

# the Open Door

Winter 2006



## NECC Celebrates Its 30th Anniversary

*Nixon was President, Streisand's The Way We Were topped the charts and, hard as it is for us to believe, people flinched at paying an average of 53 cents for a gallon of gas. It was 1974 and Founder and President Vincent Strully incorporated what would become The New England Center For Children.*

Dedicated to providing ground breaking educational services for children with autism and related disorders, NECC welcomed its first students with a vision of bringing out potential and creating productive lives. Through the hard work, commitment and talent of its senior administration, staff, teachers, parents and more, NECC has grown to today be recognized as a leader in this specialized field of education.

The timeline running along the bottom of the pages in this issue of The Open Door provides a snapshot of the major milestones in NECC's history. Of course, for every milestone listed here there are hundreds of stories of personal achievement and growth for our students, their families and our staff. We invite you, too, to share your NECC stories and join us in celebrating this special occasion as we look toward the next 30 years and what they will hold for NECC.

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*This is the winning artwork from the 30th Anniversary T-shirt design contest submitted by the Sharon Partner Classroom.*



## Grant News

Autism Speaks, formerly known as The Autism Coalition for Research and Education, has awarded NECC a \$10,000 grant to fund the implementation of the Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia (ACE). *(For more information on the ACE, see related article on page 6.)* This is the second grant that NECC has received for this project from the Autism Coalition, which raises funds, distributes grants, and raises public awareness about autism.

Cisco Systems, Inc. has awarded NECC a grant of networking products with a total value of over \$60,000.

NECC will use the Cisco hardware to deploy the Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia (ACE) to Partner Classrooms in the local area. Cisco Systems, Inc. is the worldwide leader in networking for the Internet.

The Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association (MCMA) has awarded NECC a grant of \$8,500 to purchase communication devices. The MCMA was founded by Paul Revere in 1795, and now has more than 200 members. The Association's mission is to help human beings live up to their potential to become productive members of society.

## NECC Hosts Training for DEEC and DSS

NECC recently hosted a training workshop about the treatment of autism for more than 30 DEEC *(formerly the Office of Child Care Services)* and DSS *(Department of Social Services)* staffers this past summer. Senior NECC clinicians Dan Gould, Allen Karsina and Richard Graff, Speech/Language Director Laura

Hutt, and Health Services Director Pamela Peck presented on topics including characteristics of children with autism, communication issues and training, Applied Behavior Analysis and psychopharmacological interventions, and treatment monitoring systems. Participant comments indicated they felt the

information presented would be very helpful in their work. NECC appreciated the opportunity to promote a better understanding of the issues surrounding care and treatment of our students.

## NECC Through The Years

1974

NECC Founder Vincent Strully incorporates the Efficacy Research Institute, devoted to providing educational services to children with autism and related disorders.

1975

Starting with six children from the adult ward of a state institution and a staff of eight teachers, ERI opens a residential school on the grounds of Taunton State Hospital, considered "one of a kind" for its use of Applied Behavior Analysis.

1980

At the request of the MA Department of Education, Efficacy Research Institute of Framingham is established when ERI assumes control of a failing school for boys with autism in Framingham.

# familyprofile

## The Lionettas

Any 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration provides a chance to look back, and share stories of the past and present. For NECC it's been 30 years filled with stories of students and their families who have come to the school with the hope of bringing out potential and creating productive lives. This is William's story.

For William, a current NECC student transitioning into his public school system in Andover, MA, "It's been a story of phenomenal success," according to his proud mother Bernadette Lionetta. William came to NECC over four years ago at the age of three. His family home is in Andover and attending NECC would mean at least two hours in the car each day, but his family decided it was the best place for William.

Just out of Early Intervention, William arrived at NECC with little or no speech and exhibiting numerous inappropriate behaviors. "But, with the individual attention he received from the caring teachers at NECC, William's progress was even more than I might have expected in a lifetime."

William's story is not just his alone, Bernadette is quick to point out. "As it is with many of the other NECC families that I know, NECC has been very important to our whole family." His teachers have always made



*William celebrates his graduation from the NECC preschool with his Mom and sisters, Angelina and Francesca, last August.*

sure that William's two sisters were included in and understood his treatment. "We feel they have become like a part of our family." In fact the Lionettas have stayed in touch with every one of William's teachers – even attending one of their recent weddings. "It's a feeling we haven't found anywhere else," she adds.

So William's NECC story began with a decision to make a 52-mile drive each way, each day - but according to Bernadette, it was "So worth it!" On William's first day in his new public school his teacher posed the question to the class, "What do you want out of life?" Amid a full gamut of grand replies, William answered, "I just want to be like all the other kids I know." And, with the help of NECC, Bernadette adds, "He's getting closer to that goal everyday."

