

CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS CONNECTOR



All ages. All abilities. All together.

VOL. I, NO. I A PUBLICATION OF CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS SPONSORED BY SULLIVAN TIRE  FALL 2012



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Hannah Mikulis and Tobias Connolly work in the computer lab; below, Eric Allen shows off his photo; Julie Ellis works in The Trader and Coles Pierrette enjoys the ropes course. PHOTOS: MEAGHAN CASEY

Special place, special people

BY PAUL HALLORAN

Sixty-five years ago, Richard Cardinal Cushing, the Archbishop of Boston, had a vision for the educational opportunities that should be afforded to special-needs – or “exceptional” — children as the Cardinal referred to them. He called on the Sisters of St. Francis Assisi to implement that vision.

The Sisters of St. Francis, based in Wisconsin, were known for their expertise in working with children with intellectual disabilities. They had established schools in Illinois and Wisconsin and were asked to do the same in Massachusetts; thus was born St. Coletta’s by the Sea.

The name has changed several times over the years, becoming Cardinal Cushing Centers in 2000. The mission, however, remains the same: It is a place where people of all ages and abilities find possibility, opportunity, and hope. The organization is committed to educating all ages, all abilities, all together.

“We know learning never ends,” said Jo Ann Simons, president and CEO of Cardinal Cushing Centers. “Everybody has the potential to achieve more than they are achieving today.”

The school, which has never actually been affiliated with the archdiocese, opened in Hanover on Oct. 15, 1947, providing residences and classrooms for 35 children. The entire staff consisted of five Sisters and three laypeople, under the direction of Superintendent Sister Mary George Reichert. The program consisted of academic studies and training in life skills.

The Sisters of St. Francis opened St. Coletta Day School in Braintree with six students in 1957. That

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Making a connection for 65 years and counting



JO ANN SIMONS

programs that make Cushing Centers such a special place, and introducing our organization to those who may not be as

Welcome to the first edition of the *Cardinal Cushing Connector*. We are producing this newspaper in the hope of reminding those who know us of some of the people and

familiar with us.

Our organization today is in many ways different from the school founded in 1947 by the Sisters of St. Francis Assisi at the direction of Richard Cardinal Cushing. Yet, the mission remains unchanged as we have expanded our focus to include adults. Cardinal Cushing Centers is a place where people of all ages and abilities find possibility, opportunity and hope.

Of the approximately 350 individuals ages 6-75 that we support, 70 percent are on the autism spectrum; the rest have Down syndrome, Williams syndrome or other developmental or mental-health issues.

Whether they are on our Hanover or Braintree campus, or our 12 group homes throughout the South Shore, they are educated and cared for by a dedicated group of more than 500 staff.

Perhaps the most important way in which our organization has evolved over the years is that we now focus not only on educating students throughout their learning years, but also preparing them to live as successful and productive adults. We know that everyone has the potential to achieve more than they are currently achieving, and we strive every day to help the students and adults we support reach that potential.

In this edition, you will read about some of our success stories, whether they be individual students or our acclaimed programs. You will meet a few members of our staff, whose collective commitment and dedication to our students and adults is exceptional. I am proud to have them on our team.

I hope you enjoy this look inside Cardinal Cushing Centers and encourage you to stay abreast of happenings at our school by visiting www.cushingcenters.org

Jo Ann Simons is president and CEO of Cardinal Cushing Centers.

School's impact has had a lasting effect

BY PAUL SULLIVAN

My memories of Cardinal Cushing Centers go back to when I was a child and my father would take the entire family to Sunday Mass at the chapel on the main campus. Since that time, I have always held the school in the highest regard for the tremendous work it does with the most vulnerable members of the population.

It is for that reason that our company is thrilled to play a small part in supporting the school in this endeavor to spread the word on its mission and strategic planning.

Cardinal Cushing Centers has a

rich history. From humble beginning in 1947 as St. Coletta by the Sea (and later St. Coletta School), when five dedicated Sisters of Saint Francis founded it, the school has not only taught but also nurtured and cared for more than 3,500 individuals, staying true to its mission of educating all ages, all abilities, all together – all the time.

