

Cardinal Cushing Centers CONNECTOR



Feeling fit

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ASD Fit Boston founder Ryan Feeney helps Cushing student Reggie Charnel, left, during an exercise.
PHOTO BY KATIE MORRISON

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For Cushing alumnus, jobs well done

By MEAGHAN CASEY

It's been said that you have to first dream before your dreams can come true. Cushing alumnus David Wolfson has never had a problem doing that. Growing up, Wolfson had dreams of getting a job, living in a house, driving a car, being a radio DJ and getting married. One-by-one, he has accomplished each of his goals. He lives in Bourne with his wife, Sarah, loves driving, and is employed at 7-Eleven, as well as AutoCamp Cape Cod, which provides accommodations in Airstreams, luxury tents and other suites. He also has an on-air position at WATD

95.9, based in Marshfield. "My life is so excellent," he said. "I owe my thanks to everyone at Cushing. They really did a great job training me and getting me where I am today." Wolfson, who is from East Weymouth, spent nearly 10 years as a residential student at Cushing, graduating in 1995. While at Cushing, he excelled at gymnastics and earned his driver's license at age 21, a few months before graduating. "I loved that school," he said. "I miss it. The staff there are incredible." Wolfson still keeps in touch with a number of his former teachers, including



Rob Hakala, left, and David Wolfson cover Cushing's Fun Run for WATD 95.9.

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CARDINAL CUSHING CENTERS
CONNECTOR

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Celebrating giving as well as receiving



**MICHELLE
MARKOWITZ**

with the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Science. I'm excited for our students to experience

At Cushing, we appreciate the partnerships we have and understand it is a two-way street. In this edition of the Connector, you will read about our students' having the opportunity to travel to Bermuda in October to study science and the environment, thanks to a collaboration

hands-on learning in a beautiful setting. Through a partnership with ASD Fit Boston, our students have increased access to adaptive physical fitness, with coaches bringing to campus innovative ways of engaging students in order to help them become more physically fit. We appreciate the support of the One Step Forward Education Foundation in making this program available. We are equally pleased to offer the Vocational Alternatives Program, in which non-Cushing students receive vocational training at Cushing as part of their high school experience in their local school district. This is a way for us to share our resources with students in Hanover, Hull, Braintree and Hingham. Students from those communities are learning

skills in culinary, business, industrial arts and agriculture from our talented Cushing staff. It is very gratifying for us to be able to provide this opportunity for our neighbors. We are looking forward to our annual Springtime gala, when we honor the Vitti Family and Maria Wood-Smith. Springtime is always a festive event, with dinner, music, student art display and a fabulous fashion show. I hope you can join us on May 22 at the Seaport Hotel in Boston. Thank you for your continued support.

Michelle Markowitz is president & CEO of Cardinal Cushing Centers.



You're Invited!

Springtime Gala Legacy of Giving

May 22, 2025 | 5:30 p.m. at Seaport Hotel Boston

Honoring the Vitti Family and Maria Wood-Smith

SpringtimeGala.com

Cushing alumnus has achieved his goals

ALUMNUS from page 1

Cushing's director of food service, Gerry Fanning, who employed Wolfson in the kitchen for a few years after he graduated, making a huge impact on him. "I love Gerry. He was like a father to me," said Wolfson. "He'll still call me while I'm at the (radio) station on Wednesdays, and I get tears in my eyes." "He always had the dream and drive to accomplish what he has," said Fanning. "He loves to learn, have fun, laugh and keep you on your toes. I'm very proud of David for what he has done, and grateful for the friendship we have. He has shown that he is quite capable of making it on his own and with some guidance. I always believed he would be a star, and he is, showing what one can achieve. I hope he gets to do what he is doing for a long time." Wolfson has been lending his voice to WATD for 23 years. He hosts a live show Wednesdays from 1 to 5 a.m., playing music and talking. He also prerecords a show for Monday evenings in his home studio and assists with special events, festivals, sporting events and station tours.

