The BELLE FOCUS
News & Notes from the Belle Center of Chicago
All Children Can Learn and Play Together

SPRING 2010

INSIDE ▶
3 FASHION SHOW Our First Annual New Fall Event
4 BELLE-A NOTTE 2010
5 PRINCIPAL'S CORNER From St. Matthias Transfiguration School

Family Reflection:

The Narrow Path: Where Great Success Comes In Small Increments

by Patrice Tuohy

When my husband and I learned at 20 weeks that the baby I was carrying had a heart defect and most probably Trisomy 21, or Down syndrome, we were not given a realistic picture by most of our doctors of what lay in store. We were told that the fetus would not thrive; that the stress of having a baby with Down syndrome would be hard on our family; and that our marriage would most likely break under the strain.

This bleak picture was painted by well-respected doctors from prestigious hospitals who, no doubt, genuinely thought they were helping by encouraging us to terminate the pregnancy. Yet, even in the midst of our deep sadness at learning of our baby's defects, we knew that the story we were being told was grim beyond what most families with children with special needs experience.

Of course, as we soon learned, parents of children with special needs don't have idyllic lives. We have misty moments when we wish progress came easier. But we also have plenty of grace-filled moments when we are astounded by the courageous perseverance of our children in whose lives little things are writ large. It is as if we are watching our children grow in slow motion – first words, first steps, first signs of independence may be years rather than months in the making – which renders these milestones all the more significant and thrilling.

The day my daughter Hannah learned to jump reminded me of the day I first learned to ride a two-wheel bike. Just as my mother had coached me and watched amazed when I finally took off down the street, I worked and worked with Hannah – trying to break down what was far more complicated than I ever realized – who knew jumping required so many brain signals and coordinated muscle movements – until suddenly both her feet were off the ground and she called out, "Mommy, I'm jumping! I'm jumping!"

The day my daughter Hannah learned to jump reminded me of the day I first learned to ride a two-wheel bike.

Hannah is now in second grade at St. Matthias School in Chicago, where the pastor and principal are committed to inclusive education, though it is a new approach for all of us – parents and teachers alike. Discussions at parent-teacher meetings have vacillated from the teachers being assured that they are doing a great job, even as they see that Hannah is being outpaced by her peers academically and socially, to my husband and I being assured that the other children are benefitting from Hannah's presence as much as she is benefitting from theirs. We see progress – small but consistent. Hannah is reading short sentences and simple stories. She writes her name, draws, counts, and remembers lessons from her social studies, music, and art classes. She laughs, plays, and has friends and mentors from every grade.

She has setbacks as well. After-school drama camp and basketball practice proved too demanding, but we'll try choir, dance, and Special Olympics –

(continued on page 2)

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

With the coming of Spring we think of new beginnings, and for several of our families it sparks the process of beginning to plan for their child's next school year. The staff at Belle has been busy attending IEP meetings and involved in helping facilitate smooth transitions into high school. This seems impossible to believe for those of us who have known these children since they were in kindergarten.

I am thrilled to report that an overwhelming majority of our families have found high school programs that are inclusive in some form – something that I don't believe would have happened ten years ago. I also believe that The Belle Center played a role in that outcome. We are so proud of all of our 8th grade graduates who will be attending the following schools:

Alcott High School (2)
Gordon Tech (1)
Jacqueline Vaughn (1)
New Trier (1)
Notre Dame (1)
Rauner College Prep (2)

I also wanted to highlight other new beginnings at Belle. We were thrilled to welcome our new Inclusion Educator, Lin Tomlinson, who started in December. She comes to us with great experience and has already been doing wonderful work.

Belle has received some new funding as well over the past year from the Andrew Family Foundation, Cleary ten Brink Family Foundation, Cubs Care Foundation and the Polk Brothers Foundation. We have also received an $8,000 matching grant from an anonymous donor. We will be kicking off a Summer Appeal in June to raise the matching funds. We'd like to thank these new foundations that are supporting The Belle Center of Chicago and all of the good work that goes on here.

Thank you again to all of the Belle Center friends and families for all of their support over the past year. We are looking forward to a wonderful summer.

Nancy Mayo Buchanan

OUR 2010 EIGHTH GRADE GRADUATES

David Brucks (Notre Dame High School)
Rachel Buchanan (Alcott High School for the Humanities)
Andrew Kosnik (Alcott High School for the Humanities)
Eric Llorens (Rauner College Prep)
Francesca Maddock (New Trier High School)
Elis OK (Vaughn Occupational High School)
Rene Ruano (Rauner College Prep)

Congratulations to the students and their families!