1985

The Commonwealth of MA approves plans to merge the two ERI programs into one community-based school, The New England Center for Autism (NECA), with multiple group homes and a centrally located school building in the Metro West region.

1986-1990

Backed by creative financial strategies NECA is able to construct a spacious, specially designed school building with fully modern classrooms. In addition, NECA opens 11 group homes in the Metro West region.

1990

The New England Center for Autism incorporates under its new name – *The New England Center For Children (NECC)*.

## Don't Miss NECC's Research Newsletter Online

Several times a year NECC publishes its Research Newsletter to let families, practitioners, researchers, and others in the NECC community know about some of the research being conducted at NECC and elsewhere. The most recent issue, as well as an archive of past issues, is now available online in the Research section of our website, [necc.org](http://necc.org). You can also sign up through the website to receive the newsletter by mail or e-mail.

Of course, we can't begin to cover all of the burgeoning research on autism related topics, but we attempt to

summarize major developments as we learn of them, and to point readers to credible sources of further information. Along the way, we provide some tips on how to sift through the ever-increasing and confusing array of reports about autism, and treatments for it, to determine which are reliable, and why.

The latest issue includes an article on Thimerosal (*a preservative used in some vaccines since the 1930's*) as well as a Readers' Forum and an overview of current NECC research.

### NECC's Executive Director Honored

*Vinnie Strully has been honored by his Alma Mater, Newark Academy in Livingston, NJ, as the Alumni Association's Board of Governors' unanimous choice for the Alumni Achievement Award. The award is presented annually to one graduate who has distinguished him/herself in their field of endeavor whether in public life, the professions, the arts or in the business world.*



### Expressions of Support

*"Thanks to everyone for being there for our children – being patient, teaching them to communicate and learn, giving them encouragement, and applauding all their baby steps – and the wonderful big steps too."*

**Nancy Zlotsky, Parent**

## Celebrating 30 Years

**1991**

NECC establishes its center-based preschool program providing intensive behavioral instruction and opportunities for integration with typical peers for young children with autism and PDD.

**1994**

NECC enters into a strategic alliance with Simmons College to provide a Simmons Master's Degree Program in Intensive Special Needs held completely at NECC's Southborough campus.

**1995**

NECC develops its first Public School Research Program by introducing a model classroom in the Worcester Public Schools.

## Show Your NECC Pride

If you're showing your NECC pride, send us your photos and they may be included in the next issue of *The Open Door*. Submit your photo with a short description to Mary Ellen Parzych, NECC, 33 Turnpike Road, Southborough, MA 01772, or by e-mail at [mparzych@necc.org](mailto:mparzych@necc.org).

*Jean Leone, parent of NECC student Matthew, sold tickets to her local AA-Affiliate baseball team, the Norwich Navigators of Norwich, CT, and as a result received a \$1,000 donation to NECC. Jean was presented with the check at the Navigators game in August and Matthew's brother Dominic was there to throw out the first pitch.*



## A "Strong" Show of Support for NECC



Brian Kelly, uncle of NECC student Matthew, held his 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Lisbon's Strongest Man Contest (LSMC) in June and donated the money to NECC. Each year, Brian's friends and family gather for this unique competition held in Lisbon, CT. This year's LSMC incorporated a 5K road race with four "strongman" events in which 15 participants competed for the coveted Strongest Man title and trophy. The event was a Herculean success and the proceeds tipped the scales at over \$4,500!

1996

NECC opens its Staff Intensive Residential Program providing 24-hour educational services for students who present the most complex needs including self-injurious and aggressive behaviors.

2000

NECC celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary hosting a gala celebration at Boston's World Trade Center with Senator Edward Kennedy and Mayor Thomas Menino in attendance.

NECC receives the National Award for Model Professional Development from the US Department of Education.

## Team NECC

In August, NECC participated in the 33<sup>rd</sup> running of the SBLI Falmouth Road Race. The principal sponsor of the prestigious seven-mile race, Savings Bank Life Insurance, named NECC as one of the recipients of this year's race proceeds and honored NECC with an award.

Runners representing NECC in the race were Bert Lannon, Sally Roberts, Maureen Ricotta, Gary Martin, Pam McClafferty and David and Justin Deary. Members of NECC's senior administration, Vinnie Strully, Kathy Foster, Michael Downey and RoseAnn Lovely generously sponsored the runners for a total of more than \$1,000. Thanks to all who played a role in making the race a great success for NECC!



*Team NECC poses with SBLI's CEO, Bob Sheridan*

## NECC's ACE

The Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia (ACE) is a revolutionary computerized database currently being developed by NECC that includes curriculum, assessment tools and reports to educate children with autism and related disorders. ACE is based on NECC's 30 years of experience in conjunction with the latest research on effective instruction strategies for working with children with autism.