"I work with some awesome people, who really accept me for who I am," he said. "I just love what I do. I'm so happy." "He's a high-energy guy, who is enthusiastic and passionate about radio," said Rob Hakala, program director and host of the station's morning news. Wolfson lives in Bourne in a home for individuals with special needs, with his wife, Sarah. The couple met while he was living in an apartment complex for the elderly and disabled, where Sarah's mother also resided. "I was walking my cat, Luigi, on a leash and Sarah came rollerblading over to me and wanted to pet my cat," he said. They lost touch for a few years, but reconnected and have been married for seven years. Proud of all that he has achieved, Wolfson gives credit to his mother, Naomi, and father, Phil, for always believing in him and thinking positively. "They gave me the confidence," he said. Wolfson still has one unfulfilled dream, but he's not giving up on it just yet: to meet one of the members of the former boy band New Kids on the Block. With his enthusiasm and determination, it would be more surprising if he didn't.



Gerry Fanning, left, Cushing's director of food service, employed David Wolfson after he graduated from Cushing.

Bermuda will be an environment for learning

This October, a cohort of staff, students and adult participants will head to Bermuda for a mix of learning and fun at the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Science (BIOS).

BIOS serves as the Atlantic research headquarters of Arizona State University's School of Ocean Futures. The research work is focused on experiential learning opportunities that study the current and future state of the ocean and the challenges our environments experience due to human activities.

"In the fall, we took a meeting and got a good sense of what we could do," said Cushing President and CEO Michelle Markowitz. "It's really exciting because it's such a fun, hands-on way to learn about the environment, in such a beautiful, rich landscape."

The Cushing group will spend a week fully immersed at the institute, studying in labs and learning more about oceanography. They will stay in student dormitories and go out on research vessels and visit Walsingham Nature Reserve, where they will explore limestone caves, swim in the Blue Hole and explore the mangroves. The group is also interested in learning more about what they can do to take better care of their environments. They will visit Cooper's Island, where they will see first-hand the effects of microplastics on the environment.

There will be additional time for nature hikes and visiting parks and museums, as well as Gibbs Lighthouse and the

Bermuda Aquarium and Zoo. They hope to squeeze in some snorkeling at Tobacco Bay, visit the South Shore beaches and enjoy some local dining and shopping in downtown Hamilton.

"Society is more formal there, so I'm excited for that part of

the journey as well," said Markowitz. "There will be different expectations as far as how to dress and how to greet people. So, on top of the environmental learning, they'll be working on social skills."



From left, Cushing National Director of Marketing and Program Development Sarah Norfleet, Cushing President and CEO Michelle Markowitz, Bermuda Child and Family Services Director Alfred Maybury, Bermuda Public Schools Commissioner of Education Kalmar Richards, Bermuda Public Schools Assistant Director of Student Services Lisa Swan and Cushing Vice President of Student Services Meghan Campia enjoyed a visit together at Cushing.

Bell a striking success in Special Olympics

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Bermuda native and Cushing alumna Ciara Bell has been on a bit of a world tour recently, thanks to her achievements with Special Olympics.

Bell and her bowling team traveled to Hong Kong in January to participate in the International Para Bowling World Championships. "It was very exciting," she said. "The best part of Hong Kong was the food."

As one of four members of the Bermuda team, she also attended the 2023 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Berlin, Germany. "I got involved with Special Olympics in 2019, and I enjoy bowling with my friends," she said.

Bell was a residential student at Cushing from age 16 to 18,

graduating in June 2011.

"I met a lot of nice friends and teachers," she said. "I got a chance to experience a lot of new things, and I learned a lot. I enjoyed the parties and being a cheerleader the most."

After leaving Cushing, she returned home to Bermuda. She attends a daily program that supports adults 21 and older, through the Bermuda Autism Early Intervention Centre.

"I go there to develop my social and vocational skills and really enjoy it there," said Bell. "I get to play games with my friends, help with cleaning and other chores and I even get to do some cooking, which is one of my favorite activities."