Family Reflection

continued from page 1

or there's always next year. I watch other children become honor students and track stars and I am very happy for them. I know some people worry about sharing their children's successes with us, but they shouldn't, because Hannah has had so many successes of her own. She has made her way in the world with amazing strength and grace. She is loving and forgiving and very funny. She isn't always kind and nice, but she knows how to say, "I'm sorry," which is not a lesson easily learned by any of us.

Like some beautifully restrained architectural wonder, God is definitely in the details when it comes to Hannah and other children with special needs. Minutia matters. No feat is too small for notice or celebration – a circle drawn, a coat buttoned, eye contact made.

Diverse learners are on a narrow path where different rules of measurement apply – think millimeters instead of meters. For those of us doing the measuring – parents, teachers, therapists, and friends – it is a difficult adjustment to make at first, especially coming from our fast-paced culture where little is savored or carefully attended. But it is actually an unexpected blessing to be given permission to slow down and notice the grandeur in simple accomplishments and commonplace achievements.

The path special needs children travel may be narrow and focused, but the journey for all involved is expansive and awe-inspiring.

ABOUT THE BELLE CENTER

MISSION STATEMENT
The Belle Center promotes the rights and expectations of all children to be fully included in the community. The Center provides a progressive, family-centered inclusive approach to education and community life that supports children with disabilities and their families.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Belle Center of Chicago
1754 West Wilson
Chicago, IL 60640
P: 773-878-7868
F: 773-878-7869
www.bellecenter-chicago.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Anthony L. Abboud, President
Judith Malin Feller, Vice President
Tammy Novak, Secretary
Cathleen Bottini
Rick Drews
Greg Shrader
Richard Feller, Treasurer*

Nancy M. Buchanan, Executive Director

*Not a member of the board

FOUNDING MEMBERS & ADVISORS
Kemery Bloom, Co-Founder
Nancy M. Buchanan, Founding Member
Kathryn Lavin, Founding Member
Mady Lesnik, Founding Member
Robert Shapiro, Co-Founder

Belle Center of Chicago
All Children Can Learn and Play Together

The Belle Center's First Annual Fall Fashion Show

The Belle Center's Fall Fashion Show that took place on Sunday, October 4, 2009 was a new addition to our fundraising calendar. The fashion show took place at Lincoln Park boutique, Frankie's on the Park and featured children served by Belle and their friends and/or siblings modeling cloths provided by Frankie's on the Park, Original Penguin Brand, Mini Boden and Dorby Goods. The girl's hair and makeup were done and donated by one of our mom's Elizabeth Floersheimer and Blo Salon. Each of the 29 models raised money much like you would do if you were running a 5k race for charity.

The owners of Frankie's on the Park, Lisa Burik and Mary Carter, generously donated their space, their clothes and a 2 lb. candy bar and gift certificate for our raffle. All the retailers offered discounts to participants and/or donations to Belle if they bought any of the clothes. Coffee and pastries were donated by Julius Meinl. Tickets cost $15 for adults and $10 for children that attended the show. We raised almost $3,000 and a great time was had by all. I want to thank all of our sponsors and participants that helped make the event a success. We are planning another fashion show for the fall, so stay tuned for that date.