You will read in this publication about some of the people and programs that make Cardinal Cushing Centers a very special place. My experience is that the people and businesses of the South Shore and beyond are especially supportive when asked to get behind an organization with a proven track record. I think we can all agree that Cardinal Cushing Centers fits that bill.

In closing, we would like to thank all who work tirelessly, many of whom volunteer their time, in helping many families. There is no greater cause than helping those less fortunate and those forgotten.

Paul Sullivan is vice president of Sullivan Tire.

Sheehan: volunteer who never left

BY PAUL HALLORAN

It was the summer of 1974 and Michael Sheehan was a 14-year volunteer at what was then known as the Cardinal Cushing School and Training Center. Sheehan, whose father was on the board of directors, taught physical education, which meant he got to spend plenty of time in the new, air-conditioned gymnasium.

“I was a basketball player, so it was perfect,” he recalled. “What a great place to work.”

Sheehan has one lasting memory of his time at Cushing. “I have never been more appreciated and more loved in my job as when I volunteered there,” he said. “You don’t know how rewarding it is until you do it.”

Almost four decades later, Sheehan is still contributing to the school, as a member of the board of overseers and co-chair (along with Ted English) of the Cardinal Cushing Centers Classic golf tournament at Black Rock Country Club in Hingham. He also served two terms on the board of directors, from 2001-07.

Sheehan, the CEO of Hill Holliday marketing and advertising agency, remains involved with the school because he believes in its mission.

“It’s the kind of place that there will always be a need for financial support and strategic help,” he said. “When I was a volunteer, most of the students had Down Syndrome. The student who went to Cardinal Cushing then goes to public high school now and graduates with his friends and has a wonderful experience. Cardinal Cushing (Centers) has had to adapt to deal with far more challenging students and has done a wonderful job doing so.”

In addition to educating students, Cardinal Cushing Centers has become very proficient at preparing them for the rest of their lives.

“Kids graduate and what do they do next?” Sheehan said. “They need social and vocational training to get ready to live as productive adults. Cardinal Cushing is amazing at doing that.”

The school could not accomplish its mission without the support of a bevy of business partners, including: Bob’s Discount Furniture (of which English is CEO), TJX, BJ’s Wholesale Club, HomeGoods, Stop & Shop, Roche Brothers, Macy’s, Jack Conway Realtor, South Shore Bank, Rockland Trust, ING, VERC Enterprises, Bridgewater State University and



Michael Sheehan, who has been affiliated with Cushing Centers for almost 40 years, dances with Grace O’Hara.

Cape Cod Community College.

“These companies provide financial support and employment opportunities for Cushing students,” Sheehan said. “They are wonderful partners.”

As a young copywriter at Devine + Partners in the early 1980s, Sheehan was assigned to write the copy for a brochure the advertising agency produced pro-bono for Cushing. The piece was titled “What is Possible.” Thirty years later, Sheehan is still a witness to what Cardinal Cushing Centers makes possible, particularly when he sees English with his daughter Kathleen, who has autism, and Jim O’Hara with his daughter, Grace, who has Down Syndrome.

“There is something so wonderful about those relationships,” Sheehan said, “to see the love those parents have for their kids and the love the kids have for their parents. That is very rewarding.”

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PICTURE-PERFECT LEARNING



Instructor Melanie Holland works with student Michael Biagioni photography techniques.

BY PAUL HALLORAN

The photo club at Cardinal Cushing Centers is about more than taking pictures – though there is plenty of evidence that the students in the club are very good at doing just that.

In existence for the last few years, the photo club gives students the opportunity to learn both the technical and creative aspects of photography.

“I like going outside (to take photos),” said Eric Allen, a 21-year-old student. “I’m always taking pictures of flowers, pumpkins and trees.”

Instructor Melanie Holland, who took over directing the club from occupational therapist Amy Segal, said the students who are members learn technical, creative and even entrepreneurial skills.

“They learn about the subject (of the photo), contrast and lighting,” said Holland. “They go to CVS and learn how to get the photos developed and printed. It also

gives them the opportunity to express themselves creatively. It’s fun to see things through their eyes.”