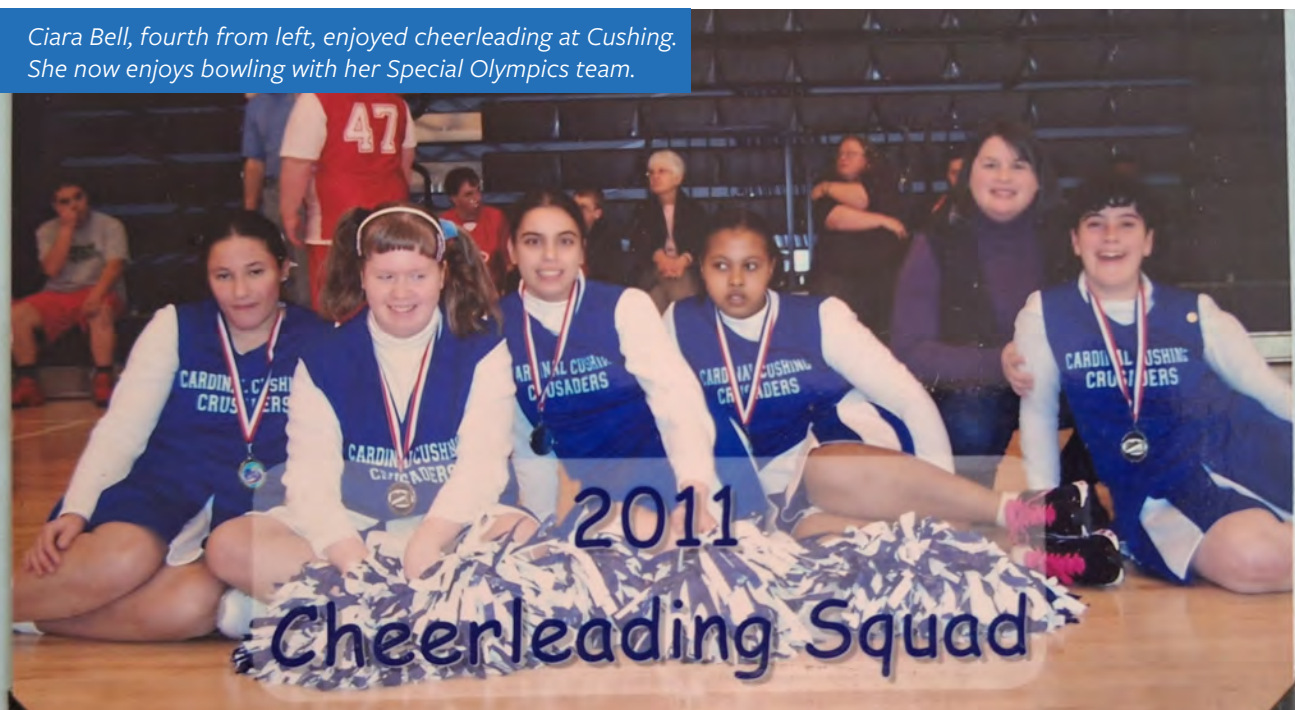
Bell also reads to preschoolers at a nursery school each week. She loves the warmth of Bermuda and the opportunity to swim.

Though she left Cushing nearly 15 years ago, the organization still remains close to her heart. When Cushing President and CEO Michelle Markowitz visited Bermuda in the fall, she reconnected with Bell and her family. Bell is one of three Cushing alumni from Bermuda, and Markowitz was instrumental in her enrollment.

"I was overseeing admissions at the time and I wanted to do more international recruitment," Markowitz said. "Bermuda is such a short flight that it made sense, and that's how the relationship started."

"I had a wonderful visit with Ciara and her mom," Markowitz added. "It was so good to hear about all that she's been doing."

Ciara Bell, fourth from left, enjoyed cheerleading at Cushing. She now enjoys bowling with her Special Olympics team.



Cushing homes get an upgrade

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Thanks to the generosity of donors, Cushing students are benefiting from significantly improved living spaces. The renovations of two residences have wrapped up and students moved back into the refreshed homes, which include upgraded furniture, artwork and amenities.

“Most of these were decades-old, so the changes were necessary for long-term function,” said Cushing President and CEO Michelle Markowitz. “Over time, certain things become apparent, like when we first built the houses and they all had showers. There’s a need for tubs, too, so that’s something we added.”

More work is underway to improve additional kitchens, bathrooms, flooring and more. The facilities team has also installed new heating and cooling systems in every residential home.

Markowitz said it’s exciting to walk into the new homes, which are brighter and more colorful.

“We’ve been thrilled,” she said. “We want to be able to provide beautiful, functional, comfortable spaces for our students in their home away from home.”

