



2022 YEAR END APPEAL



December 2022

Dear FRIENDS,

A JOYFUL HOLIDAY SEASON TO YOU ALL!!!

“In the end, only kindness matters.”
—Jewel

I am writing this as the holiday season begins, and it seems like the perfect time to express our gratitude to all of you for your friendship and continued interest in the Guild for Exceptional Children (GEC). We are so thankful to you for helping to support our mission of serving children and adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Your kindness makes a difference...in the lives of the people served by GEC, as well as in the morale of the workforce.

It is an incredibly powerful motivator to learn that you are not alone; that there are others who believe in and support the work you do; that there is more kindness in the world than you may have thought. GEC is lucky to have kind friends like you!

At this time of year, I always reflect on the many things in life that I am thankful for, I feel very thankful to be a part of this world; a world where people genuinely care about and support each other...the world of the GEC. The truth of the matter is that *I am a very lucky person!* I am lucky because I get to work at the GEC with the most loving, open-hearted, appreciative people on the planet-of course I am referring to the adults who attend our day programs and who live in our residences and the children who attend our school.

I am lucky because I get to work with a whole bunch of people who believe as I do; that a life of helping and supporting our fellow human beings, is a life well lived.

I am lucky because I have had the benefit of fine example. People who always acted in the interest of others, who taught me the meaning of service, and who showed me the path toward living my best life. I walk in the footsteps of giants, from the parents who fought the State to close down Willowbrook; to the parents who fought to build a better solution, the GEC, from scratch; to the people who went before me, broke down barriers, worked tirelessly and passionately, and showed me what a lifetime of real service is about.

It is my belief that this is what life is all about, helping others. **A lifetime of service to others in need is a life well spent, perhaps a way of living our best lives.**

There are many stories that highlight the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the GEC. I provided a few short stories below.



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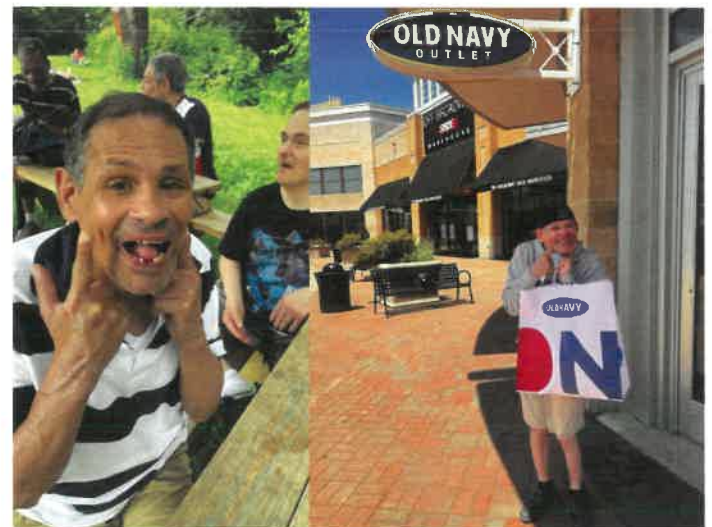
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS



I met James way back in 1986. I was teaching in a local high school and came by after work to visit my friend John at his job (GEC's Martini Residence). I was invited in and while waiting for John, one of the residents, a young man named James came up to me. James cannot speak nor hear, but of course I didn't know that, so I attempted to say hello and stuck out my hand. James took my hand and wrapped me in a great big hug. I instantly felt accepted and at peace. Not knowing what else to do, I hugged back. Laura, the Residence Manager

at the time witnessed this interaction and offered me a job. I was reluctant because I was happy with my teaching position, but the truth of the matter is that I was already hooked. The hug got me. I began working weekends as a Direct Support Professional (they called us direct care counselors in those days), and 36 years later, I'm still here. And I'm not the only one. John and Laura are both still affiliated with GEC, John as Incident Review Chair and Laura as Director of Residential Services; and there are so many others who remain connected to GEC for 20, 30, 40 years. They were all hooked as I was!

James moved into Martini Residence in 1981, after living in a state-run institution. That move was the best thing that ever happened to him. He has thrived and is so happy in the residence he has now lived in for 41 years! He is leading a full and active life.