Eleanor and Rachel Buchanan

Maya Rose Capell and Maggie Siebert

David Emery

Julia Novak, Maggie Siebert, and Mary Feller

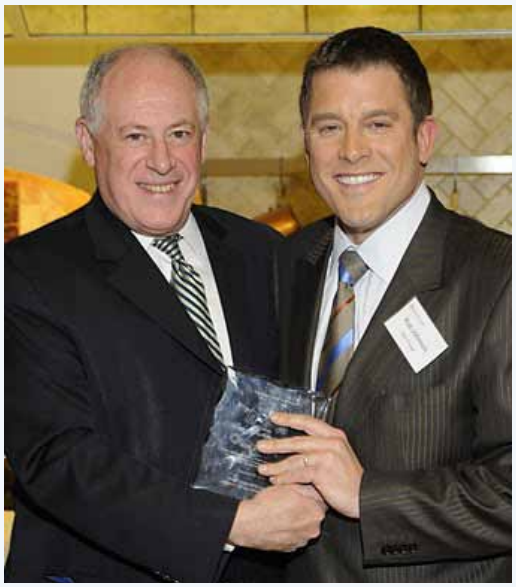
Quincy Bane

Belle Center Executive Director Nancy Buchanan

Belle-A Notte 2010: A Beautiful Night with the Belle Center of Chicago

The Belle Center's annual event *Belle-a Notte* took place February 25th at The Chopping Block in the Merchandise Mart. Roseanne Tellez of CBS2 News generously emceed the event. With special guest, Chef Tim Kirker of Bistro Zinc, cooking up delightful food along with our Honorary Chair, Governor Pat Quinn, it was truly a beautiful night. The annual Silver Belle award that recognizes outstanding leadership regarding inclusive practices went to Katherine Kartheiser, Principal of Coonley Elementary School. Our Bridge Builder Award was awarded to Rob Johnson, CBS2's evening news anchor, recognizing his dedication to children with special needs and his work on behalf of the Belle Center.

A wonderful time was had by all, and together we raised over $72,000 for the Belle Center. Thank you to our event chair, Judith Feller, for her tireless work on the event. Another thank you to our sponsors: Jenny & P. Jay Fortner, National Teacher Education Center, Baker Tilly, Greenberg Traurig, Goldman, Sachs & Co., AT&T, Kemery Bloom, Don & Anne Edwards, Mesirow Insurance Services, Neumann Family Services, Stericycle, Peter & Cathleen Bottini, John & Sue Buchanan, CBS2 Chicago, The Carr Family, Chicago Zoological Society's Brookfield Zoo, Dan Shomon, Inc., Rick & Judie Feller, Janet Geovanis & Steve Schwartz, Lesnik Family Foundation, John & Kate Siebert, and John & Kelly Waller. And thank you to everyone who attended and supported the evening!



Governor Pat Quinn presents the Bridge Builder Award to Rob Johnson

Chef Tim Kirker with Rachel Buchanan

Board President Tony Abboud shows off a mosaic created by the kids during the live auction

Nancy Buchanan presents the Silver Belle Award to Katherine Kennedy-Kartheiser

Event chair, Judith Feller, and guest emcee, Roseanne Tellez

Photos courtesy of Selima Ani.

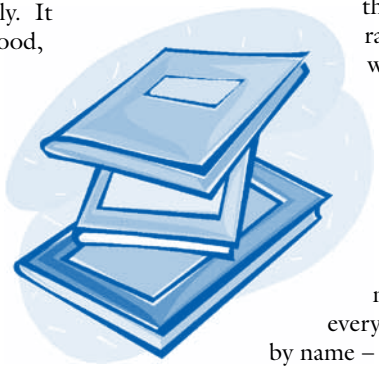
PRINCIPAL'S CORNER

by Sandria Morten in collaboration with Betsy O'Donnell

"I want Hannah to read, to have a sense of humor, and to be a part of this community," Patrice answered when I asked her what her goals were for her daughter. As teachers and administrators, who are so often focused on teaching and measuring the numerous benchmarks and learning objectives we ask of our students, it is refreshing to hear a parent so concisely articulate success for their child. Hannah *is* reading, laughing often, and central to our community – she is succeeding at St. Matthias Transfiguration School.

Like the other first graders, Hannah had a moment when reading "clicked" for her last year. She proved to us one day, that though naming letters is difficult for her, she can memorize entire words! Hannah is able to recognize these words within the context of the books she is familiar with and in other contexts such as flash cards and sentence strips. She has mastered a total of forty words thus far, and can independently read several books.

Reading is not Hannah's favorite or most successful activity every day. There are days and weeks when her percentage of recognized sight words slides back dramatically. It could be her mood, or it could be that for some reason the words are lost in Hannah's mind and will resurface at a later time. These days present challenges for our teachers because just as they were gaining momentum, they find they need to pause and switch their approach. It is at these times that we witness the trusting relationship between teacher and student. Hannah, though unable to verbalize it, is communicating that she needs to slow down. Her teachers, though unable to understand the hindrance, respond to Hannah and help her regain her confidence. Hannah succeeds.



If you were listening outside the classroom to Hannah and Ms. O'Donnell's banter, you would hardly believe it was a second grader and her teacher. Hannah has a wicked sense of humor. I don't know any other nine year old who can not only quote various popular movies but insert these quotes appropriately and humorously into conversation. She is playful and happy, and laughs with her classmates and teachers. Her sense of humor brings joy to all of us. Hannah succeeds.