Cushing has spent approximately \$6.6 million in recent infrastructure and capital improvements, with \$3 million of that from private gifts. Residential life is a priority, allowing students to be able to enjoy their academic day programs, while also living with friends in a campus setting. They receive 24-hour supervision and develop independent living skills such as hygiene, health and wellness, cooking, laundry and more.



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1. From left, residential life skills instructors Marquis Baptiste and Katty Celestin, students Ismael Valentin, Greg Pritchard, John Kahian and house manager Steeve Estil enjoy the new residence.
2. Makari feels at home in his new bedroom.
3. Dylan Singer relaxes at home.
4. The kitchen is the center of the home.
5. Marquis Baptiste and DJ Russ relax in the living room.
6. Joey Bettencourt, left, and Patrick Sullivan do a puzzle in the dining room.
7. John Kahian and Ismael Valetin chow down in the dining room.
8. Residents Dylan Singer and Luke Lee make brownies with teaching assistant Amanda Cleary.

PHOTOS BY KATIE MORRISON

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Ross is well trained in volunteering for Cushing

Personal trainer Kelly Ross has become somewhat of a regular at Cardinal Cushing Centers since modeling at last year’s Springtime Gala.

Ross, a Norwell resident, was introduced to Cushing by board member Meg Kelleher. As an independent representative for Zya Active, she modeled clothing from the brand. She was paired with Canton resident Abby Nix, who graduated from Cushing in August.

“She kind of changed my life,” said Ross. “We really bonded. She’s a great young woman, and that was such an amazing, feel-good event. After that, when she was working at the Cushing Café, I would stop in and hang out with her.”

Ross also returned to host a bootcamp, raising \$2,000 for Cushing, thanks to a corporate match. This was the third fundraiser she has hosted, with proceeds from the first two benefiting breast cancer awareness and Jack’s Drive 55 Foundation, which raises funds for pediatric brain tumor research.

She plans to repeat her next fundraiser at Cushing.

“I love this cause. It teaches real work skills,” she said. “The staff is so passionate about they do. I have a niece who is autistic, and I’ve said so many times that I wish she had something like this available to her where she lives. It fills a huge need in the community.”

A Boston College graduate, Ross has a background in psychology and social work. She later turned to a career in fitness.

“I was always in the world of volunteerism and had a career in behavioral health,” she said. “When I had kids, I spent a lot of time in the gym. I got certified in kickboxing and started doing classes, and then personal training, first at gyms and then on my own.”

Ten years ago, she founded her own studio, Scorch Fitness, in Norwell, where she teachers 12 to 15 classes per week.

“It’s great to be your own boss, and giving people the opportunity to change their lives – who doesn’t want to do that?” she said. “It’s been an amazing, wonderful journey.”



Abby Nix and Kelly Ross walk the runway at Springtime.

BOARD PROFILE

Having Cramer on board is a good strategy



Stephen Cramer

Stephen Cramer brings more than 30 years of leadership experience in the nonprofit world to his seat on the Cardinal Cushing Center board of directors.

Cramer, vice president of partnerships at Orbis Education, has worked largely in the education, health and social service sectors. At Orbis Education, he is responsible for university partnership operations, financial profitability,

and strategic growth and planning of nursing education programs. He is also tasked with developing policies in information technology, online education, space and facilities, financial and administrative operations and more.

A graduate of UMass Amherst and Suffolk University, Cramer earned his bachelor’s degree in accounting and finance and his master’s in business administration. Early in his career, he served as the director of finance and administration at Tufts University, and then the chief financial officer of Duke University’s School of Medicine.

“I think I was partly drawn to education due to my wife and seeing what she was doing in the public schools,” he said.

His wife, Elizabeth, worked as an elementary school teacher in Scituate Public Schools for 30 years. They raised two children, Jeffrey and Emily, while living in Stoughton, and now live in Falmouth.

Cramer also worked as the CFO for Caritas Christi Health Care, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Southcoast Health. His most recent

position before joining Orbis Education was associate dean of administration and finance at Northeastern University’s Bouvé College of Health Sciences. It was while he was at Northeastern that a colleague and former Cushing board member, Jeanine Mount, introduced him to Cushing.

“She would talk about the Sisters and the organization and the learning,” said Cramer. “It’s amazing to me the dedication of the staff, and I love seeing the accomplishments and the satisfaction the students get.”

