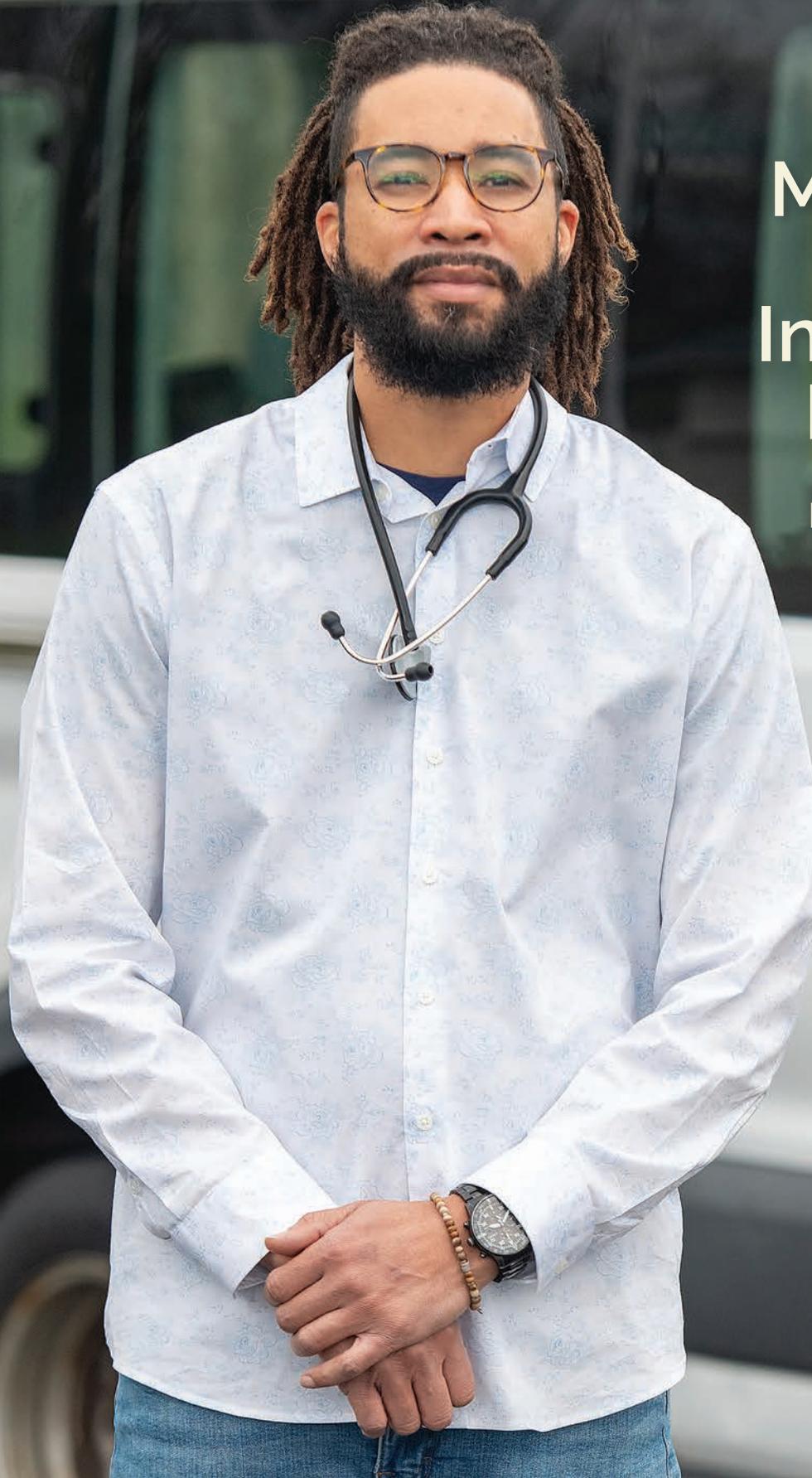


matheny**matters**

Fall 2022 • Winter 2023

Matheny Expands Independent Living

Nurses Are Vital to
Community Residences





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Matheny Moves Forward

This has been a banner year for Matheny. Not only did we celebrate our 75th anniversary—together—but together we took significant steps toward a very positive future. Since its founding in 1946, Matheny has built a thriving community, step by step. In 1992, with the opening of its first community residence in Basking Ridge, a significant milestone was reached—a shared home where adults with medically complex developmental disabilities could live together. The feedback was so positive that Matheny welcomed residents to four more such homes in 1995, 1998, and 2002. Twenty years later, we celebrate the opening of two more community residences—in Far Hills—that will provide a shared home for eight adult residents.

