

OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

TOWERS

VOL. 71, No. 4, FALL 2018

**EMBRACING
CHANGE:**
RETIRING ONE
GUIDE DOG,
BUT WELCOMING
ANOTHER
see page 2

INSIDE: Talent and Triumph 1 | Boundless Art 4 | Meaningful Support 6 | Overbrook Experience 8



TOWERS NEWSLETTER

Vol. 71, No. 4, Spring 2018

Overbrook School for the Blind
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
Established 1832

OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2018-2019

President

Warwick S. Wheeler

Vice Presidents

Anne Marble

Elizabeth Passanante-Rodriguez

Treasurer

Joseph T. Doyle, Jr.

Secretary

Marjorie G. Stein

Alumni Representative

Lyle Sine

Members

Brad Bartkowski

Crystal Casmirri

Colleen Christian

Jenine Cohen

John Dougherty

Bruce J. Fenster

Bryant M. Greene

Jacqueline Keenan

Dan Mahoney

Robert J. Marcantuono

Edward J. McGinn, Jr.

Vincent McVeigh

James J. Murphy

Susan E. Neumann

Sid Rosenblatt

Emmeline VanderZwaag

OSB Executive Director and CEO

Todd Reeves

Gloria Pfeiffer Yoshioka

gloria@obs.org

Editor

Denise Mihalik

denise@obs.org

Photos

Rebecca Ilinski

rilniski@obs.org

Braille Transcriptionist



00816

United Way

FOLLOW US



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Dear Friend of Overbrook,

It's likely you're receiving this publication on a crisp Fall day, which serves as proof that renewal is not reserved to Spring. One of our greatest passions is communicating with you, our friends, the successes and joys of our students, which is receiving even more focus in not only this issue and the coming issues, but on our revamped website as well. Each and every day that a student crosses the threshold of a classroom and is greeted by a teacher intent on inspiring them is a day of renewal. We hope the expanded content and direction of Towers mirrors that evolution of discovery and achievement.

Juxtaposed against the leaves on the ground in the latter stages of Fall is what floats in the air. Walking out of a recent administrative meeting in which we updated projects-in-works ranging from student-driven social enterprises involving brailled signage and operating a bed-n-breakfast to partnering with a local non-profit to provide after school care to increasing short-course programming for students with visual impairments locally and throughout eastern Pennsylvania, a colleague turned to me as he walked out the door and said, "Boy, we have a lot of balls in the air." Indeed we do. In fact, I'm crafting this letter from a hotel room in San Francisco, taking advantage of a layover from visits to our International partners in the Philippines and Vietnam to meet with the staff of AirBnB to gain their insights on the operation of the social enterprise noted above.

I hope you enjoy reading the pages that follow and stay with us in upcoming issues to see where all the balls land. Just like the seasons, change is inherent in our tone and tenor because we know each minute of each day matters in the lives of our students and their growth and renewal -- the simple calculus of what has been gained and lost in their lives -- is what matters most. Moreso, as you peruse these pages, it's my hope that you come to know that you matter in their lives as well.

Sincerely,

Todd Reeves

Executive Director and CEO

TALENT AND TRIUMPH

When Brandon Watson attended OSB's Transition Vocational Initiative (TVI) Summer Program last year, he was thrilled to learn how to be more independent in every way. "I learned how to cook, how to cross the street safely, how to clean and even how to do laundry," says Wilson.

The experience was so beneficial that Brandon's parents enrolled him in OSB's School To Work Program in the Fall of 2017. "We were so impressed with the TVI Program and the opportunity to learn to live independently in White Hall, that we reached out to OSB and our school district to get Brandon enrolled as soon as possible," says Patti Watson, Brandon's mother.

Previously, Brandon attended a typical suburban high school, and his teachers did their best to support his visual impairment by providing services a few times a week. "Brandon's parents and school district realized that he would greatly benefit from daily living skills instruction to gain independence," says Susan Vaughan, Coordinator of OSB's School to Work Program. "We focused on all of the skills that the general education curriculum does not cover, such as independent living skills, orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, career education, assistive technology, and sensory efficiency skills. These are the skills that are essential for students in their lives after they are finished with high school."

Within a few weeks of starting in the School to Work Program, teachers noticed a change in Brandon. He began using his cane, which he rarely used in high school. He was much more social and quickly developed friendships with other students. He joined the bell choir, swim team and track team. He was determined to use the low vision apps and tools that his instructors provided.

But mostly, Brandon's independent living skills greatly improved, thanks to the White Hall Program, which gives Brandon the opportunity to live on campus all week and return home on the weekends. "It's the best part of being at OSB," says Brandon. "I want to be more independent so I can live on my own one day."

His progress hasn't gone unnoticed. During the OSB Achievement Day ceremony at the end of the school year, Brandon won the First Annual Alicia Burton Pawprint Shop Award for his work in the Pawprint Supply Shop.