While serving on the board, he has been continuously impressed by the growth and investment in Cushing, and credits that to President and CEO Michelle Markowitz.

“Hands-down, it’s due to Michelle and her leadership, and the team in there now,” said Cramer. “It’s really fulfilling to be able to position the organization to continue to serve its participants, and have these strategic discussions. The transformation, particularly with the new classrooms and residences and vocational sites, is a huge accomplishment.”

Cushing opens doors for vocational students

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Cardinal Cushing Centers’ commitment to vocational training doesn’t include only its own students and adult participants.

The organization offers additional services to non-Cushing students, in conjunction with their public schools. These services, which meet both state and federal requirements, include the Vocational Alternatives Program, in which students receive one-on-one training in a particular vocational field to better prepare for future job opportunities.

The students, who are typically age 18-21, qualify for special education services within their local high schools and can participate until they age out of services at 22. They can choose from culinary, business, recycling, industrial arts and agriculture training.

“It’s robust skills training without having to be a full-time Cushing student,” said Meghan Campia, Cushing vice president of student programs and services.

The program, which relaunched in the fall of 2023, has really taken off this year. Campia said it’s a great way to maintain positive relationships with school partners.

Participating this year are students from Braintree, Hanover, Hingham and Hull.

Maureen Melone, Providing Opportunities to Students in Transition (POST) program teacher at Hanover High School, said students go to Cushing twice weekly and learn basic job readiness skills such as dressing for the job, displaying appropriate behavior, working through independent problem solving and taking direction from a supervisor.

“The goal is to help them find out what they want to do when they age out,” said Melone. “It’s awesome to have the opportunity to try things out, and the convenience of rotating between multiple vocation sites at the same location is unmatched. Plus, it’s right down the street. Their comfort level has really grown in the last two years, as well as their all-around competency and self-advocacy. Hopefully they’ll be ready for jobs when they leave us.”



Kate Mortland helps Hanover High School student Aedel Mustafa-Rivera navigate around the kitchen at Cushing.

PHOTOS BY KATIE MORRISON



Special education teacher Eddie Cameron helps Hull High School students Dylan Grier and Mark Robbs show off their culinary work.

Shaping up at Cushing

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Cushing students are gaining new enthusiasm when it comes to exercise, thanks to a partnership with ASD Fit Boston, a leader in the adaptive fitness community.

The partnership is helping to expand students’ access to physical fitness at school and in the community. The program is being offered thanks to three-year grant funding from the One Step Forward Education Foundation.

“One Step Forward Education Foundation is proud to collaborate with Cushing and ASD Fit Boston to bring this program into the school. It is important for all kids to have access to physical fitness and to have a healthy body that will help them reach all of their potential,” said foundation president and founder Julia Casady. “The foundation strives to positively impact the process of education—a lifelong journey that can take many forms.”

Coaches come to the school weekly, bringing new and innovative ways to engage each student, at their level, to become more physically fit. They have been working with more than 60 students.

“They love new people coming in. It gets them excited,” said Kristen Scalata, Cushing’s adaptive physical education instructor. “We’ve already had so many success stories, like one person with arthritis

who comes in and works for 30 minutes, start to finish.”

Based in Brockton, ASD Fit Boston offers one-to-one personal training, group classes and satellite programming. It was founded on the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to live a healthy lifestyle. Coaches strive to build confidence and increase the quality of life for individuals who have varying cognitive, physical and emotional disabilities, that they can carry throughout their lives.

“We believe in meeting people exactly where they are and giving them the tools they need to go out and live a healthy life,” said Ryan Feeney, the founder and owner of ASD Fit Boston.

“Ryan is phenomenal with our kids,” said Scalata. “Some will even go to their gym in Brockton after school to get more training in. They’re really working on gross motor skills, with things like basic box jumps and obstacle courses or kettlebells and medicine balls.”

Scalata is excited to see how students are benefiting physically, while also practicing daily living skills like following multi-step directions.

In addition to the new ASD Fit Boston classes, Scalata also works with students at the middle- and high-school levels twice weekly, and vocational students have a class once a week.



1. Coach Jake Mahoney helps student Flynn Murphy balance on equipment 2. Jake Mahoney gives directions to Reggie Charnel. 3. Ryan Feeney leads Brayden Chambers in an exercise.

PHOTOS BY KATIE MORRISON