Community—it broadly means coming together around common interests, life

experiences, and often a shared locale. The isolation experienced by many during COVID-19 quarantines underscored the importance of community for all human beings, and the damaging effects of feeling isolated.

Matheny was built on the recognition that for those with developmental disabilities, community may be difficult to establish. This goes far beyond basic survival; it includes opportunities for friendships, emotional support, mental challenges, personal achievement, and happiness in adult life. In our community residences, staff work 24–7 to handle the physical challenges of each client. They assist residents with feeding, daily showers, dressing, getting up in the morning, moving about in wheelchairs and walkers, medications, and so many other aspects of their daily routines. But equally important, each staff member works to make each residence a “happy home” for everyone who lives there, a place where each individual can thrive.

While we are all busy with our day-to-day work responsibilities, we are simultaneously moving forward with planning for Matheny’s future. That future will bring changes, necessitated by circumstances that did not exist 75, or even 20, years ago. Now is the right time for us to make decisions that will ensure Matheny’s next 75 years. The welfare of our students, patients, residents, and families, will remain in the forefront as we move ahead. Two new residences will open in Far Hills very soon, attesting to our unshakable commitment to the well-being of our Matheny community.

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On the cover:
Matheny Nurse Chris Nesbitt
Photo by Keith B. Bratcher, Jr.

Welcome Home

Matheny took a giant step forward in December, opening a new community residence in Far Hills for adults with developmental disabilities who do not need ongoing intensive medical care. It's Matheny's sixth group home. In 1992, Matheny built its first community residence with funds from the State's Division of Developmental Disabilities—in response to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. A pioneer in the effort to help disabled individuals live more independently, Matheny built a total of five community residences between 1992 and 2002 in Basking Ridge, Franklin Township, Frel-inghuysen and Lakeside, which provide 30 individuals with living space, food,

medical care, assistance with everyday needs, and daily educational, social, and recreational opportunities. A skilled staff support the group home residents 24–7.

Matheny has extensive experience helping residents fashion these community houses into their long-term homes. For all, it's a dream come true. Another new community residence will open in Far Hills within the next few months; and Matheny's long-term strategic plans call for building several more over the next few years.

Weyetta Golafaly started her career at Matheny in 2006 as a personal care assistant, later moving up to Red Zone supervisor, and now to Far Hills Group Home Manager. "My days at Matheny are awesome. It's like family here. You really bond with the patients."



Time to Celebrate

Holiday celebrations, October to December, bring great joy to Matheny patients, residents, and students. Everyone is included in the fun, gift-giving, and merry-making. Favorites of the season include the traditional Halloween parade, Tim McCloone's Holiday Express rocking musical concert, and the Committee of Auto Racing Supporters (CARS) party with piles of gifts and lots of good cheer.

Don't Miss Out

Matheny launched a merchandise store in 2022 to celebrate its 75th anniversary. A limited number of items can still be purchased, including t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, and socks. Use the QR code provided below.



OUR

home



It's 2 PM on a Tuesday in early October and Cyndi Audibert is juggling multiple work tasks, as usual. Our *Matheny Matters* telephone interview is happening while she simultaneously directs the installation of several big appliances in a new, soon-to-be-opened Matheny community residence in Far Hills, NJ. Two such residences will be ready for move-in within a few months—a cause for celebrating by the individuals who will call this “our home.” Audibert and others will make sure that every aspect of these two neighboring houses is safe, functional, accessible, and homey for the eight adults with developmental disabilities who will likely live here for many years, even decades.

Top: (left to right) Reindorf Gyamena, DSP; Perry Barley DSP; Weyetta Golafaly, Group Home Manager at new Far Hills community residence; **Bottom:** Cyndi Audibert, Manager Community Residential Services
Facing page: Karen Yates, resident, Matheny's new Far Hills community residence



“These houses need to have everything in good working order, just like your home or mine,” says the Matheny group home supervisor, who currently has overall administrative responsibility for the day-to-day operations of five such homes and in a few months a total of seven.

Among the most impactful developments in Matheny’s 75-year history was the opening of its first group home in Basking Ridge 30 years ago in 1992—with funding from the State’s Division of Developmental Disabilities. It was so well-received that, in 1995, Matheny opened a second group home in Franklin Township, followed by two more in Frelinghuysen Township in 1998, and a fifth in Lakeside in 2002. Each residence was designed to help six adults 21 or older, not requiring ongoing intensive medical care, to live more independently. Community home residents become members of a household and their larger community, and lead active lives, participating in educational, volunteer, arts, adapted athletics, and social activities.