Through the ACE, teachers and specialists will be able to access an entire curriculum in one centralized location,

including curriculum templates that provide step-by-step instructions to teach over 800 skills. Each curriculum template will be accompanied by a video clip that demonstrates the skill being taught. Also incorporated into the computerized curriculum templates will be numerous modifications that will enable teachers to address the individual learning style of each child. The ultimate goal of the ACE project is to share this computerized curriculum encyclopedia with others in the field across the world.

**2003**

NECC opens a new, state-of-the-art preschool and early childhood center at its Southborough site.

**2003**

NECC kicks off its Capital Campaign to help with the mission of opening doors for children with autism and other related disorders.

**JANUARY 2005**

NECC begins its 30<sup>th</sup> year as an internationally recognized leader in the field of education for children with autism and related disorders. NECC staff, numbering in the hundreds, currently serves over 200 students between the ages of 2 and 22 from across the US and several foreign countries.

## Parents' Organization Holds 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Day

NECC's playgrounds and gym were filled with activities and fun as our Parents' Organization held its 6<sup>th</sup> annual Family Day in June. Coordinated by the organization's Activities Committee, Family Day provides the perfect opportunity for families and students to have a great time while meeting or getting reacquainted with other NECC families. With volunteer assistance from NECC Adapted Physical Education Specialists, students and siblings enjoyed a moon bounce and other playground activities, and everyone cooled down on the hot day with delicious ice cream sundaes.



## Celebrating 30 Years

*"Teachers that help people of special needs are truly a blessing."*

**The Lawson Family**

*"NECC has been the main bastion of behavior analysis in Massachusetts for decades."*

**David Palmer**

*"It is difficult to put into words how truly grateful we are for all that you do."*

**Sallie & Jon Wood, Parents**

**MAY 2005**

NECC receives the prestigious SABA Award for Enduring Programmatic Contributions in Behavior Analysis from the Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA.)

**NOVEMBER 2005**

NECC celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a gala event where former Governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, is presented with NECC's *Children of Promise Award*.

# Annual Fund & Capital Campaign Support Reaches New Levels

Last year, NECC raised over \$450,000 through its Annual Fund & Capital Campaign which allow us to provide our students with a superior learning environment so they can reach their unique, fullest potential. By supporting NECC, the following individuals have directly affected a child's ability to live a productive, happy life. We thank them for their generosity and invite you to join in supporting our students by giving to NECC.

## ANNUAL FUND

### Diamond Door - \$10,000+

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Hamilton, Brook, Smith & Reynolds, P.C.  
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Parents Organization of NECC  
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*"I was very impressed by the professionalism and competence demonstrated by all the staff at the Center, their dedication towards their students, and the quality of their interactions with each other. It is obvious that they are highly skilled in the practices of positive ABA principles!"*

**Cath Sumpter**  
Lecturer in Psychology  
The University of Waikato, New Zealand

*"Having viewed programs in most of the states, it was most pleasing to see a program of such unusually high quality as that observed at the New England Center for Children"*

**Dennis H. Reid, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director  
Habilitative Management Consultants, Inc.



Visit [necc.org](http://necc.org)  
for more information  
on autism and its treatment.

## Celebrating Staff Anniversaries

We'd like to take this opportunity to recognize NECC staff members on their 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> year anniversaries. Congratulations and thanks for your hard work.

- June '05: Kenneth Faugno - 10 years, Patrick Njeru - 5 years
- July '05: Julie Weiss - 15 years, Marlene Cramer - 5 years, Mike DeMauro - 5 years
- August '05: Carol Benoit - 10 years, Linda Donahue - 15 years, Mark Doten - 10 years, Katherine Foster - 30 years, Nicole Groskreutz - 5 years, Michele Klein - 15 years, Chad Linstruth - 5 years, Beverly Luacaw - 20 years, TJ May - 5 years, Margaret Megan - 5 years, Hajime Okuda - 5 years, Ellen Pearlman - 10 years, June Sanchez-Kivi - 10 years, Alexandra Stone - 5 years, Vinnie Strully - 30 years, Gillian Warwick - 5 years
- September '05: Sarah Buckingham - 5 years, Jennifer Chappell - 5 years, Amy Geckeler - 15 years, Amy Hammer - 5 years, Allen Karsina - 15 years, Utah Nickel - 5 years, Mary Ellen Parzych - 10 years, Alina Pullano - 5 years, Julie Yankauskas - 5 years
- October '05: Marion Karsina - 15 years, Kimberly Keogh - 15 years, Pam Olsen - 5 years, Maureen Ricotta - 5 years, Lila Shayan - 5 years, Isaura Tavares - 15 years