

CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS CONNECTOR



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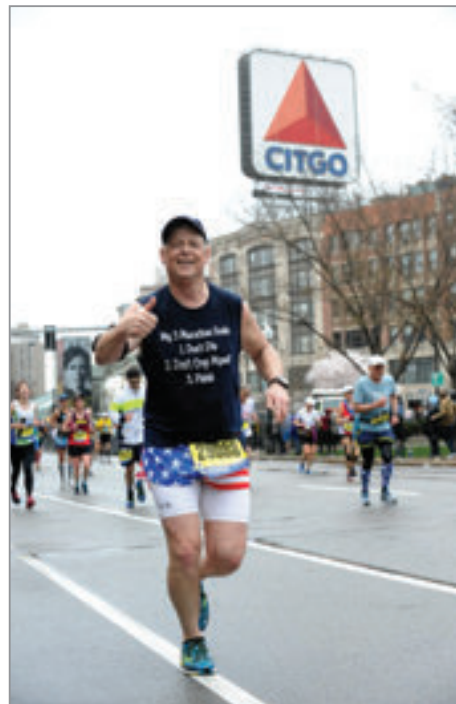
Market movers



Cardinal Cushing Centers intern Kim Hamilton organizes the displays at the Unique Boutique.

Story, Page 3

PHOTO: SEAN BROWNE



Joe Ohm has raised more than \$37,000 for Cushing through this year's Boston Marathon.

Better late than never

Runners adjust to fall marathon

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Even with the 125th Boston Marathon being delayed from Patriots' Day to Columbus Day, the runners representing Cardinal Cushing Centers remained focused on their mission: to raise valuable funds for Cushing.

The team includes two Cushing staff members, Scott Pittman and Michael Tautiva; two parents, Bill Egan and Marcy Bettencourt; and two returnees, Michelle Nolan and Joe Ohm, who didn't get the chance to run last year due to the pandemic.

Ohm, who lives just outside of Chicago, had already raised more than \$37,000 for Cushing prior to the event. He connected with Cushing through his friends Jonathan and Lisa Siegel, whose son is a Cushing student.

"It's a terrific organization and I'm pleased to run on their behalf," said Ohm, who has run 10 marathons in the past.

See MARATHON Page 6



Woodworking: Pages 4-5



Community coffee: Page 7



At your service: Page 8

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A PUBLICATION OF:

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There's plenty of work to do



**MICHELLE
MARKOWITZ**

The global pandemic – which, incredibly, is in its 20th month – has affected everyone and wreaked havoc with our daily lives. We all continue to strive for “normalcy,” whatever that may look like.

The road back has proven to be a rocky one that we continue to navigate. We are grateful to provide the education and services that our students, adult participants and families rely on. And we remain committed to that mission.

In the context of what is going on in the world, however, I think it is important to acknowledge the challenges we face in

carrying out that mission.

It is no secret that virtually all industries are suffering from a workforce shortage. Not only is that true in human services, but we are arguably impacted even more than others. The ongoing effects of the pandemic, combined with salaries that have become increasingly non-competitive, has put us in a difficult situation.

Students and adult participants typically attend Cushing under contracts we have with school districts and the Mass. Department of Developmental Services (DDS). We receive funding for direct-service professionals based on those contracts. DDS and MassHealth set the prescribed rate at which we are reimbursed for the salaries we pay our staff. Frankly, we need that rate to increase.

This was an issue even before the pandemic,

when we were seeing professional staff leave the human-service sector for positions at, for example, Target and Walmart. Now, it is at the point where the staffing situation has forced us to hold off on accepting new adult participants, and we are close to creating a waiting list for students, despite having vacancies in our program.

It is my sincere hope that the state will revisit the funding formula and that we can all work toward ensuring that these professionals can be compensated in a manner that is reflective of the invaluable contributions they make in bettering the lives of the individuals they serve.

Michelle Markowitz is president & CEO of Cardinal Cushing Centers.

Generosity runs in cycles at Cushing

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Nearly seven years ago, Richard Bonanno found a bicycle out for disposal, which he scooped up, repaired and gave to a neighborhood child. That one act of kindness has spiraled into a frenzy of donations, surpassing 6,000 bikes, plus food, clothing, books, toys, appliances and more.

Cardinal Cushing Centers was the lucky recipient of five of Bonanno's refurbished bikes over the summer.

“That was an easy one,” said Bonanno, a Scituate resident. “I asked how many they needed and what size, and I repaired some I had and dropped them off.”