Every day is different both for the residents and staff, says Audibert, whose daily line-up might include addressing 24–7 staffing issues, residents’ medical and transportation needs, supply snags, or a system breakdown, such as a faulty fire alarm, in one of the houses.

“I basically help the group home managers to keep everything on track,” she says. With her background working with developmentally disabled individuals, as well as her experience in nursing (she returned to school at 50 to earn her RN and worked as a hands-on nurse for several years after), her current position at Matheny feels like “just the right fit” for her.

But she credits the direct care staff with doing the really hard work of running the households, including cleaning, laundry, preparing and serving all meals, getting residents up in the mornings and ready for bed at night, toileting, changing diapers, showering, accompanying them to doctor and dentist appointments and recreational activities, as well as driving residents there sometimes—anything to take good care of them. And for residents with medical issues, “our nurses are there



“Just like anyone else, all of the residents have hopes and dreams. Our job is to find out what would make their life fulfilling and happy and help them to do that.”

CYNDI AUDIBERT
MATHENY GROUP HOMES
SUPERVISOR

24–7. Kudos to all of them—they are in the frontlines day to day. They deserve so much credit.”

“Our staff is like family for the residents,” she observes. “They even make sure holidays are special, including decorations and preparing special holiday meals for those who can eat.”

Making the house a home is equally important to getting residents out of their homes for socializing and interesting activities. “Just like anyone else, all of the residents have hopes and dreams,” she says. “Our job is to find out what would make their life fulfilling and happy and help them to do that. Many residents are involved in the arts, love visiting with family members, and enjoy getting out to local parks and restaurants and malls”—

although trips to indoor public venues have been halted during COVID.

Audibert says that in her now long-term experience working with adults with developmental disabilities, she has learned to “expect the unexpected. Our residents are individuals—you can’t look at them as a group. Each person can communicate, laugh, enjoy life, learn new things, and wants to be with family and friends. Each one wants to be happy.”

What’s next on Audibert’s schedule today? “I’m going to Walmart,” she says energetically, “to shop for bedding, and pots and pans for the two new homes. We still have furniture to be delivered, appliances and computers to be installed, before opening the new residences. But it’s all worth it when you see the looks on the faces of the soon-to-be-residents.”

“This is exactly what I envisioned my group home to be,” said one resident recently while touring one of the new residences where he will soon live.

“That was awesome to hear,” says Audibert. “Just thrilling.”

24–7 in a Community Residence

Keeping a group home running 24 hours a day is complicated. Direct support professionals assist clients with all of the activities of daily living, administer oral medications, do general housekeeping, and sometimes drive clients to medical and dental appointments and recreational activities. A manager is responsible for scheduling and coordinating the activities of residents and staff. The manager chats frequently with residents, problem-solves on their behalf, and keeps in touch with their families.

The Nursing Perspective

Chris Nesbitt’s career plan to follow his mother and sister into the education field was derailed when his father became very ill with Alzheimer’s in his early 50s, just a few years after being diagnosed with the disease. Nesbitt, then a freshman at Kean University, withdrew from his studies to give himself time to regroup and decide on a new direction for his life.

“While my father was sick, I realized how important the health care providers were—not only to the patient but to the patient’s entire family. A visit from a nurse, an aide, a doctor could have such a positive impact,” he says. “I knew that’s what I wanted to do.”

Nesbitt “made a strong pivot,” went back to school, earned his nursing license and jumped into his career. “My father held on until I finished nursing school. His disease progressed rapidly, but it was very symbolic for me that he held on that long,” he says. “My work means a lot to me.” His initial enthusiasm and sense of purpose has not diminished over time.

His first job after nursing school was with Kessler Institute in Saddlebrook, which specializes in traumatic brain injuries, stroke, and neurological disorders. “It was very challenging,” he remembers, “but my experience there was great.”

In his next job—with the Youth Consultation Services (YCS) Situational Response Team—he “worked in behavioral health care, floating to every single site. That was my baby.” YCS serves children, nursery age through teens.

It was with YCS that he was introduced to the workings of group homes, and spent three of his eight years there as a nurse manager at a transitional group home. “I loved my job, but it was very difficult to deal with that population and go home and be a human being for my family. To be a good parent to my two kids after the emotional stress of the job became too hard.”

One of the things he loves best about nursing is the number of different practice options it offers. He worked at the Somerset County Jail, where he says the “unique atmosphere fostered camaraderie, and I loved the work.” One of his nurse colleagues sent him an ad for a job at Matheny, which he knew right away was a good fit. “I saw that I would be able to use all of my background in nursing, everything would come together. It was really perfect.”

