



## Message From the Board

By Geri Spencer

September is my favorite month! From the time I was a little girl I knew that September meant a new beginning—new school clothes and supplies, waking each morning to a chill in the air, watching the leaves change color on the trees and the sun cast shadows as each day became shorter. Everything is exciting in September because we're already looking ahead to the rest of the school year.

You can feel that excitement in the halls of Larc School, too. Teachers have decorated and prepped their rooms. They have created lesson plans designed to grab the students' attention, engage them in new learning experiences, and help them master new skills.

<sup>66</sup> "September at Larc School means looking ahead with excitement, anticipation, and an openness to new possibilities."

September at Larc School means looking ahead with excitement, anticipation, and an openness to new possibilities. What miracles will unfold this year? First sounds, first signs, first steps—Larc's staff is fearless, and their creativity and passion limitless when it comes to their students' achievements.

Larc's wonderful, dedicated staff makes it all happen—the hands-on teachers, therapists, and assistants ... the behind-the-scenes administrative staff ... and the custodians of Larc's most beautiful, immaculate building and grounds. Everyone has a part in making the upcoming year the very best possible time for every student, every day, in every way. September is just the start—and that is very exciting!



### At Larc, When It Rained, It Poured ... Ice Cream!!

Thank you to our **Special Friends at Camden County** for our yummy Mr. Softee—a particularly special treat on a rainy day!



Above, visiting Disneyland with her family and her "talker"!—has made **Ada's** Christmas holiday a truly special time for all.

Now she can express what she's thinking, and you can better see the real Ada.

## Giving Ada A Voice

What teacher wants to hear You're getting on my nerves from a student?! That would be Larc Teacher Joanne Pezzella, who loves to hear it from her student, Ada.

"I had Ada at ages seven to nine, when her communication consisted mostly of eye gazing," said Ms. Pezzella. "I now have her again, at age 20, and I just love it when she tells me that I'm getting on her nerves. It's a valid feeling, and it's so typical of a young adult. Seeing so much growth is very, very satisfying."

Ada, who has been a student at Larc since she was three years old, is in a wheelchair at school, and has difficulty with movement, with smiling, or having eye contact. Also, Ada has no verbal language, but, thanks to modern technology and Larc School, she now has a voice—a programmable, computerized speech generating "talker" she can control. And, according to her teachers and her mom, Ada Savidge (yes, also named Ada!), it's a sassy voice indeed.

"Sure, she can be ornery, but then she'll say the sweetest thing, like I love you or will you sit with me? and be so proud of herself," Ms. Savidge explains. "It makes us all very happy to see that Ada can tell us what's on her mind. We feel she has so much inside her, but, before the talker, she had no way to get it out.

"Once, at a noisy science fair, she kept saying, *I don't want to do this*. When we finally went into the hall, where it was quiet, she said, *Will you sit with me ... can you told my hand?* "The talker gave her a way to tell me she was unhappy, but with words, not tears. Everyone should be able to do that."

Ada's speech therapist, Roxane Adams, says she always saw the potential in her. "Ada was aware of what was going on around her," said Ms. Adams. "When she was young, she and her mom had developed their own shorthand, such as Ada touching her mom's hand for yes and her face for no."

"The one thing we wanted year after year was for Ada to be able to communicate," says Ms. Savidge. Ms. Adams worked successfully with Ada and speech devices at school, but finding one she could use at home proved more difficult. When an iPad was found to have the necessary criteria for successful home use, the next hurdle was getting the insurance company to agree to pay for it. They turned down the request twice. Then Ms. Adams suggested Ms. Savidge write a letter from the heart, explaining how the device would help Ada medically—how it would allow her to tell others if she was hot or cold, hungry or feeling sick.

"That did it," says Ms. Savidge. "They finally approved it. It gave Ada a voice and we're so very grateful for that."

Ms. Adams explains that the talker can be programmed to include phrases Ada might use in everyday life, such as, *Ready for my turn ... I'm finished ... Not ready yet ... I don't really want to do this ... Something hurts.* Using her head to click a switch, Ada can "turn pages" on the iPad screen, and then scroll down and click on the phase she wants to use. More pages with more phrases can be added as staff and *family learn how she responds to activities* and the phrases she already has in the talker, giving voice to her state of being, and her personality.

"Now she can express what she's thinking, and you can better see the real Ada," says Ms. Adams. "She can not only tell you that she wants to hear music, but she can pick out what she wants to hear, like Taylor Swift."

One important revelation was that she was able to predict when she was about to have a seizure. Ms. Adams explained that, one day, Ada said, I'm upset because, and then, *I don't feel well*. A few minutes later, she had a seizure. That's when it was understood that, although infrequent, her seizures were preceded by an aura she could communicate to those around her. *I feel like I'm going to have a seizure* was then programmed into her talker.

"Ada has become really good at using the talker," Ms. Adams says. "It makes her more a part of the whole day in school as she's now able to participate much more. She has a say in what happens during activities.

"More than that, Ada's able to display her personality as she has more *conversation* with others," says Ms. Adams. "What she likes to use most are the funny, sassy little comments that make us laugh." doesn't use it all the time," says Ms. Savidge. "But in Disneyworld, she used the talker much more successfully than I had ever seen. She was able to tell us what she wanted and where she wanted to go—Magic Kingdom... Peter Pan Flight ... I can't wait for the nighttime show ... I'm ready to take a break ... Can I see it? ... I want to do that again ... I had so much

It makes us all very happy to see that Ada can tell us what's on her mind. We feel she has so much inside her, but, before the talker, she had no way to get it out."

Each year, Ada enjoys a vacation at Disneyworld, in Florida. The whole family is included in the trip: Ada's mom, and her dad, Howard; her older sister, Jessica, and her husband, Dan, and their daughter, Lily; another older sister, Jennifer, and her husband, Rich; and her brother, Howard, Jr.

Last year was the first time they took the talker along. "Ada was really excited to use it," says Ms. Savidge. "My older kids are very involved with Ada and are a big part of her life. Before the trip, we all sat with her and made a list of new phrases for Roxane to program into the talker, including some specifically crafted for the trip on a *Disney* page.

"It takes a lot of patience and work on Ada's part to use the talker, and she *fun at Disney*. It was so rewarding to see her be able to express herself, and she was so happy to be able to do it.

"Ada's favorite ride is Dumbo, in the Magic Kingdom," Ms. Savidge says. "On the last day, after her last ride, after watching the electric light parade, she used her talker to say, *Things to do ... nothing*. We understood she meant, *We did it all!* We could tell she was happy.

"Larc School felt like the right fit the first time we went there," Ms. Savidge relates. "It's always been a place where I felt Ada was safe, cared for, and loved. But it's truly a blessing that Roxane and others at Larc cared enough to find a way to give Ada her voice! It's amazing and overwhelming to hear my daughter say, *I love you*."

## calendar

Saturday, October 1, 2016 The Camden County Bar Association's Young Lawyer Committee (YLC) 7th Annual Event



Sunday, November 6, 2016 2016 Cooper Norcross Run the Bridge Presented by AmeriHealth New Jersey

#### Larc's Spring Formal ... Enchanting!

May flowers ... spring sunshine ... a wonderful time for an enchanted evening in an **Enchanted Forest**— Larc School's theme for this year's **Spring Formal** held in May!



*Larc Student Ashley* captures sunshine in her dress and her smile at Larc's Spring formal!



All dressed up for Larc's Spring Formal, Larc Students William and Giana enjoy a light-hearted moment.



Larc Student Charles and Classroom Assistant Rebecca share an enchanted and colorful photo-op at Larc's Spring Formal.

## Celebrating The End Of The School Year By Recognizing Those Who Help Make Miracles At Larc



## End-Of-Year Dinner

## Kudos to those who celebrate special anniversaries of their many years with Larc!

Executive Director Susan Weiner - 35 years Speech Therapist Betsy Thompson - 30 years Classroom Assistant Edie Siciliano - 25 years Classroom Assistant Maryann Tomlin - 25 years Classroom Assistant Georgia Vitacolonna - 15 years School Psychologist Kristin Nowell - 15 years Classroom Assistant Cindy Scott - 15 years

## Starting a new chapter in their lives, those who are retiring this year will surely be missed!

Classroom Assistant Georgia Vitacolonna Occupational Therapist Barbara Spadafora

Below, celebrating at Larc's annual **End-Of-Year Dinner** are (left to right) **Barbara Spadafora,** Susan Weiner, Edie Siciliano, Georgia Viacolonna, and Betsy Thompson.

## Heart of Larc Award

The Heart of Larc Award is presented each year at Larc's **End-Of-Year Dinner** to one staff member to recognize his or her extraordinary contribution to Larc School and its students. This year's Heart of Larc Award was presented to Larc School Psychologist Kristin Nowell (*right*) by Larc Executive Director Susan Weiner (*left*) for consistently going above and beyond the scope of her position, both in and out of the classroom.



# FLARC SCHOOL

Larc School gratefully acknowledges these gifts from our caring friends—individuals, foundations, corporations—whose generosity makes it possible for Larc School to provide the very best for its students and their families. We extend our deepest gratitude to every donor.