Prior to his full-time philanthropy work, Bonanno was a photographer for 26 years before becoming a self-employed contractor. As the need for bike donations has escalated, he ended up buying a

construction trailer that he uses as his bike shop. This year alone, he will have donated 1,500 bikes, shipping them as far as California and even Haiti after the devastating earthquake. Last Christmas, he sent out more than 4,000 gifts for children.

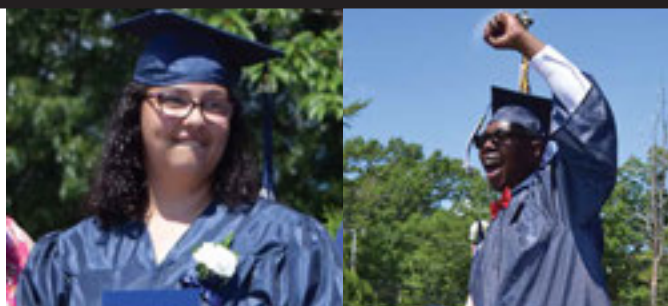
“You could pick a spot on any map and pick a charity and they'll be more than happy to receive donations,” said Bonanno. “It's fun helping people who you don't know. My mission is to build, sustain, enable and energize communities by supplying bicycles and everyday living items.”

Bonanno's efforts are fueled by community donations of used bikes, clothing and goods, as well as funds. He has created a nonprofit, the Rolling Wave Foundation. Cushing has been able to return the good will by periodically offering Bonanno excess inventory from its thrift shop.

“People were thrilled with those donations, especially the winter jackets and hats,” he said.



Adam Burbine accepts a bike donation from Richard Bonanno.



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Cardinal Cushing Centers

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November 20, 2021



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Cunningham Elementary School
44 Edge Hill Road, Milton, MA

Contact: Ricky DeSisto at
RDesisto@cushingcenters.org or 781-829-1289

Interns help make MarketPlace go

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Cushing’s MarketPlace is not only staffed by volunteers from the community, but also by a group of interns from the organization’s adult employment programs.

The five interns — Kendra Bourque, Caroline Dane, Kim Hamilton, Nick Hanson and Amy Slater—have become the heart and soul of the Unique Boutique and Take 2.

“They’ve been so valuable,” said MarketPlace Business Manager Jody Nash. “Both stores are staffed entirely by volunteers and they are a big part of that. They’ve been great with customer service and helping with displays, and they add a lot in terms of enthusiasm. The customers enjoy talking to them.”

“I like keeping active and motivated,” said Hanson, who works at Unique Boutique. He came to Cushing as a student in 2003 and has been in adult employment services since 2013. “I really like greeting people and learning how to price products.”

“I love interacting with people and straightening the shelves,” said Hamilton, who also works at Unique Boutique. She has previous experience in the retail space, holding jobs at JCPenny, T.J. Maxx, Ames and Michaels. “I even started at a young age cleaning up dressing rooms when my mom worked at Caldor.”

Bourque and Slater, who both graduated as Cushing students in the early 1990s, are enjoying working at the thrift shop, Take 2, together. Dane works there as well once a week, sorting the donations.

“I enjoy keeping busy,” said Bourque, who had been working at Dairy Queen before the pandemic. “And I love having lunch at the café with Kim and Amy.”

“I love the people I work with,” said Slater. “They’re like family. It’s just so much fun there and I learn so much. I hope I can be a mentor to new volunteers at some point.”

Although all of them agree they don’t want to leave the MarketPlace, the skills they are learning will prepare them for other community placements.

“They are all independent in ringing customers up now,” said Nash. “We use Square, so they’ll be able to use that in other retail settings.”

The interns were selected, said Employment Director Tom Beedle, because they were already work-ready.

“The most important thing was that they were interested in that type of work, but we were targeting individuals who had already been employed before COVID,” said Beedle. “They were going a little stir-crazy. It ended up being a great match. We had a workforce who needed work and a new employment site opening and needing workers.

“It’s been better than expected,” Beedle added. “The skills that they’re learning and the exposure is wonderful. They’re getting out there in the community as people, regardless of disability, chatting with their new friends and customers. That’s the real value.”

1. Cushing intern Nick Hanson enjoys working at Unique Boutique. 2. Intern Amy Slater rings up a customer at Take 2 while volunteer Katie Daly helps in the background. 3. Caroline Dane helps sort donations at Take 2 with volunteer Barbara DiNatale. 4. Intern Kendra Bourque organizes a clothing rack at Take 2. 5. From left, interns Kendra Bourque, Amy Slater and Kim Hamilton pose for a photo outside the MarketPlace.

PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE



BUILDING SKILLS

WOODWORKING CLASSES POPULAR WITH STUDENTS, ADULT PARTICIPANTS

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Searching for a handcrafted table? A cornhole board? Wooden jack-o-lanterns? Look no further than Cardinal Cushing Centers’ woodworking classes.

The classes are experiencing heightened popularity among both students and adult participants.

On the student side, vocational instructor Anne Matheson has been working with three classrooms since summer and is expecting that to expand. Matheson, who started at Cushing nearly 40 years ago, has transitioned from residential services to the recreation department to vocational industrial crafts. The idea for the woodworking classes came about after she was hosting weekend workshops through the recreation department and noticed how many students were attending.

Students have been learning to make a number of items, some of which are making their way to the MarketPlace’s Unique Boutique. Projects have included wood pallet scarecrows and Christmas décor, welcome signs, tables, napkin holders and more. Space in the former Bass Café has also been repurposed for use by students.

“The biggest thing is that it’s building their self-confidence,” said Matheson. “Often, kids are told they can’t use things, but to give them a power sander and let them go to work, it gives them the confidence to try other things.”

On the adult services side, job coach Tom Phair launched the woodworking program years ago.

“He’s the type of person who could never not be fixing something,” said Employment Director Tom Beedle of Phair, who is a chemical engineer by trade.

Due to the pandemic, adult participants are now using workshop space in Cushing’s maintenance building, rather than classroom space.

They have completed a variety of projects from wooden ornaments for Christmas trees to cornhole boards to wheelchair-accessible raised planter beds. They have sold birdhouses to the Massachusetts Audubon Society’s gift shop. They also do repair work and minor maintenance. For example, if something needs to be assembled in the MarketPlace, one of the participants will be tasked with the job. Additionally, they have done minor maintenance and upkeep on Cushing’s vans.



1. Student Ryan Akins, left, and staff member Doug Reilly show off a napkin holder made for a local pizza shop. 2. Meredith Ortiz, adult services participant, paints her cornhole board with an American flag. 3. Cushing woodworking students have made several Halloween projects to be sold at Unique Boutique. 4. Student Brady Silvia measures out a length of wood during class. 5. Student Joseph Barnes gives a thumbs-up while working on his project. 6. Brady Silvia uses a manual miter saw to cut a piece of wood. 7. Jonathan Perreault screws together the scarecrow project that he's been working on.

PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE

BOARD PROFILE:

Cochrane provides parent perspective

By Meaghan Casey

John Cochrane was introduced to Cardinal Cushing Centers 12 years ago when his son, Michael, began attending its employment training program. And his commitment has only grown stronger over the years.

A Hingham resident, Cochrane is co-chair of the board of directors, along with Jerry Vitti. He has used his professional background to bring financial discipline to the board, helping the organization to operate more efficiently.

Cochrane has nearly 40 years’ experience in U.S. and international utility sector finance. He spent 32 years at National Grid, retiring in 2013 as executive vice president, global mergers and acquisitions. He went back into the field as a senior managing director at Boston-based FTI Consulting, leading its power and utilities practice.

In addition to serving on the Cushing board, Cochrane has served on the boards of a variety of energy sector companies. His knowledge includes all areas within corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, partnerships, restructurings, regulation, gas and electric supply and business development, both domestic and international. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Harvard University and his master’s from Northeastern University.

Michael, who has autism, attends Cushing’s adult employment program four days a week in Braintree.

“He’s continuing to interact with others with and without disabilities, which has always been important to us,” said Cochrane. “He’s still doing educational and practical things and has had outside jobs, but he also gets exposed to fun things, like bowling or Special Olympics. He participates in as much as possible.”



STUDENT PROFILE:

Ben Foley has the write stuff

By Meaghan Casey

When Ben Foley arrived at Cardinal Cushing Centers in February 2020, he shared a dream of one day being published.

He is one step closer to that goal, thanks to Cushing sharing his work on its Facebook page for National Poetry Day.

“He was thrilled,” said Bridget Lally, who worked with Foley for a year-and-a-half at Cushing. “The goal of being published is a positive motivator for him when he is thinking of his future hopes and dreams.”

Foley, who grew up in Hull, has written a collection of short stories, mysteries and poems. He loves to research, read and discover the how and why of topics of interest.