In his current job at Matheny’s community residence in Basking Ridge, which he’s held since June 2020, “I’m a part of the medical team and help manage all aspects of the residents’ health,” he says. That might include giving medications, scheduling and attending appointments with doctors and dentists, and other ambulatory care providers, communicating with families, arranging family visits, reviewing charts, assessing medical supplies, “even fixing iPads,” he says laughing.

He looks forward to the time when residents can get out and about more, resume the trips they loved so much before

COVID-19 put the kibosh on restaurant, mall, and library visits and other indoor venues. “I know they want to be back in the world,” he says.

“Getting to know the residents well is the best part of my job,” he states. “They look forward to hearing my car pull up and hearing my stories. Some even wait at the window for me.”

“There is a real home dynamic here. The residents have the say-so. They’re put first and always listened to.”

“It doesn’t always work for the best, but in the end it’s their decision,” he states. “That’s what makes it home for them.”



Opposite page: Far Hills group home resident Ellen Kane with Community Residential Services Manager Cyndi Audibert

Right: Nurse Chris Nesbitt with Basking Ridge group home resident Jennifer Cox



Group Homes Nurse Manager Dawn Schreiber with Basking Ridge Group Home Nurse Chris Nesbitt

Group homes nurse manager Dawn Schreiber is not your ordinary “girl next door.”

With 17 years’ experience working in clinics and specialized doctors’ offices after earning her RN, she happened to move next door to the Matheny Frel-inghuysen group home. “It looks like your average house and there were trees between the two homes, so I didn’t even realize,” she says. That was in 2004.

In 2013, one of the resident’s parents, also a neighbor, told her about an available shift open at the group home. She applied and got the job, and started to work in the house next door. She has done part-time and full-time, day and night shifts at the group homes, worked her way up to supervisor for two group homes, then assistant nurse manager, and now to her current job of nurse manager for all of Matheny’s group homes. Her job is to ensure that all of the medical needs of the residents are taken care of.

Matheny community residences currently employ 16 LPNs who provide coverage 24–7. Making sure the nurses are adequately supported to do their jobs is one of the nurse manager’s primary concerns. “Once I started working with

the group homes, I loved it,” she says. “Working with the developmentally disabled residents has become my passion.”

She makes sure to get around to all the homes and to know every resident, as well as sometimes responding to an emergency call concerning a resident whose change in health status needs to be checked out quickly. When residents have appointments on campus at the Matheny Center of Medicine and Dentistry, she meets them there—ensuring that their concerns and questions are answered and their needs are met.

Most residents leave their homes at 8 AM on weekdays to attend the Hillsborough Adult Learning Center programs, returning home around 4 PM. (See article page 11) While they are out, the staff does all of the cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Some staff members accompany residents to the day program. Dinner is served early, and residents spend their evenings listening to music, watching television, using their iPads and reading—“whatever they choose to do in their own homes,” says Schreiber.

On weekends, residents may sleep in, take it easy, go to the park or other outdoor trips, visit with family, attend social

activities, and use their iPads. When the cold weather arrives, they might go for a ride in the van—just for a change of pace. “They like to do all of the same things that you and I do on the weekends,” the nurse manager observes.

Before COVID-19, the trips were more varied. “But everyone now has an iPad. The Hillsborough Adult Day Program was instrumental in getting iPads out to everyone and teaching the residents how to use them.”

“What a savior for them,” she continues. “We would have had a lot more mental health issues without iPads. They foster creativity and allow ongoing communication with family and friends, especially during the worst of the COVID epidemic. Also, many residents have close friendships with residents in other group homes. When the day program could not meet in person, the iPads allowed everyone to visit with each other. It helped keep everyone sane.”

What are the greatest benefits of living in a Matheny community residence? “The residents form strong bonds with each other, as well as with staff,” she says.

“Also, staff tend to work in the residences a long time, some 20 to 30 years. There are even some staff who started working at the group homes when they opened in 1992 and are still here.”

“With only six residents in each home, and staff working with the same residents for many years, each residence has a strong sense of family,” she concludes. “Residents say it’s like living with brothers and sisters. This is where they live. This is their home.”

What's New?

In 2022, Matheny celebrated both the 75th anniversary of its founding and the 30th anniversary of the opening of its first community residence.

Currently, 30 adults with multiple complex developmental disabilities live in Matheny’s five group homes in Somerset, Sussex and Warren counties. For all

of them, it's a dream come true. Shared housing helps these residents live more independently and enriches their lives in many ways—forming strong ties with each other in a home setting, having a say-so in how the residence is run, becoming part of a larger community, and attending Matheny's adult day programs and social activities. Matheny will open two new community residences for eight residents in Far Hills soon.