Allen and Michael Biagioni, also 21, spent time on a recent morning outside The Trader shop taking photos of pumpkins that would eventually be sold in the store. It was obvious to visitors that the pair takes great pride in their work.

In addition to taking photos, club members learn how to use them to make greeting cards that are also sold in the Trader, along with framed copies of the photos.

“We go through the photos on the computer and discuss which ones are good and which could be better,” Holland said. “Once you see the pictures in full size on the computer you realize that these students really do have a lot of talent.”

Another benefit to participation in the club is that it gives students another means to communicate. “A

lot of students have verbal communication issues,” Holland said. “We try to give them another means of expressing themselves so they can live up to their full potential.”



Robert’s rules: Cushing provides opportunity and independence

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

For Robert Pelletier, Cardinal Cushing Centers provided him with the skills to thrive, at home and in the workplace.

Pelletier, who was a Cushing student for nearly five years, is a recent graduate enjoying life in an apartment adjacent to campus, while being employed as a dishwasher at the Iron Kettle.

“It’s a nice place to work,” he said. “I like working with the kids. A lot of them have a good sense of humor and some of them look up to me, especially because I started working in the kitchen for three years when I was a student.”

“He’s very talented and really rises to the occasion,” said Gerry Fanning, director of food services. “He shows great pride in his work, and is quite capable and dependable.”

Pelletier, who hopes to pursue a long-term career in the food industry, sharpened his culinary skills as a Cushing student while participating in Project Forward, a program at Cape Cod Community College that focuses on vocational and social skills.

“It was nice to get off campus and spend time at the college,” he said.

Today, Pelletier lives independently in a one-bedroom apartment, decorated to his personal taste. His experiences at Cushing have helped him to live on his own, take responsibility for daily chores and develop positive relationships with neighbors and friends.

In addition to his work at the Iron Kettle, Pelletier has also secured a job as a dishwasher at Denly Gardens, an Italian restaurant and pizzeria in Weymouth where he works two nights a week.



Robert Pelletier enjoys his job as a dishwasher at Cushing.

CUSHING VOCATIONAL PROGRAM PROVIDES REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Behind every cash register, coffee pot, rake or recycling bin on the grounds of Cardinal Cushing Centers is the capable hand of a student.

"We like to see how our students work on campus, and fostering solid work skills that enable them to make a successful transition to a rewarding adult life is a top priority," said Doug Frazier, director of vocational services.

Vocational services are available to all Cushing students ages 18-22, with programs designed to meet their individual talents, interests, abilities and needs. Students are encouraged to try several different career sites during their vocational training, not only to learn job-specific skills, but also to develop an understanding of work and what it means to be a good employee and citizen. As students increase their work stamina and acquire new skills in the different job sites, they also learn to adapt to diverse personalities and supervisory styles.

"We want them to gain general employability skills that would apply to any job," said Frazier. "There are so many different options and levels, but it's about getting them to reach their highest potential."

On campus, students can choose from a variety of sites. At the Bass Village Café, a bakery and deli open to the public, students prepare recipes from scratch, using mixers and ovens to produce fresh baked goods, and make sandwiches to order. In the Iron Kettle, students refine their culinary skills in a real-life kitchen setting, preparing lunches for students and staff in high volume.

As part of the horticulture program, students enjoy planting and cultivating flower and vegetable gardens, and selling seasonal plants and flowers to the public. Additionally, they make quality craft items such as candles, soap and dried flower arrangements to be sold in the Cushing Trader. The shop also sells student-produced artwork, photos, ornaments, jewelry, pottery and other decorative items.

At the Timeless Treasures thrift store, students help with sorting donated merchandise and stocking shelves. The Recycling Center enables students to wait on customers, count returns and calculate refunds. When not attending to customers, students sort containers by size, brand and distributor, and perform routine cleaning tasks. They also collect paper, cardboard and plastics from all school programs and the public retail areas and take weekly trips to the town of Hanover recycling facility.

For those interested in health careers, there are four local nursing homes where students act as bed-maker trainees, interacting with nursing home staff and patients, and experiencing the satisfaction of performing a meaningful service.