“He’s been writing since he was a teeny, tiny child,” said his mother, Deb. “He started with just a few sentences and pictures and then when he taught himself to type, it just took off. He’s always been really creative.”

“Writing has been a positive outlet for him in times of various emotions, and especially when he has a topic of interest he wants to share with others,” said Lally. “During the heightened moments of COVID when there were more breaks and unstructured time in the day due to limited activities, he did a lot of writing. His family, teachers, staff and friends have been impressed by his talent, intelligence, creative mind, story lines, attention to detail and the way he can integrate various thoughts.”

Outside of his writing, Foley has enjoyed working in the greenhouse and has developed strong relationships with peers and staff.

“He has made exceptional strides at Cardinal Cushing,” said Lally. “This is his first experience of living away from home and working in vocational job sites, and he’s learning life skills. He has developed self-awareness of interests and hobbies, shared his expertise of video games with friends and tried many new activities such as fishing and magic tricks. He’s enjoyed the dances, senior formal, movie nights, playing cards and having conversations with friends and staff.”

“Cushing offers him the whole package in terms of independent living and social skills,” said his mother.



Boston runners adjust to delayed marathon



Marcy Bettencourt’s enthusiasm for Cushing runs deep.

MARATHON from Page 1

“Like every runner, I’m anxious to get back to some ‘normalcy’ in my everyday life – particularly as it relates to running a marathon,” he said. “I’m looking forward to seeing the crowds of people. I’m sure everyone will be particularly pumped for this year’s marathon – especially since the 2020 one was cancelled.”

For Tautiva, a teaching assistant at Cushing and an avid runner, there was the combined opportunity of completing his first marathon and benefiting his students.

“This Boston Marathon is an event bigger than myself and my passion of the sport,” he said. “I am running for the Cushing community and all of the students past, present and future. The students that I have been with have made such an impact on me over the two years I’ve been here. I’ve been a witness to a lot of students reaching awe-inspiring milestones.”

Bettencourt has previously run four marathons. Her 17-year-old son, Joe, has autism and started at Cushing as a residential student in February.

“When we found Cushing, I just said, ‘wow, this is the place,’” said Bettencourt, a Martha’s Vineyard resident. “It’s been nothing but fantastic, especially the communication and

the opportunities for him. He’s worked at a farm and he did Special Olympics over the summer and won a gold medal. There’s just so much fun stuff. We hit the jackpot with this school. He’s doing so well. We know he’s being cared about and cared for, and is working and learning. It’s the best place for him.”

Bettencourt admits she gets a little excited when talking about Cushing, but that makes her a perfect candidate to be running in support of the organization.

“This marathon has a lot more meaning,” she said. “I know what I’m running for.”

For more information on all the runners and to support this year’s team, visit: cushingcenters.org/support/give/fundraising/boston-marathon-team/

“When we found Cushing, I just said, ‘wow, this is the place. It’s been nothing but fantastic.’

— Marcy Bettencourt

DONOR PROFILE:

Supporting Cushing has redeeming value

BY LAURIE MARANIAN

She's had a robust career in the education field, is local to the South Shore and has first-hand experience working with individuals with disabilities. Based on that alone, you would think that Geraldine Begonis would be well connected to Cardinal Cushing Centers.

And she is. She has become a trusted donor and valued friend, but what originally brought Begonis to Cushing was actually its bottle redemption center.

Begonis, who lives in Braintree, had certainly heard of Cardinal Cushing Centers. When her sister told her that she could recycle her bottles for a cause, she decided to pay a visit. Together, they would make regular trips and see the students and staff who worked in this employment training site. She was also a regular at the Cushing Trader (now the Unique Boutique at the new MarketPlace).

"Many items find their way as gifts to friends and business associates," said Begonis. "They have always been a big hit and several pieces are prominently displayed in my house. The holiday cards are always well designed and unique."

When COVID-19 temporarily closed off the organization to the outside world, Begonis' trips were temporarily on hold. It was during this time that she started doing her research. When it came time to determine how she would approach her required minimum distribution (RMD) for her IRA, she made



Geraldine Begonis is a trusted donor and valued friend.

some phone calls and did her due diligence with the development team at Cushing, and the match was made.

"I am so pleased that I have found a way to give back annually to an organization whose mission speaks volumes to me," said Begonis, whose teaching career began with Title I for children who needed additional support. After new special education laws were passed, her career evolved to integrated pre-schools and eventually to administration. "All of these positions gave me the satisfaction of supporting children to achieve their full potential as lifelong learners in our society," she said.