Brandon is also achieving his transition goals by venturing into the working world. He has worked on campus at the Huskies Cafe and off campus at Walgreens, Little Sunshine



John Thomas

Brandon uses his cane on campus.

Cafe and Coldstone Creamery. "I want to go to school to learn about working with computers," he says.

"Our experience at Overbrook School for the Blind has truly exceeded every expectation that we had," says Patti Watson. "Our only regret is that we didn't find it sooner."

EMBRACING CHANGE: RETIRING ONE GUIDE DOG, BUT WELCOMING ANOTHER

He was our friendliest—and fluffiest—staff member on campus.

After seven years as a hardworking guide dog for OSB Spanish Teacher and Braille Transcriptionist Rebecca Ilniski, Zeb, the cutest Labrador Retriever on campus, retired in the spring.

"At age nine, Zeb began letting me know in his own way that he wanted to retire," says Ilniski. "He slowed down considerably. Zeb got tired of the daily commute and balked at the trolley. He became fearful of it and didn't want to ride it any longer. I had to begin carpooling to and from work for the rest of the school year because of it, and I'm thankful to my wonderful coworkers for that."

Knowing that with her active lifestyle, she couldn't keep Zeb, Ilniski submitted an application with Guide Dogs for the Blind and after phone interviews, a home interview and physical forms, Ilniski was accepted back into the program but had to wait until a trained dog was ready.

In the meantime, Ilniski set about finding the perfect retirement home for Zeb and found it with OSB Para-Educator Lisa Wilson. "I knew that Zeb would probably get depressed if he were cramped in my apartment all day long while I took my new guide to work. After all, he was used to being with me each day," says Ilniski. "When my guides retire, I always place them with a family member or a friend of my choice. I think about what kind of life my retired guide will have when I choose a home for him. Will he get the proper care and exercise? Zeb is a medium-sized dog so I also thought about whether he could physically be handled by those who would be taking care of him. Are there other pets in the home? If so, are they friendly or aggressive? I also evaluate the home and make sure that it would be safe for my retired guide to live there."

Ilniski met with Lisa Wilson and her family three times before the decision was made. "Each time we got together, I felt more comfortable as the family showed such an interest in his care," says Ilniski. "During the first visit, Lisa's kids learned how to brush him. For the second one, Zeb went for a walk with Lisa's husband, and he played with her kids. And by the third visit, we discussed the details. Lisa and her family were very reassuring and always concerned about how I felt at any



time. On the day of the transition, they brought me some very sweet Braille letters from the kids and some sunflowers. A friend of mine was also there and we ended up talking about Zeb for hours and laughed and cried together."

Having supportive family members, friends, a great church family, and caring coworkers helped Ilniski with the transition. "Everyone in my family and at Overbrook loved Zeb, too, so it was difficult for them as well," says Ilniski. "I missed Zeb and had trouble sleeping for several nights. I missed his companionship and having him around."

Luckily, Ilniski didn't have to wait too long for a call from Guide Dogs for the Blind with the happy news that a guide dog was available for her in Borring, Oregon.

Before she left for Oregon, she visited Zeb at the Wilsons. "Zeb was happy to see me in his own way," says Ilniski. "I knew that he had adjusted well to his new retirement home, but at first, he was a little reserved with me. He did lay on my feet under the table like he used to do when I had him. I believe that was his way of thanking me for his permanent vacation/retirement home! I was happy, and it really helped me make the transition by providing some closure. I also know that I can go visit him anytime and can't wait to see him and my new guide dog play together."



Nick Wilson

Zeb's new owner, Lisa Wilson (top row, left) with her children Maya Genuardi, Nora Wilson (bottom left) and Dean Wilson.



“We really started to bond, and I learned that he is confident in city environments. I truly loved taking a walk with him.”

MEET KABOB

MUCH MORE THAN A PRETTY FACE

Back at school, Ilniski’s students and colleagues at OSB enjoyed getting to know Kabob, a yellow Labrador Retriever who can be playful at times, but mostly, he is focused on doing his job. “When I first met him, he gave me a little tail wag and just sat at my side,” says Ilniski. “We both had to learn each other’s movements. I had to learn how to walk with him and learn how to detect when he was moving me around obstacles as well as finding doors, stairs, ramps, curbs and other things. In the beginning, he didn’t seem confident to me. He moved very slowly and it was difficult to feel his movements through the harness. I questioned whether Kabob was confident and had the skills to guide me through the 69th Street Terminal and other areas that have lots of pedestrians.”

The guide dog trainers explained that while Kabob walks slowly, he is focused and doesn’t distract easily. “It was on the way back from my trip to Oregon when all of my questions inside were answered,” says Ilniski. “We really started to bond, and I learned that he is confident in city environments. I truly loved taking a walk with him. I knew that he sincerely wanted to keep me safe.”