Regardless of the site, the goal is for students to learn the skills necessary for supported

employment or community placement, including following directions, working cooperatively with others, accepting supervision, meeting demands for quality and determining their preferred work environment. In addition to the worksite experience, they continue to be supported in the classroom, enhancing their functional academics, refining their social skills, increasing their general knowledge and learning how to fill out job applications, read wants ads and practice interviewing skills.

When students are ready to transfer the skills they have learned in the vocational department, Cardinal Cushing Centers can help provide off-campus job placements in the community. Some of those placements have included Plimoth Plantation, Hanover Public Library, McGee Toyota, Pet Smart, Bertucci's, TJX and Christmas Tree Shops.

In collaboration with Best Buddies Jobs of Massachusetts, students have secured other paid jobs at businesses such as Kohl's, VERC Enterprises, Target, Burton's Grill, Cohasset Cycles, Bruegger's Bakery and the Gardener's Choice. Students who participate in this program are provided with job-development skills, job placement and job coaching.

Cardinal Cushing Centers also provides students with opportunities for job shadowing, after-school jobs through the Job Bank program and academic-support services. If students have an interest in a particular area, they are able to explore other options, such as taking classes at Massasoit Community College, South Shore Art Center or other training sites. Three years ago, Cushing students began participating in Project Forward, a program at Cape Cod Community College (CCC) that focuses on vocational and social skills for students while taking college courses. It is operated and administered by the college with Cushing Centers coordinating student schedules, transportation and support.

"Students have become members of the CCC community," said Frazier. "Seeing them go into a new environment and maneuver the college grounds is wonderful. You see such growth in their confidence and independence."

In addition to the services provided to its own students, Cardinal Cushing Centers also provides the opportunity for public school systems to participate in its vocational programs. Presently, five public schools send their students with a staff person to experience multiple vocational experiences and training offered at Cushing.

Photos clockwise from the left are: Devin Wilson, Holly Pacewicz, staff member DJ Lopes, Lorenzo Oliveri and Mike Biagioni, Nicole Bastoni and instructor Sakina Vazquez, Miguel Santiago, and Julie Ellis; center photo: Ashley Chase and Doug Frazier, director of Vocational Services.

PHOTOS: MEAGHAN CASEY



Cushing student is valuable to VERC



Erik Pasakarnis works at a VERC convenience store in Duxbury through the Cushing employment program.

BY PAUL HALLORAN

Donna Sherman has been the manager at the VERC Enterprises convenience store in Duxbury for less than a year, but it did not take her long to figure how out valuable her assistant merchandising manager is to the operation.

That would be Erik Pasakarnis, a 21-year-old Cardinal Cushing Centers student who works at VERC two days a week, through an employment program in which Cushing collaborates with Best Buddies Jobs.

“Erik helps me tremendously,” said Sherman. “He checks every package in the store to make sure the dates have not expired and pulls from the shelves anything that is out of date.”

Allen works on Thursday, the day supplies are delivered to the store.

“Erik puts the order away with great attention to detail,” Sherman said. “He keeps everything neat, and I don’t have to worry about anything.”

Pasakarnis, who lives with his family in Easton, gets transported to and from his job by Cushing staff. He said he enjoys coming to work on Mondays and Thursdays.

“And,” Sherman said, “he’s always smiling.”

VERC Enterprises is a family-owned, convenience store/gasoline and car wash group operating 23 facilities in Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. VERC is a leader in the area of employing those with disabilities, and is committed to comprising 20 percent of its workforce with individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Cushing Centers: special place, special people

HISTORY: from page 1

campus is still in operation, with about 20 day students attending. In 1971, the name of the organization was changed to Cardinal Cushing School and Training Center, in tribute to the Cardinal, who had died a year earlier.

The school was a quarter-century ahead of its time, as Massachusetts did not pass Chapter 766 until 1972. It was the first special-education law in the nation, serving as the model for the first national law, passed in 1975.