> **Hannah, though unable to verbalize it, is communicating that she needs to slow down. Her teachers, though unable to understand the hindrance, respond to Hannah and help her regain her confidence. Hannah succeeds**

All I really need to start my day off right is a cup of coffee and a "Hi, Mrs. Morten!" from Hannah. Simply walk through the halls at St. Matthias Transfiguration School with Hannah and you will realize her spirited contribution to our community. Hannah greets everyone she sees by name – her own classmates, students from preschool to 8th grade, parents, teachers, and office staff.

Hannah is included for much of the day in a second grade classroom, with the same students she has known for the past five years. Hannah sings in our school choir and is a member of the basketball team. We all recognize the benefit of inclusion for Hannah, including the positive modeling of her peers and the exposure to a variety of learning and social experiences. Yet the benefits of inclusion for her peers have been so much more profound.

My heart swelled just a few weeks ago while observing an interaction between Hannah and her classmate. I was monitoring indoor recess when Damary, another second grade student, invited Hannah over to read with her. Damary read the picture book to Hannah with enthusiasm, pausing to ask Hannah questions that she knew Hannah could answer and praising Hannah's answers. The girls giggled together over the silly book and talked about their favorite types of pizza. These lessons of compassion, friendship, patience, and tolerance will stay with our students for a lifetime.

Hannah continues to surprise us, entertain us, and impress us. At St. Matthias Transfiguration School we'll continue to work to support Hannah's development while appreciating what she offers us with her talents, personality, and spirit. With inclusion, we all succeed.

WISH LIST

As a non-profit organization, the Belle Center relies on your donations so it can continue to offer high-quality services. If you are able to donate any of the items listed below, we would be most grateful.

- MP3 player
- Digital camera
- Educational software
- Gift certificates to book stores
- File cabinets (new or used)
- Board games
- Small, portable CD player
- Children's books
- 2 Folding chairs
- Lexia reading software from **www.lexialearning.com**
- Kidspiration and Inspiration software from **www.Kidspiration.com**
- Gift certificates to Super Duper from **www.superduperinc.com** for educational and therapeutic materials
- Gift certificates to Theraproducts from **www.Theraproducts.com** for occupational therapy materials

RAISE MONEY FOR THE BELLE CENTER OF CHICAGO!

- ☐ Would you contribute ½ your tax rebate to Belle? Most families will receive them in May.

- ☐ Do your family members and friends know about the difference the Belle Center makes in your life? If not, would you tell them and ask them to be contributors on behalf of your child and others? No one speaks more eloquently about the importance of Belle's services and advocacy than you.
- ☐ Would you invite friends and co-workers to a bbq, dessert, or drinks at your house to learn more about Belle and make a contribution to support it? We can give you simple materials to make this easy.

- ☐ Have you bought a copy of *Rachel and the Magic Beads*? It makes a great present and each sale benefits the Belle Center.
- ☐ Would you contribute a portion of your garage sale take to Belle this summer? Would you organize a giant garage sale of neighbors to benefit Belle?

- ☐ Would you run a marathon or organize an informal bowl-athon for Belle, asking those you know to pledge per mile or pin in support of Belle?

- ☐ Does your employer make contributions to nonprofit organizations or match employee gifts?
- ☐ Would you volunteer to help develop and run a fundraiser for Belle? Do you have talent, experience, connections, or willingness to help with raising money for Belle? We need leaders and workers.
- ☐ Would you help your kids organize a lemonade stand to raise money for Belle?
- ☐ What other idea do you have for giving or getting support for Belle?

_____

_____

_____

_____

NEXT STEPS:

1. Please check at least one item on the list above to pledge your support.
2. Print out this page.
3. Mail it to the Belle Center at: *1754 West Wilson Chicago, IL 60640.*
4. Carry out your commitment!

On behalf of all the children served by the Belle Center – now, in the past, and into the future – thank you very much!

Parent Education & Support Group

Let's Play! Using Games To Support Academics and Development

Presented by: Belle Center Staff

Ever wonder how you can support what your child is learning in school or what he or she is doing in therapy? Come hear the educators, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapist discuss benefits of commercially available games. We will talk about how different games support your child's academic curriculum, facilitate language development, and enhance motor skills. We will also discuss how you can modify the games and the rules of games to meet the needs of your child.

When:
June 16, 2010
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Where:
Queen of Angels
Voss Parish Center
2nd Floor Conference Room
4412 N. Western Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625

RSVP by June 9 to Rachel Hirsch at (773)878-7868 or Rachel@bellecenter-chicago.org