Having Kabob has given Ilniski a life of mobility, camaraderie and independence. “It’s amazing being able to move around crowded areas like malls and busy bus terminals and airports,” says Ilniski. “He’s a great companion, too. I’m never alone.”

GUIDE DOG ETIQUETTE TIPS from Rebecca Ilniski

Many people are curious about my relationship with my guide dog, and I’m happy to answer questions when I’m not busy trying to get somewhere with Kabob. But here are a few guidelines I wish more people knew about guide dog teams:

Please don’t talk, feed or otherwise distract guide dogs while they are wearing their harnesses. Yes, they’re adorable—but remember that distracting a working guide dog creates the same dangers that grabbing the steering wheel away from a driver would. Wait until the harness is off—and then ask for permission—to pet and play.

Keep other pets on a leash and close to you when you’re near a guide dog team. Not only can pets who aren’t on leashes distract the guide dog, if they are aggressive they may be unsafe for interaction with me or a service dog. If a guide dog is attacked, they may become fearful of other dogs and may have to retire early.

If you would like to assist a guide team, ask first how you could be of assistance. Grabbing the guide dog’s harness or leash while the guide dog is trying to guide could disrupt the team’s safety.

Don’t interfere when a guide dog’s handler is giving a correction. Guide dogs are highly trained, but sometimes they make mistakes! If a correction is necessary, it could be a verbal reprimand or leash correction from me. As a handler, I’ve been taught the proper way to keep up his training.

A guide dog is not a pet. There is a working relationship between the owner and his guide dog. He is a service dog so he has rights and protections under the law to go with me wherever I go, so you can expect to see us just about anywhere including planes, trains, and ride sharing services like Uber and Lyft.

PROGRAMS



BOUNDLESS ART

As visitors walked through the east cloister hall at Overbrook School for the Blind, they were drawn to the numerous brightly colored paintings of sunflowers lining the walls. Reminiscent of Van Gogh's famous "Sunflowers" painting, the student artwork was created using bubble paint, a product from France which has a fluffy, foamy texture that can be shaped and molded to build up volume. These textural student paintings also incorporated scented materials, just one of the ways OSB Art Teacher Susan DiFabio made the art accessible to students.

"We studied Van Gogh in class, and the students really connected with this painting because they were able to touch real sunflowers that our Farm to Table Program grew on campus," says DiFabio.

Little did she know but just a few months after completing her unit on Van Gogh, DiFabio would meet Van Gogh's great grand nephew as a guest at the opening reception of the Van Gogh Museum's Pop-Up Tour in the King of Prussia Mall.

Located in the Lord & Taylor Court, the travelling Van Gogh Museum's Pop-Up Tour was the first of its kind in the United States, featuring three-dimensional curator-approved replicas of nine Van Gogh masterpieces for visitors to touch. The mission of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam is to make the life and work of Van Gogh accessible to as many people as possible, both physically and digitally. For this tour, Overbrook School for the Blind was one of the first schools invited to experience the exhibit, and students from each program were invited to touch all of the masterpieces to feel Van Gogh's famous brushstrokes.

We're not sure if Early Childhood student Anthony B. was trying to imitate Van Gogh's famous brushstrokes on his sunflower painting (he is all of 4 years-old!), but his piece was submitted to the American Printing House for the Blind's Annual Insights Art Show and won Third Place. Organized by APH for artists of all ages with vision loss, the competition and exhibition is international in scope with over 500 entries received each year. Anthony B.'s sunflower painting may be reproduced in the APH InSights Art Calendar and as an image on greeting cards next year.

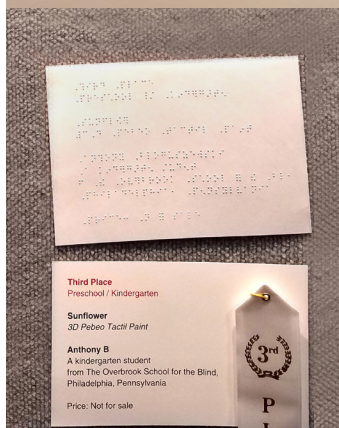
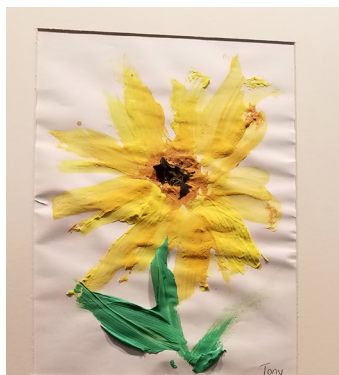
OSB entered a total of 25 art pieces for consideration in the art show, and a group project from the Elementary Program entitled, "The Water Lily," won an Honorable Mention and was selected for the annual juried exhibit at APH in Louisville, Kentucky.