"Giving to Cushing is a win-win situation," Begonis said. "I can make an impact in an area and field that is meaningful to me, while also making a smart financial decision for myself. It was an incredibly easy process

from the initial call to the completion of the forms and the electronic transfer of the donation. I hope that by sharing my story others are encouraged to do the same. Find a mission you can stand behind, and then make the gift of your RMD."

Individuals age 70½ or older can distribute otherwise taxable amounts from their IRAs directly to qualified charitable organizations tax-free. Up to \$100,000 per year of such distributions can qualify as tax-free and amounts transferred to charity count as part of a taxpayer's RMD.

Amounts passing tax-free from an IRA to charity are not able to be deducted as charitable contribution itemized deductions. That offers certain benefits:

- Excluding the IRA distributions from income reduces a taxpayer's adjusted gross income on which phaseouts of certain other deductions and credits are based.
- Massachusetts does not allow a deduction for charitable contributions, but it does follow the federal treatment of tax-free IRA distributions directly to charity.
- Under the 2017 new tax law, fewer people (particularly retired married couples) are able to itemize their deductions. As a result, distributing amounts from an IRA to charity can provide a tax deduction without itemizing deductions.

Please contact your tax professional to learn how making a qualified contribution distribution from your IRA can benefit you.

Coffee and community on the menu at Cushing Café

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Affectionately called the "Monday morning coffee group," a group of men with ties to the Lutheran Church of the Cross in Hanover have been regularly meeting at Cardinal Cushing Centers for more than 20 years.

In the late 1990s, they started getting together at the Bass Café for coffee every Monday, and the tradition has fortunately continued for decades. With the start of the pandemic, they hit their first roadblock and were forced to delay meeting at the new Cushing Café until this past July.

"Our July 26 meeting was the first time getting together in almost a year-and-a-half," said Bruce Bakeberg. "It was the first time we'd seen each other. I'm on oxygen and really don't get out at all, so these meetings are really special to me."

They now try to meet once a month at the Cushing Café and then Zoom every Monday morning to keep in touch.

"We all have an original connection with Lutheran Church of the Cross," said the church's pastor, Rev. Paul Lantz. "Not everyone still attends the same church, but they all are true friends."

"We come from all walks of life," said George Olson, who has known the group for more than 35 years and started attending the coffee meetings nine years ago in his retirement. "We have a VP from John Hancock, a jet pilot who flew commercial airlines all over the country, an electrical engineer who tested jet sleds during the old war and then taught at Northeastern University, and a structural engineer who worked on power plants, just to give you an idea. We have interesting discussions about everything from sports to current events and everything in between."

In all the years, they have never wavered from their meeting spot, but they are enjoying the new and improved café.

"Cardinal Cushing is an inviting and comfortable place to meet," said Olson. "The staff are always friendly and helpful."



Benefiting Cushing By Service

Blue Cross employees lend a hand

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Cardinal Cushing Centers’ outdoor space has gotten a much-needed facelift thanks to 10 employees of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. The volunteers visited Cushing on Sept. 23 as part of Blue Cross’ 11th annual Service Day. Approximately 2,800 Blue Cross employees volunteered to support 90 service projects across Massachusetts, focused on improving the health of children and families.

“It’s a great way to have a hands-on relationship with our community partners and see the work that they’re doing,” said Katie Hamilton, senior manager of Social Impact Communications at Blue Cross. “And the projects all tend to align with our mission to help our partners with healthy living.”

At Cushing, the volunteers were tasked with sprucing up the fitness trails. They removed branches and debris from the trails, spread wood chips and made the trails more user-friendly and accessible for the students and adults with disabilities that Cushing supports. They also sanded and stained a small bridge on one of the trails. To support the project, Blue Cross gifted Cushing \$2,500.

“We are so appreciative of our partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts,” said Jansi Chandler, Chief Development Officer at Cardinal Cushing Centers. “From their annual service days to support of our fundraising events, we are so grateful for all of their energy and support.”

Blue Cross volunteers first visited Cushing for Service Day in 2017, when they originally cleared the fitness trails and created a volleyball court. Last year, nearly all projects were virtual and 23 employees recorded themselves reading children’s stories and shared that collection with Cushing students.



Employees of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts volunteered at Cushing as part of the 11th annual company-wide Service Day. They worked to spruce up the fitness trails and provide an outlet for individuals at Cushing to be active. Cushing employees joined the Blue Cross volunteers in the effort.

PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHER EVANS