An organizational change made last July at Matheny aligns several different services—the seven community residences, the Hillsborough Adult Learning Center, the on-campus adult day program, transportation services, and recreation therapy and music therapy—under a single “chief.” That person is Sean Bielefeldt, who started at Matheny as Director of Recreation Therapy in 2002, added Director, Adult Day Services to that position in 2017, became Director of Life Enrichment Therapies in 2021, and moved into the new position of Vice President, Life Enrichment Therapies and Community Living last July.

“This is an organizational restructuring that aligns Matheny's DDD service offerings,” he explains, “while ensuring we are delivering the most opportunities to everyone we serve.” His primary emphasis will continue to be providing quality-of-

life services to clients, now with a greater emphasis on those living in group homes.

Hiring additional staff is necessary to this expansion, which he hopes will include more individual and small group trips on weekends, and music and recreation therapy for group home residents. Pizza parties, regularly held house meetings, scheduled weekend trips into the community and weekend barbecues and other social events with family and friends are all part of the plan, Bielefeldt says. The day program provides an array of educational, recreational, and social activities during the week.



Sean Bielefeldt, Vice President,
Life Enrichment Therapies and
Community Living



“The residents form strong bonds with each other, as well as with staff. And staff tend to work in the residences a long time, some 20 to 30 years. With only a few residents in each home, and staff working with the same residents for many years, **each residence has a strong sense of family.**”

DAWN SCHREIBER
GROUP HOMES NURSE MANAGER

Bielefeldt's work-life has always been busy, but now “my days are very very full—in a good way,” he says. High on his list is the timely opening of the two newest group homes.

“I feel lucky to have the opportunity to have an impact on the lives of those we serve,” he continues. “My focus has always been, and continues to be, quality of life. All of our residents deserve every opportunity we can provide.”

The new VP has mapped out projects through Spring 2023. Some have already been completed, others are ongoing. One of his “pet projects” is planning new furniture, new paint, and new landscaping for all the community residences. “It would make a world of difference for those who live there,” he explains. “The residents are outspoken advocates for themselves and happily they are starting to see action.”

Opening a number of additional group homes over the next couple of years is part of Matheny's long-term strategic plans. “We're discussing which design will best meet our residents' accessibility and technology needs going forward,” he says.

“We're also looking for municipalities to partner with—we have to see where the right opportunities are,” he continues. “In addition, we'll evaluate day program sites for expansion of services. My hope is that by late Summer 2023, we'll be engaging in talks on how to move everything forward. I feel so fortunate to be able to help make these dreams into reality.” **MM**

Matheny A Pioneer In Independent Living

Thirty-two years ago, the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act allocated additional funding for facilities like Matheny to support independent living for disabled adults, and two years later, Matheny opened its first group home in Basking Ridge—with funding from the State’s Division of Developmental Disabilities. It was so well-received that, in 1995, Matheny opened a second group home in Franklin Township, two more in Frelinghuysen Township in 1998, and another in Lakeside in 2002. Each residence helps six adults not requiring ongoing intensive medical care to live more independently, and participate in educational, volunteer, arts, and social activities. The ongoing success of these group homes has been indisputable.

In late 2022, Matheny opened a new community residence—in Far Hills—and plans to open several more during the next few years. Designing new group homes that are accessible, safe, comfortable, attractive, and technologically up-to-date, and ensuring that residents thrive in their new homes, are among Matheny’s highest priorities.

Matheny is committed to addressing these priorities well into the future. Their long-term, dedicated staff know how to do this well, and over the years, staff members and residents in the existing community residences have forged deep and long-lasting relationships. On the following page, meet residents of Matheny’s newest group home and some of the staff dedicated to their day-to-day and ongoing well-being.

Matheny staff and residents of new community residence in Far Hills, opened in December 2022

Center photo: Residents of Matheny’s community residence in Basking Ridge





Hillsborough Adult Learning Center participant
Josh Handler with Center nurse Nanci Harriman



ALWAYS A WARM
Welcome

Life is “rich” at the Hillsborough Adult Day Center, and staff always look for ways to make it even better for the clients.

The lights are on. The doors are open. Matheny’s Adult Learning Center in Hillsborough is abuzz once again with sound and activity. It’s only 9 AM in late October with the mornings turning uncomfortably chilly, but everyone is “ready to go,” happy to see friends and be welcomed by staff, anticipating an interesting and lively day ahead.

When New Jersey shuttered schools and other public venues in March 2020, clients of the Hillsborough Adult Learning Center were stuck at home, like many of us. COVID-19 threatened everyone, but residents of Matheny’s group homes—who participate in this program along with a few individuals who live with family or independently in the community—were clearly even more vulnerable to the virus. Most of them have developmental disabilities as well as chronic health conditions that make them more prone to complications from respiratory infections. So, person-to-person contact needed to be strictly limited, necessitating a quick shutdown of their very favorite place to spend their weekdays.