Art Teacher Susan DiFabio and Willem Van Gogh, Vincent's Great Grandnephew, at the Van Gogh Museum's Pop Up Tour in King of Prussia



Early Childhood student Anthony B. and his award-winning sunflower painting.



Ms. DiFabio dressed up as Vincent Van Gogh for last year's Fall Festival and Parade.



The Elementary Program's group art submission to the APH Insights Art Show.

"We studied Van Gogh in class, and the students really connected with this painting because they were able to touch real sunflowers that our Farm to Table Program grew on campus."

MEANINGFUL SUPPORT

Much like the title suggests, a Parent Liaison is the designated individual whose primary function is to bridge the gap between home and school by helping parents get the information and support they need to ensure their child's academic and social success. OSB Parent Liaison Rhonda Davis works with teachers, staff, parents, families, community stakeholders, and external service providers to increase student success inside and outside of OSB.

Rhonda took time to chat with Towers about her plans for students and families this year.

Q: How do you see the position of OSB Parent Liaison?

A: Being a parent is tricky even under the best of circumstances! Mix in a challenge or two, and all bets are off. That said, I see the role of Parent Liaison as a support person for OSB parents who may be in need of information or resources. I am able to help teachers and other staff support parents, too, particularly related to school transitions, or important paperwork. I also put together "Parent Education" workshops, family activities, and a monthly newsletter for OSB families, all with the goal of connecting with OSB parents, and hopefully, helping to connect parents to each other.

Q: What are you most excited about in your role as Parent Liaison?

A: I really enjoy providing opportunities for FUN and rejuvenation to our parents and their families. Sometimes it feels like all we do is work, work, work to keep our lives on track. But when we get together with others who understand our challenges, we can relax a little, and experience true connection. Last school year we had two Friday evening events and a weekend picnic and nature walk. It was wonderful to see OSB families getting to know each other while having fun!

Q: What are your short term and long term goals at OSB?

A: For this school year, I hope we can continue to offer the activities and workshops we did last year, while incorporating lessons learned along the way. In my mind, "connection" with others is always the goal, so my hopes



OSB Parent Liaison Rhonda Davis

for the long term are that the position of Parent Liaison remains a force for connecting parents—back to the school itself, to their child's education, and so importantly, to each other! Hmmm, what about a "Family Support Center" where all kinds of things could happen? How about a "Volunteer Program" where parents (and other community members) can feel good about giving back to OSB? What about...what about...what about...well, there are so many ways to go.

Q: Why did you create the Parent Education and Support Workshops?

A: The main point of the workshops is to bring OSB parents together to talk about topics related to raising children with disabilities. Parenting a child with disabilities is an isolating experience, so it is important to make an effort to get out and talk to other parents. We meet in a relaxing space, have lunch together, talk, share, and learn from each other. Whatever stresses walked in the door with us, I hope they have drained away by the time we leave!

Q: What are some of the issues you tackle during these workshops?

A: Many of the workshops are led by a partnership with Temple University's Institute on Disabilities and Elwyn. Past workshops topics have included Visual Impairments and Social Skills, Vision and Transitions, Creating a Vision for your Child, and Understanding Evaluations. I hope to expand the offerings by having OSB parents help choose topics. I want the workshops to be helpful and relevant, in addition to being a comfortable place to meet others.



Families took turns at basketball and bowling.



The Funky Friday Family Night Program brought everyone out on the OSB dance floor.



Families and staff members enjoyed a buffet dinner together.

Q: Can you tell us about Funky Friday Family Nights and how they began?

A: My daughter and I were driving around listening to a radio station's Friday afternoon show called, "Funky Friday". We happened to pass one of those 20' tall inflatable "dancing" guys that advertises something we don't need. Luckily, we were at a stop light, because we noticed no matter the tune on the radio, that guy was rocking out in rhythm to the song. In that moment he gave us something we desperately needed - a really good laugh! That was the beginning of my idea for Funky Friday Family Nights at OSB. My greatest hope is to offer a stress free, judgment free zone where that really good laugh can sneak up on our families.

Q: How do families get in touch with you if they have questions?

A: I can be reached at rhonda.davis@obs.org if you have any questions. And if you would like to receive a copy of our parent newsletter, News You Can Use, please email me with your contact information, and I will happily add you to the distribution list.

Q: What would you like families to know about you?

A: To be out in nature...that is my happy place! I'm also a "crazy" dog lady. I love all kinds, sizes and shapes of dogs, young and old. Wait, is that weird? Oh well, that's the truth!

PARENTS, SAVE THE DATES!

Upcoming Parent Education and Support Workshops

January 17, 2019

February 21, 2019

March 21, 2019

May 16, 2019

All of the workshops are
from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Please visit the OSB website (www.obs.org) for the location and topic covered during each workshop.

Spring Walk 'n Roll in the Woods on Saturday, April 27th from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Location to be determined. Keep an eye on the OSB website for details.