“Prior to that, there were very limited opportunities for children with disabilities,” Simons said. “That’s what prompted Cardinal Cushing to go to the Sisters of St. Francis. Families were desperate to find somebody who believed in their children’s ability to learn, because the alternative – state institutions – were not very appealing. Cardinal Cushing (Centers) was among the most desirable places.”

The landscape changed significantly when the state and federal government mandated that all children be given access to education. School districts gradually began increasing their capacity to serve children with disabilities, keeping more students in the district as opposed to placing them in schools such as Cardinal Cushing Centers.

As a result, the students coming to Cushing have changed; at the beginning, a majority had Down Syndrome, whereas now 70 percent are on the autism spectrum. “Many students we originally served are now successful in public schools,” Simons said. “We’re here for the kids who can’t be

successful in accessing the regular curriculum.”

In addition to educating students ages 6-22 – the years mandated by Chapter 766 – Cardinal Cushing Centers operates 12 group homes for adults, three on the Hanover campus and eight in communities throughout the South Shore. Also, the Cushing Residence on the Hanover campus is home to more than 150 senior citizens who often eat at the school’s Iron Kettle restaurant and shop at the Cushing Trader.

“Our adult population is made up of former students who require support to live as independently as possible,” Simons said. “Some live with minimal support and others require 24/7 supervision. We are transitioning our community to increase the number of adults we are supporting.”

Today, the 515 staff members at Cardinal Cushing Centers support approximately 350 individuals ages 6-75. Students come from a dozen states and there have been some from Mexico and Bermuda. The school is now marketed nationally and internationally.

“We are committed to innovation and being leaders in the field,” said Simons, who came to Cushing in 2007 after 14 years as executive director of the ARC of East Middlesex. She also worked as deputy superintendent of the Fernald School and



Richard Cardinal Cushing and the Sisters of St. Francis welcomed the first 35 students to the school.

director of policy for the Mass. Department of Developmental Services (then known as the Department of Mental Retardation).

Simons also has the perspective of a parent of a child with Down Syndrome. Her 33-year-old son, Jonathan, graduated from Swampscott High School and Cape Cod Community College and lives on Cape Cod, with some supports. He works

at New Seabury Country Club and Roche Brothers supermarket and volunteers at a Boys & Girls Club.

“I see the field from all perspectives,” she said. “Special education gives parents a seat at the table. They are members of the team, and we take that seriously.”

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Fanning knows what's cookin' at Cushing

By MEAGHAN CASEY

As director of food services for Cardinal Cushing Centers, Gerry Fanning certainly has a lot on his plate.

"I always say, we have a small department, but a big job," he said.

On a daily basis, Fanning is responsible for preparing all of the lunches for students and staff in the Iron Kettle, as well as providing backup support for the residential units and Bass Café. He also oversees a staff of 10 – two of whom are former students – and trains approximately 10-15 students as they rotate through the kitchen as part of the vocational program.

"I try to give them all the skills they need," said Fanning, who has worked at Cushing Centers since 1986. "We start out with dishwashing and sanitation and move on to food prep and baking. You teach them what you can, with the hope that they'll get jobs in the community after this."

The culinary department has proven to be one of the most popular and vibrant vocational training sites on campus. In addition to the daily lunches, the Intergenerational Luncheon Program is available three days a week (Monday-Wednesday), where senior citizens are invited to dine with Cushing students. On most Thursdays and Fridays, the Iron Kettle Inn is open to community members, where they can enjoy a delicious, hot meal. Students learn the real-life experience of working in an on-campus restaurant, assisting in all phases from meal preparation to table service.

"It's gratifying to see the kids say, 'I can do this,'" said Fanning. "It's important to let the string go a little further and give them the additional responsibility."

Before Cushing, Fanning worked in Quincy Public Schools, teaching an afternoon program. At a young age, he had planned to become a vocational shop teacher, leaning more towards carpentry or machinery. During his time in the U.S. Coast Guard, however, he studied culinary arts, developing his skills and passion for the trade. From there, Fanning went on to earn his culinary arts degree from Johnson & Wales University.



Gerry Fanning prepares lunch at the Iron Kettle.



Teacher Beth Madden works with Shannon O'Connell on an iPad in the Voyager classroom.