Those who came to the Center before the shutdown could anticipate a daily line-up of interesting activities of their choice. While all the clients are in wheel-

chairs and have disabilities that affect their ability to walk and speak, everyone engages in six hours of stimulating pursuits that keep their minds and bodies moving. And everyone has fun.

Hillsborough Day Program Coordinator Todd Deremer, a familiar face to all the participants, has always welcomed them with an energy that belies his almost 25 years working for Matheny. He started right out of college as a community instructor (responsible for taking clients into the community on outings) in November 1998, and moved from the main campus to the Hillsborough program in the same capacity in 2000. In 2005, he became the adapted sports and fitness instructor there, his enthusiasm for the job fueled by his belief that sports, fitness, and exercise activities in general promote greater independence and self-confidence.

Despite the major difficulties that clients encounter trying to play a sport, or exercise, Deremer says “It’s just about being resourceful and figuring out how to do it. For each client, that process is unique.” He moved into his current job overseeing all day-to-day programs at the Center just over five years ago.

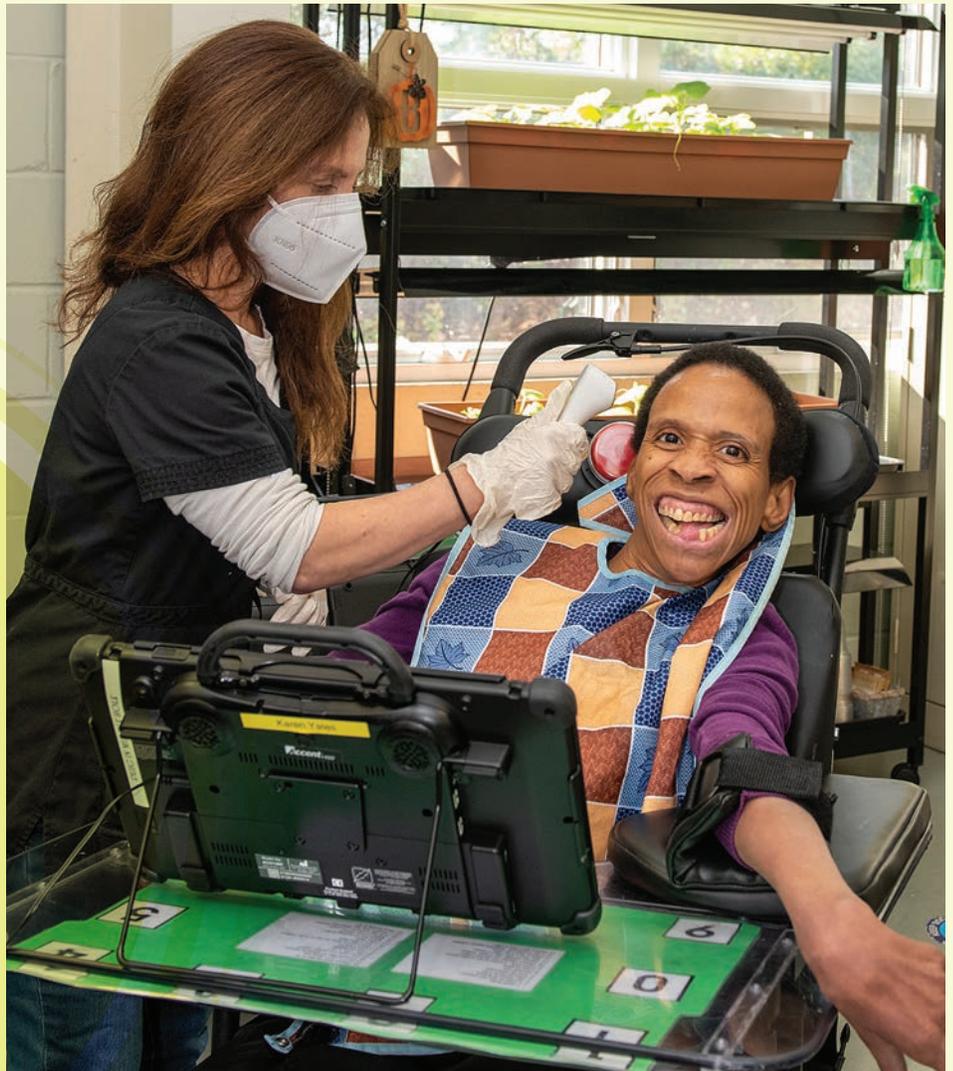
Matheny has operated this Center for many years, and has continually added new offerings to keep up with the times. Technology is a big part of the program; the Center’s technology lab computers are equipped with special switches and assistive technology, allowing students to work independently to gain and practice new skills, and to access entertainment such as computer games. The Center’s technology instructor trained clients on new technology at the Learning Center’s lab prior to the COVID-19 shutdown.