James enjoying some happy adventures with friends (above and left)



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YOUNG ANGELO FINDS GROWTH AND HAPPINESS AT GEC PRESCHOOL



Angelo, building his skills for a brighter future (above)

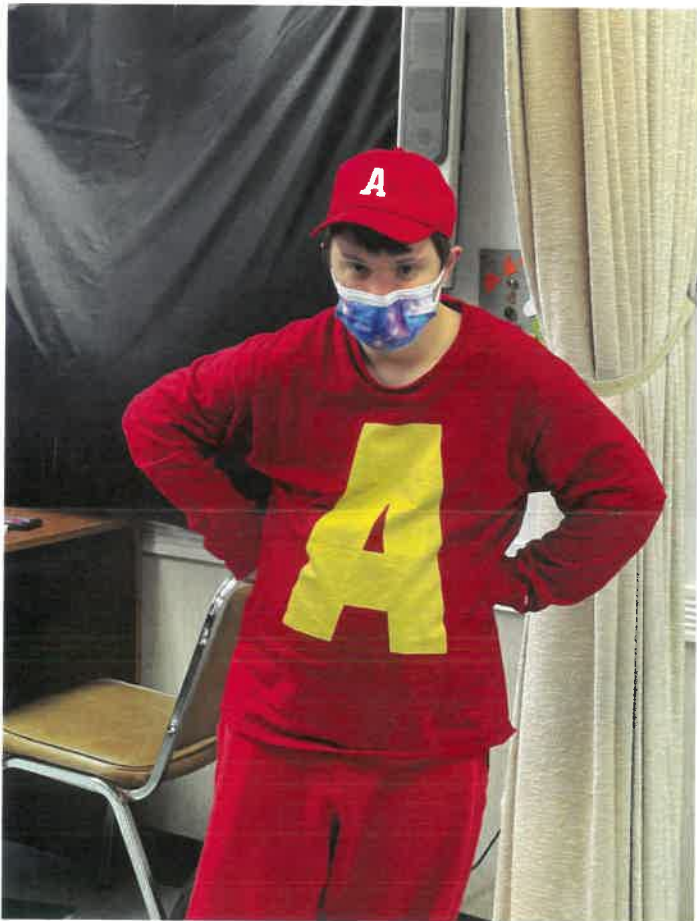
I Think Angelo's Mom tells this story so much better than I could. "My name is Nicole, and my son Angelo attends the Guild for Exceptional Children (Preschool). My son is a very bright boy who struggles with behavior problems at times and requires a lot of attention. Josh, Margaret, and Noha (school teaching staff) have been more than a blessing to us. With a classroom of 15 children also needing attention I feel like my son is the only child just

because of the effort and determination that is put forth. Josh is always challenging my son's intelligence and giving him that push that he needs. Since my son has been attending this school, he has been very happy and so have I. I do see a lot of kindness, love, care, and patience. My son has improved in many ways, and they are always looking for new ways to snag his interest and I could not be more thankful for the entire Guild system".



ADRIAN RISES TO THE CHALLENGE!

Adrian is a bright, funny, and caring individual who loves to socialize with friends and engage in a variety of activities. Some of his favorites are art, math, bowling, and music. He loves to be organized and is a stickler for abiding by his planned schedule. These are all facets of Adrian’s quirky charms.



Adrian at times has struggled to get along with peers in his program. His way of socializing could be off putting to those he would wish to be his friends. This was upsetting for Adrian, as he did not

mean to cause any offense. He simply wanted to make friends and be social. After many challenges, occasional setbacks, and countless small victories, Adrian found his place among a select group of peers and was able to forge close and lasting friendships. You will often see him laughing and joking with his buddies downstairs at the GEC Main Building, where his group currently congregates.

Adrian has formed close ties to his staff as well, especially “Uncle” Mike. You better believe it will be a good day if Mike’s art class is taking place. “Where’s Uncle Mike?” can be heard wafting through the halls and corridors of the Guild for Exceptional Children. Don’t worry Adrian, he’ll be coming down for a visit soon. Adrian will check in with Mike when he gets home from program and play him “his song” (Bruno Mars - Finesse) to close out each day.



Here at The Mastronardi Day-Hab, we could not be prouder of the effort we put in each day, the hard work our staff puts in connecting with the individuals that attend here, the lasting impact it has on their (and our) lives, and the gratification we feel when we have success stories such as this one. Cheers Adrian! Keep up the good work!

Adrian, dressed as “Alvin” for a Halloween Party (left) & with his good friend Mike (above)



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CHALLENGES, OLD & NEW

There are always challenges that surface when working with a population that has special needs. Many of the adults we serve have complex medical and psychiatric needs, and many are growing older and are developing ambulatory needs. GEC must be ever prepared to meet these challenges. We have big plans to renovate our existing buildings, making them safer for the people we serve. We are also planning to develop new spaces, which would enable us to extend our services and help more people.