Funky Friday Family Nights at OSB

January 25, 2019 from 5:30-8:30 p.m.

May 31, 2019 from 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Rhonda Davis



Parents meet at one of the Woodbine Workshops.

OVERBROOK EXPERIENCE DINNER 2018

Stu Coren



(from left to right): OSB Board of Trustees President Warwick S. Wheeler, Spark Therapeutics Co-Founders Jeffrey D. Marrazzo and Dr. Katherine A. High, OSB Executive Director and CEO Todd Reeves, and OSB Board of Trustees Member Bryant M. Greene.

Overbrook School for the Blind's fifth annual Overbrook Experience gala (Tuesday, October 9), also featured a notable first -- the inaugural presentation of the Genevieve Caulfield Medal of Distinction to Katherine A. High, M.D. and Jeffrey D. Marrazzo, the co-founders of Spark Therapeutics. A crowd of more than 200 gathered on OSB's historic campus to celebrate the occasion and raise close to \$80,000 in support of OSB's mission and students. OSB Trustee and parent, Bryant M. Greene emceed the evening with a great command of the room and stage.

The West Philadelphia-based Spark Therapeutics is a fully integrated, commercial gene therapy company committed to challenging the inevitability of genetic disease, including blindness, hemophilia and neurodegenerative diseases. Thanks to the company's groundbreaking drug, Luxturna, Spark made international headlines for bringing the first pharmaceutical treatment for an Inherited Retinal Disease (IRD) to market.

Created in honor of the legacy and pioneering spirit of Genevieve Caulfield, an alumna of Overbrook School for the Blind, the Caulfield Medal of Distinction is awarded to individuals or organizations responsible for exceptional deeds that improve society, especially the lives of those living with disabilities.

According to introductory remarks delivered by OSB Board President Rick Wheeler, OSB found perfect synergy in the inaugural recipients and the award's namesake.

"When we set out to create the Caulfield Medal of Distinction, we wanted to find alignment between not only Overbrook School for the Blind and the awardees, but Genevieve Caulfield and the awardees, as well," said Wheeler. "In Kathy and Jeff and Spark Therapeutics, I can safely say that we have accomplished just that."

"It's a true honor to be recognized by the Overbrook School for the Blind, an organization that shares our commitment to breaking the barriers so that people with visual disabilities continue to live active and fulfilling lives," said Marrazzo, Spark's chief executive officer. "Kathy and I are delighted to accept this award on behalf of our employees who perform exceptional deeds every day to ensure that our vision—to create a world where no life is limited by genetic disease—can one day be reality."

"We are grateful for the leadership in education and advocacy provided by the Overbrook School for the Blind, and for the remarkable example provided by Genevieve Caulfield's determination and achievements," said High.



Following the presentation to High and Marrazzo, OSB's Executive Director/CEO Todd Reeves, delivered inspiring remarks that invited guests to take part in a \$10,000 matching gift designed to support OSB's students and programs.

"Genevieve Caulfield was an alumna of our school with a big idea to start a school for the blind in Thailand," stated Reeves. "The fact that it was never done before was a woefully insufficient barrier to her strength of will. And our honorees tonight from Spark Therapeutics are worth recipients of our award... Like Ms. Caulfield, there were no doubt times when failure was not only a possibility, but perhaps probable. When quitting was an option, they individually and collectively pushed through."

Prior to dinner service, guests enjoyed a five-song performance by Alex Mitnick of the Emmy-award winning local children's band, Alex + the Kaleidoscope and students in OSB's Early Childhood and Elementary programs.

While 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' is normally considered a lullaby, in the capable and compelling voices of Mitnick and OSB students, it didn't so much as signal the close of the night but, rather, the promise of the memorable celebration that was to come.

—Robert S. K. Smith Jr., Director of School, Philanthropic & Community Relations

To view more photos from the 2018 Overbrook Experience Dinner, visit www.obs.org.

NEW MEMBERS OF THE OSB BOARD OF TRUSTEES



OSB Executive Director and CEO Todd Reeves recently announced the addition of six new members of the OSB Board of Trustees.

"We are pleased to add these talented people to our Board of Trustees," said Reeves. "Given the diverse backgrounds and impressive track-records of each of our new board members, I am confident that their leadership will have a meaningful impact on Overbrook's future growth."

Mr. Brad Bartkowski is President and Founder of Orion Fleet Intelligence, a company that works with fleet operators and insurance carriers to improve fleet safety and efficiency. Specifically, Orion focuses on the fleet operations of Human and Social Services organizations where it assists in managing the transportation needs of their consumers and staff. "I am looking forward to being a part of the OSB Board of Trustees community, meeting the students, and continuing to serve on the facilities committee to help future the OSB mission."

Dr. Colleen June Christian is a Pediatric Ophthalmologist and Surgeon with Ophthalmic Associates in Lansdale, PA. A native of California, she received her B.A. in Biology, Phi Beta Kappa, from the University of California in Los Angeles. Dr. Christian attend the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland, Ohio. Her postgraduate training includes a Transitional Internship at the Illinois Masonic Medical Center, an Ophthalmology Residency at Northwestern University at McGraw Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois, and a Fellowship in Pediatric Ophthalmology at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. "I have loved OSB since I moved to Philadelphia in 1989 to be a fellow at Wills Eye Hospital," said Christian. "As fellows, we came out every week to perform eye examinations on the students and to make recommendations on how to help them achieve the best possible vision. I remember being enchanted by the campus itself and the community of students learning together. I am honored to have this opportunity now to be a part of the OSB Board of Trustees and hope that my experience as a pediatric ophthalmologist will allow me to support the many forms that education takes here, along with working to increase the OSB presence in the Philadelphia philanthropic community."

Dr. Jenine M. Cohen is a Pennsylvania State Licensed Psychologist. She received a Doctor of Psychology from Immaculata University, an M.S. in Clinical Psychology and

OSB Executive Director and CEO Todd Reeves (top, left) is joined by new members of the OSB Board of Trustees, including Dr. Colleen June Christian (top, middle), Dr. Jenine M. Cohen (top, right), Board of Trustees President Warwick S. Wheeler (bottom, left), Board of Trustees Secretary Marjorie G. Stein, and Alumni Representative Lyle Sine. (Missing from photo: Brad Bartkowski, John Dougherty, and Dan Mahoney)

School Psychology Certification from Millersville University, and a B.S. in Speech and Hearing Disorders from Carlow College in Pittsburgh. She also is a graduate of Temple University's S.P.E.C.I.F.I.C. Program, School Psychologists for Early Childhood, Infant and Family Individualized Care. Dr. Cohen is a Mental Health Consultant to Delaware County Intermediate Unit Early Head Start, Head Start & Community Partnership and sees patients in private practice at The Center in King of Prussia. She is also a Clinical Evaluator at the Northern Home for Children and Families where she provides supervision to master's level therapists and pre-doctoral psychology interns. "I am looking forward to sharing my expertise and experience as a child psychologist both in the special ed system and behavioral health system for the past over 30 years," said Cohen. "I am looking forward to the challenge of improving the lives of children and families with the assistance of the Overbrook School for the Blind."

Mr. John P. Dougherty, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Haverford College where he also served as Chair of Computer Science from 2005-2008. He received his Ph.D. in Computer and Information Sciences from Temple University, his M.S. in Computer Science from Drexel University, and his B.A. in Mathematics and in Computer Science (dual) from La Salle College. Mr. Dougherty has served as the Treasurer for PERC (Parents and Educators Responding to Children, OSB's parent organization, since 2005. He is the proud father of Eva, who has been at student at Overbrook School for the Blind since 2001. "I hope to share my knowledge with the students, staff and board of OSB as I conduct research in human-computer interaction and accessible computing to facilitate universal design and accessibility," said Dougherty. "But mostly, my daughter has been a student at OSB for many years. Parents of OSB students face overwhelming and unique challenges that I hope to share with the Board. It is my best way to repay the "debt" I feel to OSB; they have helped my daughter to reach levels I never thought possible."

“We are pleased to add these talented people to our Board of Trustees.”

Mr. Daniel Mahoney is Director of Deal Origination at TruSight, LLC (formerly CMF Associates, LLC) in Philadelphia, where he manages the deal origination team to source deal flow to lower middle market Private Equity firms and family offices. He graduated from Villanova University with a Master of Business Administration and from Temple University with a Bachelor of Business Administration, Finance and Risk Management. “I have a strong passion to be resourceful in any way I can be for causes in which I believe,” said Mahoney. “Coming from a sales and finance background, I am looking forward to leveraging my financial and analytical background to assist in budget and operational opportunities within OSB.”

Mr. Lyle Sine is the Alumni Representative on the Board of Trustees. He graduated from Overbrook School for the Blind in 1977. He has been a member of the Overbrook Alumni Student Liaison Committee since 1984 and has served as Vice President and President of the Overbrook Alumni Association. Mr. Sine had a 30-year career at Bell of Pennsylvania, now Verizon, where he worked in the typing pool, mail service, human resources, and motor vehicles and real estate. “I see this as an opportunity to give back to Overbrook School for the Blind for the education that allowed me to live a full and productive life,” said Sine. “I am looking forward to being a part of the team whose mission is to make OSB the leader in the blindness community.”

PENNSYLVANIA'S EMPLOYMENT FIRST ACT HAILED AS A 'WIN-WIN'

BY ROBERT S. K. SMITH JR., DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL, PHILANTHROPIC & COMMUNITY RELATIONS



While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and its companion legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2009, are both hailed as landmarks in civil rights law, individuals who are blind, visually impaired or living with multiple disabilities have experienced meaningful gains in all areas of public life but one—competitive employment.

