought our stuffed animals would find a great home there."

Ms. Yang said the Deptford store is near Larc and many in the area know of Larc, so the number of animals taken to Jared has gone up. "We make sure every student gets one each Christmas. We try to give them to teachers, too," she said. "This past Christmas, we collected over 100 animals for Larc." ■

The Heiser Family

A Model Larc Family

Some may think that the annual *Cooper Norcross Run the Bridge Presented by AmeriHealth New Jersey* is about running and winning. But the Run is really all about caring and giving. And while much of its growth can be attributed to the enthusiasm of the runners, at the heart of its success is the Larc Family—organizers, sponsors, supporters, and outstanding volunteers who donate an extraordinary amount of time and effort to benefit Larc students.

The Heiser family is, in every sense of the word, a Larc Family. Twelve-year-old Jacob is a student at Larc. Jacob's twin sister, Abigail, who is in public school, attends the sibling program at Larc to help her and her brother Jacob enrich their relationship. Fifteen-year-old Noah is autistic and also attends public school, but enjoys the support of Larc staff during family and social functions at Larc. Jacob's oldest sister, Rachel, volunteers whenever her college course allow her the time. And Jacob's parents, Nicole and Don, are avid volunteers at Larc.



An all-around Larc Family, here are the Heisers: (clockwise from top left) Nicole, Don, Rachel, Noah, Jacob, and Abigail.

Larc School came into their lives when Jacob entered the school as a student nine years ago. "We chose Larc because of the friendly and family feel the school gave," said Nicole Heiser. "Larc is welcoming from the minute you walk in, and Jacob has been very comfortable there since the first day. Everyone at the school knows my whole family and we know everyone at Larc. They embrace my older son, too."



Larc student Jacob enjoying a photo op with his dad, Don Heiser.

Ms. Heiser said that Jacob, who is severely disabled and dependent on those around him for everything, has thrived at Larc. "Jacob is blind and can't even hold his head up, but they didn't put him in a corner at Larc. The staff has always advocated for him," she said. "They introduced him to a speech-generating communication device when he was five or six, and he's progressed by leaps and bounds. He does extraordinarily well by communicating with a head switch."

“Larc is welcoming from the minute you walk in...”

Ms. Heiser, who is working toward a nursing degree at Rowan College at Gloucester County, said, "I'm very involved with Larc. I volunteer for the Run, stuffing tons of food bags and information packets for the runners, and working at the Run itself all day, starting at 5 A.M."

She also volunteers at Larc's annual golf tournament, Larc's Santa shop, and runs Larc's Yankee Candle fundraiser sale at Christmastime.

Don Heiser, a locksmith with Campbell Lock & Safe, in Westville, shows that he knows how to open his heart as well as doors by volunteering on Saturdays for the Larc Run. "He does a lot of the heavy lifting, moving boxes and such for the Run," said Ms. Heiser.

Nicole and Don Heiser continue to find time to volunteer for Larc for many of the same reasons other Larc friends and family members do. "I have no question that Larc staff cares for and loves my son," she said resolutely. "Not only do I feel Jacob is safe at Larc, but he's treated as though Larc is his home. It's very reassuring." ■

>> 2013 Run the Bridge

In recognition of the 2013 bridge run event, Camden Mayor Dana L. Redd (middle left) presented a proclamation from the city to Louis Bezich, Chief of Staff, Cooper University Health Care (far left); Judy Roman, CEO & President, AmeriHealth New Jersey (middle right); and Larc School Executive Director Susan Weiner (far right). Proclamations are given to honor those individuals and organizations who have contributed to the enrichment of their community through their service and projects.

"All of us at Larc School thank all of you—our sponsors, supporters, volunteers, and participants—for helping to once again create a Run that was fun and successful in every way," said Larc Executive Director Susan Weiner. "We thank you from the bottom of our hearts!"



Please like us on [facebook/runthebridge](https://www.facebook.com/runthebridge) to keep in touch for the 2014 event.

11.2.14



>> 2013 Run the Bridge

On Sunday, November 3, 2013, nearly 5,000 runners, walkers, and kids participated in the **2013 Cooper Norcross Run the Bridge Event Presented by AmeriHealth New Jersey**, benefitting Larc School. Both the morning and the runners were brisk—the first runner crossing the finish line with an amazing time of 29 minutes and 36 seconds. The second place runner followed 5 seconds later. Only 18 seconds separated the first five runners crossing the line.

Please like us on facebook/runthebridge to keep in touch for the 2014 event!

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Larc School sincerely thanks the supporters of the 2013 Cooper Norcross Run the Bridge *presented by AmeriHealth New Jersey*

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