Technically speaking Computers, iPads enhance learning

By PAUL HALLORAN

Technology is playing an increasingly larger role in the teaching and learning that take place every day at Cardinal Cushing Centers.

A visit to the computer lab finds a half-dozen students using touch-screen computers under the direction of technology teacher Jude Morgan as well as classroom teachers who bring students to the lab.

The students are ages 9-20, and of varying levels of intellectual development.

"The touch screens teach them the concept of input and output," Morgan said. "They know it's not a TV. When they touch the screen, something happens."

The Clicker software program is used to help students with writing, communication and visual learning. "We are using technology in education to help students access the curriculum," Morgan said.

There is also an emphasis on Internet safety and educating students about making good choices and that others online are not necessarily who they say they are. The message is the same one emphasized to typical children at an early age: Don't talk to strangers.

"We want them to use the Internet as a tool, and to have a purpose for going online," Morgan said.

Computers are also provided as a choice-time option for students. According to Morgan, favorite web sites include YouTube, ones with music videos and PBS Kids.

Older students who are higher functioning might go online to research cell phones and compare pricing, or complete an employment application.

In teacher Beth Madden's Voyager classroom, there are computers and two iPads. Parent Bonnie O'Connell, who is on Cushing's technology committee and whose daughter, Shannon, is in Madden's class, donated the iPads for all students in the class to use.

"We are exploring them to help the students learn cause and effect," Madden said, adding that the goal is to also have students use the iPads as a means of communication.

The computers in the classroom are equipped with the ZAC Internet browser – Zone for Autistic Children. It is designed to provide a pleasant and secure Internet browsing experience for children with autism. There are many links to appropriate education applications and web sites.

"We are integrating technology into the curriculum," Madden said, noting that there are social-skills applications that two students can use at the same time and interact with each other, something that is often challenging for this population.

"That's where we are focusing right now," Madden said.

The goal is to continue to improve the technology program so that it offers all students to reach their learning potential.

WORK HARD, PLAY HARD

Recreational opportunities abound at Cushing Centers

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Learning is not limited to the classroom at Cardinal Cushing Centers, where the recreation center, gym, auditorium, outdoor pool and ropes course provide students and adults with the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that facilitate friendship and promote self-esteem and health.

Recreational programs for students ages 10-22 are held during school vacations, evenings and Saturdays. Activities vary, but include Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Special Olympics, fitness, cooking, bowling, therapeutic rhythmic arts, biking, yoga and dances. Students also take part in field trips to attractions such as Plimoth Plantation, the Museum of Science and the New England Aquarium. In addition, Tom McElman, director of recreation and community programs at the Cardinal Cushing Centers, instructs a general fitness and movement class for Cushing students at the South Shore YMCA.

“We’re trying to encourage the kids to blow off energy and steam, and be social,” said McElman, a 30-year employee of

Cushing Centers.

According to McElman, the Special Olympics program at Cushing is one of the largest in the state. Teams include soccer, cheerleading, flag football, basketball, swimming, track and field, volleyball, tennis and power lifting. Students compete against other local teams and have the opportunity to travel for tournaments and events. On Oct. 28, a group visited Gillette Stadium to participate in the third annual Special Olympics Massachusetts flag football and cheerleading tournament.

Other recreational opportunities are available to individuals of all ages and developmental levels. Young athletes, under the age of 8, have an opportunity to learn beginner sports skills through fun activities with family and peers, in conjunction with Special Olympics Massachusetts. Adults can sign up for fall or spring sessions of evening classes, held over the course of 10 weeks, that offer recreational, educational and social activities.

There are also three adult basketball teams at Cushing, comprised of former Cushing students who live in the residences and adults from the community.



Coles Pierrette conquers the ropes course.



Cushing cheerleaders and staff spend time with Patriots cheerleaders, far left and far right, at Gillette Stadium: second from left Alicia Zietkowski, Lori Lalama, DJ Lopes, Vanina Mendonca, Tarchell Hammond, Caroline Specht and Kareem Ashu.



Tom McElman is the director of recreation.



Derek Freitas participates as a partner in the Special Olympics Unified flag football game at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough.