

CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS CONNECTOR



All ages. All abilities. All together.

Vol. 7 No. 2

A PUBLICATION OF CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS

SPRING 2021



RECREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Assistant Recreation Director Anne Matheson helps Ryan Akins work on his claymation video. **Story, Page 3.**
PHOTO: SEAN BROWNE



Cushing student Emma Russell took an active role in the 2020 elections.

A vote for activism

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

When it came time to vote in the 2020 presidential election, Milton's Emma Russell wasn't just excited to do her civic duty; she wanted to encourage others to do their part as well.

Russell, a Cushing student, signed up to write letters to registered voters as part of Vote Forward, a nonprofit that empowers volunteers to encourage residents in historically underrepresented communities to vote. The project began as an experiment by Harvard graduate Scott Forman, who sent 1,000 handwritten notes to Alabama voters in 2017, ahead of that year's special U.S. Senate election. He and a group of friends went on to build an online platform. In 2020, the organization corralled 182,509 volunteers and mailed 17.5 million messages to voters in 21 states.

Russell mailed out letters to 10 Texas voters.

"Voting is really important," she said. "If someone can vote in an election, they should. I thought that people may want to vote more if they got a letter from me telling them that I can't wait to vote in my first presidential election."

See **VOTE** Page 6



OPEN FOR BUSINESS: Pages 4-5



CALLING ALL CYCLISTS: Page 8

**CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS
CONNECTOR**
A PUBLICATION OF CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS

A PUBLICATION OF:

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Hope springs eternal at Cushing



**MICHELLE
MARKOWITZ**

Spring has sprung – and not a moment too soon. The feelings of rebirth and renewal that are the hallmarks of this season are very much evident at Cushing. As we continue to pursue the new normal in the aftermath of an unprecedented global pandemic, we are most certainly looking forward.

We are thrilled with the response to the long-awaited opening of our new MarketPlace

building. You can feel the energy it has brought to our Hanover community. We truly appreciate how supportive our friends and neighbors have been, and we are especially grateful to all the volunteers who help make it work. You can read about the MarketPlace on Pages 4-5.

I hope you plan to log on to our virtual Springtime celebration on June 3. We are proud to honor Jean and Fred Raymond and Dolly Di Pesa for their support of Cushing and people with disabilities. It should be a great night – and hopefully the last virtual celebration for a very long time!

The 130 students we have in Braintree and Hanover returned to in-person learning in September. Our adult day program participants have been under a hybrid model since that

time, due to capacity issues. As we move into the 14th month of COVID-19, I think it is important to recognize the Herculean efforts our staff have put forward. There was never any doubt in our minds that everyone who works at Cushing is essential. I think their above-and-beyond performance during the pandemic has made that apparent to some who may not have realized just how indispensable they are.

We appreciate your financial support that has allowed us to continue providing our services under the most challenging circumstances. We can all look forward to better and brighter days ahead. Thank you, and stay safe.

Michelle Markowitz is president & CEO of Cardinal Cushing Centers.

A shot to return to normalcy



The COVID-19 vaccine rollout for Cushing staff, students and adult participants, including Andrew Robbins, left, and Trevor Thomas, began in January. The Hanover residential school program was approved as a self-administration site, allowing Cushing to set up its own clinic dates. Members of the Cushing community were also eligible to go to the state's mass vaccination sites as part of Phase I. Students are back to full-time in-person learning at both the Hanover and Braintree sites.

The (shoe) ties that bind

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Teacher-turned-entrepreneur Bobby Morong has set out to foster independence among individuals, one shoelace at a time. And Cushing is benefiting from his innovative idea.

Morong, who created Training Ties to help make the act of tying shoes simple and fun, donated a few pairs of his patent-pending product to Cushing's occupational therapy department.

"When I started Training Ties, I wanted to have giving back as part of the mission, so I started looking for organizations

who I felt embodied that mission and I thought could benefit from a donation," said Morong. "I read a number of inspiring articles about Cushing and felt

I could help contribute to its mission of helping others, even if it's just with the small task of tying one's shoes. As someone who struggled with tasks like this as a kid, I

know how frustrating and limiting it can be for someone, so I figured why not reach out and see if Training Ties can help."

Morong has been a physical education and special education teacher for nearly 20 years, most recently having worked in Randolph Public Schools. He kept tinkering with tools to help students learn how to tie their shoes before designing, testing and creating Training Ties.

"Once a child learns how to tie their shoes using Training Ties, gaining confidence with the process, they will have learned a new skill and will no longer need the tool to tie their shoes," he said. "I take pride in instilling confidence and independence within my students. Telling someone how to do something is one thing, but showing them how to do it themselves is what it's all about for me."

"That's exactly the logic behind what we do as occupational therapists – increase independence as much as possible," said Cushing occupational therapist Erica Costa. "Shoe-tying is one of the trickiest tasks to teach students with fine motor challenges, so I really appreciate any tool that can help."

Costa has just introduced the product to a few of her students and will be reporting back to Morong with any suggestions for improvement.



Dylan Singer, 16, can tie his shoes independently using Training Ties, created by Bobby Morong, shown at left with his wife, Nicky.

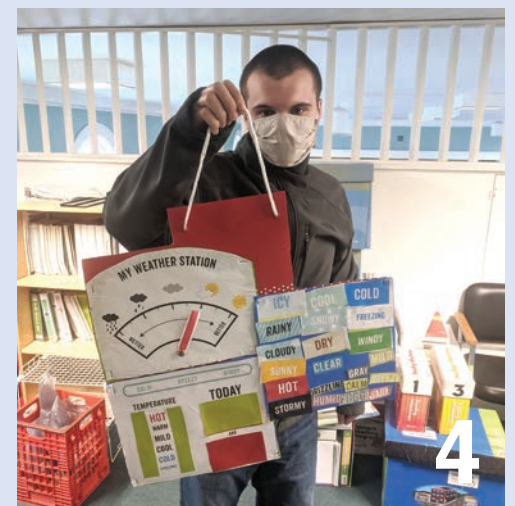
Getting creative with recreation

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

From clay animation to magic, Cushing's recreation department launched a number of new clubs for residential students to enjoy in the midst of the pandemic.

"We started offering some different things since we're not able to do field trips and some of our outside instructors haven't been able to come in," said Tom McElman, Cushing's director of Recreation and Community Programs. "We've been stretching our imaginations, and learning some new things ourselves."

Students are encouraged to participate in at least one activity per week. Each club runs over the course of one or two months, and there are usually six clubs running at a time. Some examples include power lifting, Weather Club, track and field, healthy cooking, woodworking, painting, Bike Club, Walking Club and Minute to Win It (where students have to finish an activity in a minute). This spring, fairy garden-making will kick off, along with a new pickleball league, with the hope that they can eventually get out to the new club, Pickles, that opened in Hanover.



PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE

1. As part of the bike group, Ryan Akins works to tune up a bicycle. 2. Student Jalian Jackson examines a rope during a magic trick performed by Cushing's Brent Garcia. 3. Assistant Recreation Director Anne Matheson assists student Ryan Akins with his claymation video. 4. Joshua Bowman learns more about weather. 5. Nicholas Heap works on his deadlift during powerlifting.

MARKETPLACE OPEN FOR BUSINESS

By Meaghan Casey

It took a village — or, more specifically, a group of loyal volunteers — to open Cushing’s new Marketplace, but the experience has been worth the wait.

Members of the Cushing community celebrated its grand opening in early December. The building, visible and accessible directly from Route 53, houses Cushing’s redesigned student-run retail shops — Take 2, the Unique Boutique and the Cushing Café — as well as new classroom space.

The unveiling had been delayed due to the pandemic, and restrictions still limited Cushing students from being out front with the public. That’s where the volunteers came in. Led by Marketplace Business Manager Jody Nash, a group of approximately 12-15 volunteers staff the retail shops on a weekly basis. Of that group, five came over from the Hingham Congressional Church’s Guild Consignment Center, which is temporarily closed to the public. They brought with them expertise in running a consignment shop, as well as some previously donated clothing, accessories and home décor.

“They had the time and willingness to do this and we’re so grateful,” said Nash, adding they have been a valuable resource to Take 2, which stocks clothes, children’s toys, small appliances, home décor, sporting equipment and accessories. Community members have been very generous with their donations, allowing the shop to open with a designer section.

“I love it because people will come in and say ‘we’ve been saving our best stuff for you,’” said Nash. “And shoppers are finding nice, quality items at really good prices.”

T.J. Maxx, Talbots and Avasa have also donated generously with new items from their corporate headquarters.

Just next door, the Unique Boutique offers items designed and assembled by Cushing students, including handmade jewelry and pottery, silk-screened clothing, framed artwork and photography, handcrafted home and garden accessories, note

cards and more. The shop also stocks products from outside vendors, such as Texas-based Sweet Heat Jam Co., Heart by Max notecards and arcBARKS, a dog treat company. All of these businesses support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The last to open, the Cushing Café is now fully operational with outdoor seating, spaced-out indoor seating and takeout.

Volunteers typically work full shifts of four hours. Cushing adult residents are also able to work in the shops and interface with the public, and, within the last month, students who are 18 or older have been able to assist out front.

“That’s been really great to see because that’s what we aspire to create - employment training opportunities for our students and adults in a traditional retail setting,” said Nash. “Customers are happy and the volunteers are thoroughly enjoying working with them. As restrictions lift, the need for the number of volunteers we have now will decline, but the hope is that some of those positions will always be there.”

Nash, whose daughter Sophie is in Cushing’s adult services, chaired the organization’s capital campaign and works at the Marketplace weekdays.

“It’s a happy place to be,” she said. “It’s a dream that’s been 7-8 years in the making, so to see it come to fruition has been incredibly gratifying.”

“How they envisioned it and made it happen is incredible,” said volunteer Bonnie O’Connell, a parent of a former Cushing student.

O’Connell, who lives in Wrentham, volunteers at the Marketplace twice a week.

“It’s a magical place that brought out the best in my daughter,” said O’Connell, referring to her daughter Shannon, who enrolled as a Cushing student in 2009 and just aged out last year. “It’s just an amazing organization that keeps on giving. It’s such a good feeling to be down there. After four hours, I feel like my spirits have been relifted.”



1. Handmade heart-shaped pins are on display at the Unique Boutique. 2. Volunteer Cheryl Dahan, right, gives assistance to Marcia Sinclair while shopping at Take 2. 3. Cushing board member Joanie Jaxtimmer with her son, Michael Barry, visit the Marketplace. 4. Dina Comman, left, assists Drew Frank, right, with ringing up a customer. 5. Belaine McCabe makes a sandwich for a customer at the Cushing Café. 6. Dylan Singer holds a sign of gratitude in front of Cushing’s Marketplace. 7. Volunteers and Cushing students, from left: Belaine McCabe, Nicholas Heap, Jody Nash, Sarah England, Lee Budington, Holly Roberts, Donna Malek, Bonnie Passios, Stoddard Rowley, Katie Daly, Trisha Ditullio, Callie Daly, Mary McGoldrick, Marcia Sinclair, Drew Frank and Cheryl Dahan. Volunteers not pictured include Barbara DiNapoli, Nancy Florey, Carolyn Kennedy, Julianne Mehegan, Bonnie O’Connell and Leah O’Rourke.

PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE

SHOP HOURS

The Cushing Café:
Monday – Friday from
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Take 2:
Monday – Friday from
10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with
donation drop-off on
Monday and Thursday.

See coupons, page 6

Unique Boutique:
Monday – Friday from
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

BOARD PROFILE:

Cushing can bank on his commitment

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

When Eastern Bank’s Youssef Abdouh joined the Cardinal Cushing Centers board in 2018, he never imagined the much-anticipated MarketPlace would be opening during a global pandemic.

“It wasn’t as planned, but we’ve still been able to celebrate it,” he said. “To finally see it open and to see the fruit of everyone’s time and donations — it’s better than what we even envisioned.”

Abdouh is a senior vice president, commercial banking for Eastern Bank, where he has worked for 27 years. He is responsible for providing clients with financing and cash-management solutions with the highest level of expertise and service.

“The bank has been involved with Cushing for many, many years and I had attended events, so I was very familiar with what they do,” said Abdouh, who spent a year on the Development Committee before joining the board, on which he serves as clerk.

“The other members were all welcoming and are committed to the success of the organization,” he said.

Abdouh grew up in Casablanca, Morocco and came to the U.S. by himself in 1989 at age 19.

“I had one suitcase and \$1,000 in my pocket,” he said.

While many people his age were traveling to France or Belgium for college, he was interested in the U.S.



“
I’m living the dream I
had when I was a kid.
— Youssef Abdouh
”

“Education in Morocco was free, but the jobs were scarce,” he said. “I could see the writing on the wall.”

He attended a school to learn English before enrolling at UMass Boston. He became a teller at the Boston Five Cents Savings Bank and, through a tuition-reimbursement program, earned a degree in business management and finance from Bentley University. He

went on to work at Hibernia Savings Bank, which was acquired by Eastern Bank in 1998.

Abdouh lives in Plymouth with his wife, Cristina, and 6-year-old daughter, Sofia. His mother took the oath for U.S. citizenship in March after more than 20 years of visiting from Morocco.

“I’m living the dream I had when I was a kid,” he said.

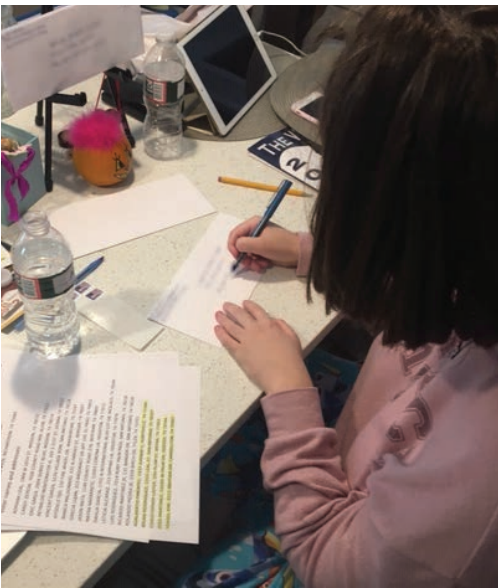
A vote for activism

VOTE from Page 1

Approximately 66 percent of registered voters cast ballots in Texas this year, making it the highest turnout in the state since 1992, when George H.W. Bush and the third-party candidacy of Ross Perot helped draw out 73 percent of registered voters.

“Emma was enthusiastically engaged in the 2020 election,” said her father, Chris. “She wrote letters sharing her excitement about being a first-time voter. She was disappointed that she could not go to the polls in 2020 to cast her vote. She has been accompanying us into the voting booth since she was a toddler and she enjoys the whole process. Receiving her ballot at home, though, allowed Emma to learn more about the purpose of each elected office and to better study the candidates.”

Russell, who was born with congenital myotonic dystrophy — a form of muscular dystrophy that weakens her muscles — was referred to Cushing in 2017 by the Milton Public Schools placement coordinator. She has been an active volunteer in her community from a young age, serving as an ambassador for Step



Emma Russell writes letters encouraging people to vote.

One Early Intervention, part of South Shore Mental Health. In 2008, the Muscular Dystrophy Association named her the goodwill ambassador for Massachusetts.

THE MarketPlace
at Cardinal Cushing Centers
120 Columbia Road, Hanover, MA 02339

CUSHING Cafe
Bakery Sandwiches Coffee
**FREE SMALL COFFEE
WITH YOUR PURCHASE OF
ANY BREAKFAST SANDWICH**

UNIQUE Boutique
Handcrafted Gifts
**ENJOY 15% OFF
YOUR NEXT PURCHASE
OF \$20 OR MORE**

TAKE Two
Thrift Store
**ENJOY \$5 OFF
YOUR NEXT PURCHASE
OF \$25 OR MORE**

CUSHING Greenhouse
Seasonal Flowers and Plants
**ENJOY \$5 OFF
YOUR NEXT PURCHASE
OF \$25 OR MORE**

Coupons only redeemable at the MarketPlace at 120 Columbia Road, Hanover, MA.
Coupons may only be used once. Can't be combined with any other offers. Expires 12/31/21.

Springtime returns in new format

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

It's been a long time coming, but the intended honorees for the 2020 Springtime Gala will finally get their due at this year's virtual event.

The Raymond family will be presented with the Richard Cardinal Cushing Award for their outstanding support of the mission and work at Cardinal Cushing Centers, as well as their advocacy on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities. Jean and Fred Raymond attend, support and champion every campaign and event at Cushing. Their daughter Katie graduated from Cushing in 2019 and has since matriculated to Cushing's programs for adults. A strong advocate for herself and others with disabilities, Katie often inspires her older sister, Chrissy, who ran the Boston Marathon for Cushing in 2019. Chrissy worked for Congressman Seth Moulton for four years, championing policy to increase access to healthcare and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. She continues to pursue her passion for advocating on behalf of people with disabilities at the Harvard Kennedy School, where she is earning

her master's in public policy.

The Franciscan Leadership Award will go to long-time supporter Dolly Di Pesa for her tireless efforts to build a stronger South Shore community. Di Pesa began her career as a special education teacher at Cardinal Cushing Centers, where her brother David was a student. Her parents, William and Mary Jane, were also supporters of Cushing, and were honored at Cushing's 42nd anniversary celebration in 1989. In her professional and civic endeavors, Di Pesa has taken a special interest in family- and women-owned small business, helping them manage their finances and their growth. She is the managing partner of Di Pesa & Company, a Quincy-based certified public accounting firm that encourages flexible schedules to accommodate the demands of family life. She serves on many boards for both nonprofit and for-profit entities.

Registration for the event is complimentary with a suggested donation of \$150 per person (or any amount that's meaningful to you). Registrants will receive an email one week prior to the event with details on how to watch the live stream.



The Raymond family, from left, Fred, Jean, Katie and Chrissy



Dolly Di Pesa and her brother, David Di Pesa

Springtime
Virtual **GALA**
SPRINGTIMEGALA.ORG
June 3, 2021
Details to follow.

Reimagined

Honoring: Dolly Di Pesa & The Raymond Family

Calling all cyclists

By **MEAGHAN CASEY**

With the pandemic came the great bicycle boom of 2020, as enthusiasts wiped out the supply in shops, dusted off bikes in their garages or pushed aside dining room tables in favor of Peloton bikes.

Cushing is hoping they can put their miles to good use.

The Cushing Cycle Challenge, which was created last spring, received so much enthusiasm that it's back this year. The event will kick off on May 1, and registrants have the opportunity to log their miles — a minimum of 50, indoors or outdoors — until June 30. The registration fee is \$25 and all will be entered to win a gift card prize valued at more than \$500. For anyone who would like to make a greater impact, he/she can become a Champion for Cushing. These participants can set up a fundraising page and begin competing for a top-of-the-line bicycle from South Shore BMW/South Shore Mini, valued at more than \$1,000. All of the funds raised will go directly to Cushing and will impact the students and adults it supports. Pam Eddy, Development Coordinator at Cushing, hopes the event will raise \$25,000.

Ali Howshall, a teacher at Cushing, was the top fundraiser last year and plans to participate in the challenge again this year. She raised \$2,100 — just topping the efforts of Eddy's daughter Ali Palasek —

and logged miles by cycling through Plymouth and Provincetown. Howshall has worked at Cushing since 2014. She started off as a music instructor and, after earning a master's degree last year, now teaches at the high school level.

"I've always had a passion for this work," said Howshall. "I went to school for human development and psychology and I was drawn to Cushing for the all-ability mindset that they have."

Cushing is thrilled to welcome National Grid and Jannell Ford of Hanover as this year's premier sponsors and would also like to give a special thanks to South Shore BMW/Mini for their continued support as the official bike sponsor.

"The staff there is a pleasure to work with and the students are amazing," said Bill Roderick, general manager of Jannell Ford of Hanover. "I like the fact that we partner with a recognized local organization like Cardinal Cushing Centers. It's always nice to give back."

Roderick, who ran the Boston Marathon for Cushing in 2015 and raised more than \$10,000, says Jannell Ford has been supportive of Cushing for a long time. The company donated 2,200 masks for Cushing staff and students, as well as Fitbits for a tracked fitness program. It also orders baked goods from the Cushing Café daily for its customer lounge.

"I've always had a passion for this work... I was drawn to Cushing for the all-ability mindset that they have."
— Ali Howshall



**Scan the QR code
to register or donate**

Last year's top fundraisers Ali Palasek, left, and Ali Howshall hope to log another 50 miles this year.