The gap is only highlighted when considering recent figures indicating that adults of working age with sensory disabilities are under-or-unemployed at a rate approaching 70%.

This troubling, long-standing statistic may soon change in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania thanks to the recent passage of House Bill 1641 and the effective establishment of the Employment First Act. Following unanimous support in the Commonwealth's General Assembly, the legislation co-sponsored by Reps. Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster) and Dan Miller (D-Allegheny) was signed into law by Gov. Tom Wolf on June 19, with the hopes of benefiting individuals with disabilities and improving Pennsylvania's workforce shortage.

“My executive order two years ago focused Pennsylvania on being a model state that is hospitable to workers with disabilities and I'm proud to sign this bill adding the weight of law,” Governor Wolf released in a statement following his signature. “This is a win-win for Pennsylvania.”

“People with disabilities have skills from which businesses can benefit,” Rep. Cutler added. “In fact, those capabilities are particularly needed given Pennsylvania's workforce shortage. This new law addresses two significant problems.”

The Employment First Act will now require state, county, and other entities receiving public funding to first consider competitive, integrated employment as the preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment, and related services and long-term services and support for individuals with a disability who are eligible to work under state law.

News of the Employment First Act's passage was heralded at Overbrook School for the Blind. “As one of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Chartered Schools for the Deaf and Blind, Overbrook School for the Blind commends the General Assembly and Governor Wolf for their unanimous passage and quick action to create the Employment First Act,” said OSB's Executive Director/CEO, Todd Reeves. “This sends a clear signal to the rest of the state and one that we already know at OSB—our students are ready, willing and, more so, prepared to join the workforce.”

Reeves cites OSB's partnership with the Department of Labor & Industry's Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) as proof that the Employment First Act will have an opportunity to succeed throughout the Commonwealth.

“Each Summer, we partner with OVR to host the Transitional Vocational Initiative,” Reeves remarked. “For those three weeks students who are visually impaired on the cusp of entering the work force (ages 16 - 21), develop their job skills. And, more than that, they are fairly compensated for their hard work in the form of a paycheck. With the Employment First Act now on the books, it is my hope that students who take part in the TVI program—as well Overbrook School for the Blind's core programs—will soon experience a meaningful, engaging career as part of the larger workforce.”



International Program Update

CEO and Executive Director Todd Reeves and International Program Coordinator Wenru Niu attended the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment East Asia Regional Conference in Manila to meet with partners from the region. Following the conference, Mr. Reeves visited project sites in Vietnam and later, Laos and Myanmar.

We're happy to report that people with visual impairments in Myanmar will have their own screen-reader to take full advantage of today's technologies. This is a result of five-year collaborative effort between several organizations with the major players being MNAB (Myanmar National Association of the Blind), Sao Mai Computer Center for the Blind in Vietnam, ICEVI, the Nippon Foundation in Japan, and the OSB International Program.

One of the beneficiaries from Myanmar is Win Shwe who received computer training, thanks to OSB and ICEVI. He is the first visually impaired person to study computer science in Myanmar.

Currently, the OSB International Program has projects in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam. The Program will soon extend into project sites in Laos and Mongolia.

For more updates about the OSB International Program, please visit www.obs.org/international.

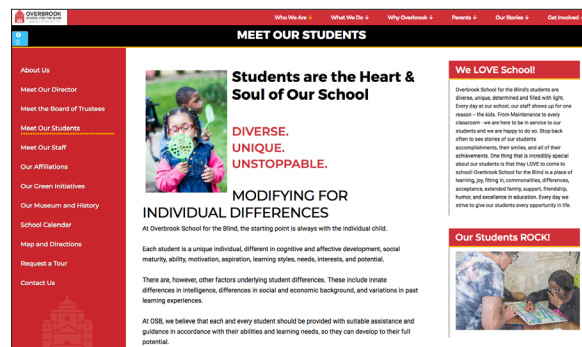
IT'S HERE! Announcing Our Expanded, Redesigned Website

We're excited to announce that our refreshed website is live at www.obs.org.

We have redesigned it with you in mind. We've simplified the navigation, enhanced the accessibility, developed a responsive layout for all platforms, and provided more resources and information on our programs and services.

Not only is the new redesign more aesthetically pleasing and easy to use, but it also has some great add-on features like videos and social media streams.

"OSB's previous website was largely informational," says Denise Mihalik, OSB's Computer Training Specialist. "With the new website, accessibility is at the forefront of the design process so now, students, parents and visitors can easily and quickly find the information they need. The difference is that we've gone from a static brochure to an engaging platform that's informative, fun and fresh."



Stay tuned for the final phase of the website redesign which will include a custom application for both parents and staff to keep abreast of school activities, announcements and more.