Creative arts; yoga, meditation, and sensory stimulation sessions; group exercise programs; and opportunities for other group activities with peers were also part of the curriculum prior to the 2020 shutdown. Writing with a writing facilitator, dance, choreography, painting, and digital art were offered at the Center by the Matheny’s Arts Access program. Add to those an “alternate positioning class,” where staff helped clients out of their wheelchairs and onto giant bean bags

“When I wake up on a Monday morning, I’m happy to come to work. **The students are great and it puts life in perspective.** Despite their issues, most of our clients are very happy people.”

SUE ANTELIS

COMPUTER INSTRUCTOR, MATHENY ADULT DAY CENTER, HILLSBOROUGH



and low physical therapy mats; a power wheelchair-driving group; cooking classes; and even a self-advocacy group, with several members attending the national conference each year. In addition, trips to local restaurants, malls, libraries, county colleges and sometimes venues even farther afield, all made life interesting. Clients chose their own program schedule.

Imagine the shock when all of that was suddenly taken away. And when two weeks stretched into three with no end in sight, the Center staff quickly decided to pivot to online programming, first providing tablets to every group home resident, and getting the technology up and running, then working with each client, teaching how to use the devices for communication such as email, for recreation, and perhaps most important, for virtual

classes and meetings with their Hillsborough Center instructors and friends. For many who were feeling cut off from the essence of their lives, this virtual connection kept them sane and functional.

Computer Connections

Sue Antelis is the Center’s computer instructor. Following college graduation with a degree in psychology, she worked at the Eden Institute, which provides a range of services to children and adults with autism, then went back to school for computer programming and worked as a software developer in private industry for about 10 years. “Working on and completing projects was rewarding,” she says, “but there were tight deadlines, long hours, and a lot of stress.”

When looking to return to work after the birth of her daughter, she saw an ad for a job at Matheny's Hillsborough Center, applied and was hired. "I love it here," she says. "When I wake up on a Monday morning, I'm happy to come to work. The students are great."

And, "it puts life in perspective. Despite their issues, most of our clients are very happy people, and they look forward to coming here each week."

Antelis has worked as a technical instructor at the Hillsborough Center since 2009. Until COVID-19 shut down onsite activities at the Center in 2020, she welcomed students into the computer lab and taught them to navigate the technology, sometimes using her programming background to write scripts allowing clients to more easily access and operate the computer with head switches and other individualized components. "I could focus on individual needs when the on-site computer lab was open," she says.

All of that changed with the COVID-19 quarantine. "Classes went completely virtual and the online classes needed to be more general, less individualized," she says. Her monthly on-site visits to each group home were suspended.

But she, like other instructors, found ways to keep clients engaged virtually.

"Working virtually forced us to find different ways to run classes, with some of the ideas continuing to be used now that we are back in person," she says.

For instance, she researched VideoScribe, an animation software package, and together with her students and another instructor wrote and produced a video called, *A Murder at the Hillsborough Day Program*.

"The students were very enthusiastic about the project," she says, "and we also found online games that we could play as a team against our other virtual classes."

Now, with the Center open and operating almost at full capacity again, Antelis is back to providing classes

which were halted due to the pandemic, such as the national e-Buddies program, which provides safe virtual space for communicating. The organization provides one-to-one matches for individuals who share interests, are of a similar age, and live in a different geographic area to encourage friendships to develop through e-mail.

It's All in a Day's Work

The nurses at the Hillsborough Adult Learning Center currently tend to 30 clients each day, administering medications, giving wound care and other first

aid, and dealing with respiratory issues, urinary diversions, and gastrostomy feedings. Add to that, screenings for COVID, and arranging for transportation back home if the client is not well. (The Center has an isolation room if quarantining is necessary.)

"When the two new group homes open, we'll have more patients to learn," says nurse Nanci Harriman, who has worked for Matheny for 30 years. "We look forward to going from 30 clients per day to closer to 40 soon."