Emerging from the pandemic has created new challenges. Chief among them is to find a way to

develop a dwindling workforce. GEC has seen a 20% reduction in our workforce since the pandemic, and we understand that this is a widespread phenomenon. Other agencies have had to shutter entire programs for lack of staffing. We are fortunate to have the dedicated staff we do but **we have a real need for more direct support professionals, teachers, and drivers.** Finding ways to attract and incentivize staff has become a big focus, and much of our current fundraising is focused on this important objective.





A HOLIDAY MESSAGE

In my letters of recent years there has been a theme weaving through. Two years ago, during the height of the pandemic, we spoke about faith. **I asked our supporters to “take a leap of faith”** in the 60 plus years of experience at the GEC and in the dedication and devotion of our incredible staff. We were able to get through those dark times by relying on each other, and our resolve to do the right thing in service to others became stronger than ever. That faith was not misplaced. We kept people safe. We continued our mission of care. We stayed the course.

Last year, when it seemed (for the first, but not the last time) that we might be coming out of the pandemic, **I wrote to you about hope**; the hope that all parents have for the best possible life for their child; hope for brighter days ahead, expanded services, less panic induced isolation, and building better lives for the people in our care. We are now in the process of making those promises a reality. You will soon be hearing about upcoming capital projects that will make GEC better than ever!

Some of you may already know where this is going, **but none of this would be possible without love.** The love that a parent has for a child whom they have learned will experience challenges throughout his/her life, somehow overcomes their despair. They would do anything for that child. They make lifelong sacrifices for the love of that child. There is also the love that staff has for the people they serve that somehow overcomes their own material needs. I have seen them make sacrifices in their own lives to continue in their underpaid but greatly appreciated service. Finally, there is the love that you, our wonderful supporters have for what you know to be a worthy cause. Your continued support is an opportunity for you to help others, **to live your best**

life. Your support of our mission and your continued kindness involve your own sacrifices, as we ask you to continue supporting our services, our labor of love. **It is, after all, love that binds us all.**

In what seems like an increasingly divided society, we can all agree that supporting people with developmental disabilities is a good thing, a worthy mission! We give of ourselves and give our very best to this cause; and **in giving, we receive so much more.** This is worth believing in!

What gives our lives meaning and makes it all worthwhile? It really comes down to these three things: Faith, Hope, and Love!

Here's hoping that life gives you good reasons to have faith in the kindness of others, hope in a brighter future, and all the love you can handle!

“All you need is love!”

—John Lennon & Paul McCarthy

Please continue your kindness and support of the GEC as we carry on our 64-year legacy of Building Better Lives for People with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities.

In Thanksgiving,

Joseph L. Riley, GEC CEO



Donation Reply Form

____ Yes, I would like to support the GEC's Year End Appeal with my enclosed tax-deductible gift of:
____ \$25 ____ \$75 ____ \$150 ____ \$200 ____ other

This is a One time donation Recurring donation Weekly Monthly Yearly

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: _____ Cell: _____
Email: _____

My gift is in Honor of _____ or in Memory of _____

Please make your check payable to the GEC.

Credit Card Payment:

Preferred Method of Payment: _____ Visa _____ Mastercard _____ Discover _____ AmEx
Name as it appears on card: _____
Card No. _____ Exp.Date: _____ 3 or 4 digit code: _____
Zip Code: _____ Amount: \$ _____ Signature: _____

Give by cell:

You can use your cell phone to make a donation. **Please text gec to number 56512**

Other Giving Opportunities

Securities, Trusts and Real Estate

Donations in the form of: stocks, bonds, mutual funds, securities or real estate can offer the contributor a substantial tax benefit. Please consult with your tax advisor for current IRS rules and regulations.

Planned Giving

Planned gifts such as: gift annuities, deferred payment annuities and remainder annuity trust can offer the donor numerous tax benefits. The Development Department can provide information that would allow you and your tax consultant to choose a plan that meets your financial needs.

Wills & Bequests

The most important reason to have a will is to ensure that you are the one who decides how your estate will be divided. By remembering the GEC in your will, you will help perpetuate a legacy of care that has existed since 1958. If you already have a will, a codicil can be added. Please consult with your attorney.

Matching Gifts

To double or perhaps triple your donation, please inquire if your employer has a matching gift program. Please include the matching gift form with your donation. The Development Department will complete the form and return it to your employer for processing.

Questions? Please contact the Development Department at **718-833-6633 x 228** or **cmansuetto@gecbklyn.org**.