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#### In honor of Larc Students, Susan Weiner, & Larc Board of Directors Ms Sheila Dyan & Mr Charles Gaglia, Jr

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## When remembering those you love, remember Larc

Make a donation to Larc School—the perfect remembrance for all occasions: birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, congratulations, and condolences

Contributions may be sent to: Larc School, 1089 Creek Road, Bellmawr, NJ 08031

(Envelope enclosed) or donate online at www.larcschool.org

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Listed above are contributions from January 1, 2016 through June 30, 2016 Please let us know if a name was omitted, and we'll be sure to print it in our next issue.





Above, proudly announcing Larc School's "Help The Kids" Golf Tournament are golfers (left to right) Battleship New Jersey Executive Director and C.E.O. Philip Rowan, and Senator Jim Beach. Below, celebrating 25 years of Larc's "Help the Kids" Golf Tournament are (left to right): Sam Ross; Larc Executive Director Susan Weiner; Shirley Wacker; Board Members Chaz Higgins, Assemblywoman Pat Jones, Carol Parker Elbert, and Board Chairman Ed McDonnell.



## A Sterling Event

Larc School's 25th Anniversary "Help The Kids" Golf Tournament

June 3, the day of Larc School's 25th (silver!) Anniversary "Help The Kids" Golf Tournament, looked more like pewter than silver, as rain clouds cast a gray (and wet!) ambience over the morning group of golfers. But, soon after, the silver lining showed up as the sun broke through for the afternoon group. In all, 127 golfers played in this year's tournament, held at the **Pennsauken Country Club**. In the evening, golfers and guests celebrated this anniversary tournament at an elegant **Golf Banquet**, complete with champagne at the dinner tables, an anniversary cake for dessert, and more than 75 beautifully-wrapped prizes.

#### AT LARC SCHOOL, WE ALL BELIEVE IN MIRACLES!"

As lovely, fun, and delicious as the Golf Banquet always is, the evening is not about golf, but about Larc School's wonderful students. Always there to remind us is Larc Executive Director Susan Weiner, whose heartfelt introductory words about Larc students always inspire us. We'd like to share some of Ms. Weiner's words ...

[The following are selected portions from Susan Weiner's opening remarks at the 2016 Golf Banquet.]

"At Larc, we believe in small, quiet miracles, and I want to tell you about some of them.

"Ryan, with his bright eyes and big smile just turned five and has been at Larc for two years. Ryan is non-verbal and cannot sign. He is the first student at Larc to use an eye scan talker. We've played 'Simon Says'—I lost. He says 'Hi' to his friends and he asked one of his assistants to please go to Dunkin Donuts for him. Small quiet miracles ...

"Anthony, 16, has been with Larc since he was three. He is also non-verbal and non-signing. After years of trials, he has begun to use a foot switch with a talker. He asks 'Can we watch TV?' when it's leisure time and always asks to watch the history or sports channel (much to the irritation of his classmate Ada). Small quiet miracles ...

"Eighteen years ago a young father attended the first IEP meeting for his three year old daughter just starting at Larc School. The student's teacher and speech therapist, still working at Larc School, never forgot what he said. With a tear rolling down his cheek he said, 'You are the first people who said what she could do, not what she couldn't do.' Sarah just turned 21 and she is beautiful and smart. She is sometimes wickedly funny, and using a head switch to activate her talker, she engages in the fullness of life. To her father and to all of us—Sarah, and all the boys and girls at Larc, continue to show us miracles every day."

We share this with you because, at Larc School, we believe in our students, we believe in our parents and families, we believe in our staff. We believe in each other, and we believe in miracles.





## First Sunday in November 11.6.16

- Ben Franklin Bridge, 8:30am
- 10K run
- 2-mile bridge walk

Register at runthebridge.org 🚹

## thank you

# Larc School Sincerely Thanks the Sponsors of the 25th Anniversary "Help the Kids" Golf Tournament

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## Congratulations Graduates!

June 10, Graduation Day at Larc School, was the very special day when four Educational Program Graduates and eight Pre-school Graduates ventured ahead, ready to experience their next achievements with determination and pride. Congratulations Graduates!

Clockwise, Larc Pre-school Graduate Austin proudly wears his cap and gown. A happy and proud moment for Educational Program Graduate Giana. Pre-school Graduate Ryan receives his diploma from Larc Principal Bethann Rogers. Educational Program Graduate Sarah celebrates with Larc School Psychologist Kristin Nowell.





**GRADUATION DAY** 