"We encourage everyone—especially prospective parents—to visit and explore the site, discovering the full spectrum of educational collateral in the Who We Are drop down menu," says Mihalik. "New content, including human interest stories that will highlight our amazing community, will be added regularly so visitors can fully explore the good work we do here at OSB."

If you have any questions, suggestions, feedback or comments, please email us and let us know your thoughts.

"We look forward to staying connected."

Remember December

"It's a time of reflection," says OSB Choir Director Christopher Sapienza about the theme for this year's holiday Concert. "In December, many cultures come together to remember the past year and celebrate together. Many of us have memories of sitting around the holiday table with family and friends. At the Overbrook holiday concert, we don't sit around a big table, but our community comes together to remember, to share successes and accomplishments, and to enjoy the gift of music."

In addition to welcoming new collaborative pianist Nicholas George Xavier Blum, the holiday concert will showcase the Voices of Overbrook, an all inclusive ensemble that was formerly known as Encore Singers. For the first time, the OSB Bell Choir, led by Bell Choir Director Jim Palmer, will play in a choral piece which will include many fresh faces from all three OSB choral groups. The repertoire for the evening will include standard choral selections but also swing music, jazz and gospel.

Join us for the holiday concert on Thursday, December 13th at 7 p.m. when we will make new memories with our students, staff and you!



WELCOME OSB ALUMNI!

Submit your class note to let fellow alumni know about your recent news, activities, accomplishments, new job, awards or anything else you want to celebrate. To submit your own class note, email Towers@obs.org or call the OSB Development Office at (215) 877-0313, ext. 256.

2015

Recent graduate **Nasim Poole** has a part-time job working in the 7-Eleven near the OSB campus where he performs cash register duties, assists with food and coffee preparation, customer service, and general housekeeping. From his home in North Philly, Nasim takes two trains and a bus to get to his job every morning. He is planning on taking a class in business administration at a community college next year.



1975

After 36 years of service at the Defense Contract Management Agency in Philadelphia, **Michael Patterson** recently retired from his position as a Contract Price and Cost Analyst. He will stay busy by donating blood to the American Red Cross, participating in the OSB Alumni Association, and bowling. He is currently the treasurer for the Philadelphia Area Blind Bowlers League and the president of the Delaware Valley Blind Bowlers League.

IN MEMORIAM

Joanne Malatesta Davidoff,
Class of 1950, July 11, 2018

Joanne Davidoff devoted her life to teaching and advocating for the blind. Born in Canton, Ohio, Mrs. Davidoff's parents moved to Philadelphia so she could attend Overbrook School for the Blind, from which she graduated in 1950. She was the first blind student to graduate from Chestnut Hill College and went on to earn a master's degree from Temple University and advanced certification from Catholic University, both in special education. Mrs. Davidoff founded and ran Upsal Day School, the first day school for blind preschoolers in the city. She served in leadership roles for the Associated Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Braille Revival League, Catholic League for People with Disabilities, Pennsylvania Council of the Blind, National Exhibit by Blind Artists, and the Center for the Blind and



Visually Impaired. She taught at Overbrook School for the Blind for more than 20 years until the late 2000s when she retired.

Peter Buonadonna,
OSB Maintenance
Department

Students and staff sadly said goodbye to OSB Maintenance Crew Member Pete B. on October 10th. Pete's smiling face could be seen whenever there was a furniture or room

set-up for a special event or when he zipped around campus on a golf cart collecting trash across our 20+acre campus. He often said that he loved working at Overbrook, and at his funeral, Pete's 30-years of service certificate from OSB was proudly on display. He will be dearly missed.



Christopher Saplenza

Roseann B. McLaughlin,
Health Services
Coordinator

The entire OSB community was shocked and saddened to learn of the tragic loss of Roseann B. McLaughlin on the evening of Friday, November 2nd. Roseann, a Registered

Nurse (certification as a School Nurse by PA Department of Education) and a Certified Nurse Practitioner by trade, was much more than that to not only our students, but also our entire school community. From the moment an Overbrook School for the Blind student arrived on campus until the second they returned home to their parents or caregivers, Roseann was an integral force in ensuring their health, welfare and safety. Roseann's skill and judgment as a healthcare professional were only exceeded by her compassion, care and love for the students, staff and mission of Overbrook School for the Blind.

Roseann's daughter, Casey, works at OSB as a Certified Life Guard in the Kappen Aquatic Center. Our focus as a school community is to now support Casey and her family—as well as our students and staff—during this difficult time. We invite anyone who is interested in supporting Roseann's surviving family to visit the GoFundMe campaign that has been set up in her name. The link is available on our website at www.obs.org.



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Demonstrating their never-ending commitment to braille literacy, the Early Childhood Program dressed up as the Braille alphabet for the annual OSB Fall Festival and Parade. **Looking good, EC!**