"The Center is a wonderful place," she continues. "When the program was closed during early COVID, the clients

continued on page 17



Opposite page: Sharon Rizzi, Hillsborough Adult Learning Center nurse, with Center participant Karen Yates

Right: (top) Hillsborough Adult Learning Center computer instructor Sue Antelis with Center participant Chet Cheeseman; (bottom) Center participant Jason Weiner with Paula Fadell, direct support professional

The hum of excited voices and the energized whir of wheelchairs on-the-move filled the hallways of the Matheny School building on Wednesday, September 7. It was the first day of the new school year—with students returning to five-day-a-week onsite classes for the first time in two and a half years. Some came from their homes in the community, others from Matheny’s residential hospital. After two years of all virtual schooling, followed by six months of hybrid learning, this official reopening was certainly an occasion for celebration.

The Matheny School halted onsite classes on March 18, 2020, to combat the spread of COVID-19—as cases began climbing in New Jersey. Students here have developmental disabilities, as well as complex medical conditions that put them at higher risk of serious complications from respiratory infections.

The decision to close had to be made quickly, but the pivot to online schooling was almost immediate. “We wanted to make sure each student could keep right on learning,” explains Matheny School Principal Sean Murphy “The education just kept rolling. We went to virtual learning with no gap.”

The quick changeover required an all-staff-onboard response. First, iPads were purchased for all students, then delivered to each house, along with learning packets created by the teachers. Next staff instructed families how to help students get up and running on the technology, and how to assist them with their virtual lessons, which included their full complement of academic classes—social studies, science, math, and English—as well as art and music.

Since speech, occupational, and physical therapies are an integral part of each student’s curriculum, providing those therapies to students also needed to be addressed promptly. In some cases, cleaned

and sterilized equipment for physical therapy, such as standers, were delivered to students’ doors, so they could continue with their exercise routines. Families gave a big thumbs-up to the quick and thorough changeover to virtual learning.

Within days, classroom teachers learned how to teach via computer; occupational and speech therapists also quickly became proficient in providing online therapy. Sadly, students missed seeing their friends and teachers, bus drivers, therapists and other staff, as well as recreational pursuits such as swimming in Matheny’s pool and horse therapy at Mane Stream in Oldwick.

Providing physical therapy—when no one other than immediate family was allowed in students’ homes—did prove challenging. For residential students living on the Matheny campus, staff members assigned to the hospital unit stepped in to help.

Senior school physical therapist Glenn Stackhouse says that supporting students’ wellbeing and progress was still first and foremost during the quarantine. “As a hands-on provider, you are first an educator,” he says. “For students quarantining at home, we first taught patients and families safety basics. Then we gave range-of-motion exercises to the patients and taught the family how to keep them safe.”

For students living at Matheny Hos-

pital, Stackhouse says there was always someone on site facilitating the student’s range-of-motion and basic exercises. Interaction with other people is always a priority for students, he states.

Keeping his clients moving has been the major driving force in Stackhouse’s career. He came to Matheny more than 20 years ago after a four-year stint in the Air Force, subsequently earning his physical therapy (PT) degree from Kean University, and then working in acute care and orthopedics. It was his experiences as a patient needing surgery and rehabilitation for a torn ACL that motivated his entry into what has become his profession and an ongoing passion.

The physical therapist’s career has been varied—taking him into hospitals, community practices, patients’ homes, and schools. From 2000 to 2008, he worked for Matheny’s community services department, which provides off campus services to students and adults. In 2008, while continuing his off-campus visits, he started working on Matheny’s campus, in the school and hospital, two days a week. In 2013, he started full-time in the school, working with a caseload of 13 students.

Nine years later, he’s still thrilled with his job. “Movement is life. We all need to move. It’s amazing, joyful—getting students out of their wheelchairs, into standers, helping them to change positions and move. There’s nothing like it.”



Matheny School student Jamier Warren-Treadwell with Senior Matheny School physical therapist Glenn Stackhouse



“I’ve been with some of the students five to eight years. We’re like family. I’ve learned a lot from them,” he continues. “They’ve taught me to enjoy and appreciate the littlest, simplest things and to stay positive. My students know how to live in the moment.”

He’s thrilled to have the students back to school, and like all other staff members, agrees that in-person interaction with the students is always superior to virtual meetings. During the COVID-19 quarantine, Matheny School staff met with students on Google classroom. “We made it work great,” he says. “There’s no room for naysayers here. There’s always good and bad. What we can control is our attitude.”

Anyone with a complex medical diagnosis needs a place like Matheny, says Stackhouse, but many don’t know about it. “Nobody does what we do like we do,” he says, referring to all of the school staff. “We love our students unconditionally. We need to shine a light on Matheny, and let people know what an amazing place it is.”

Anne Bruno may be fairly new to Matheny but she’s not new to working with children who have special needs. She started with the Matheny School as Supervisor of Curriculum in June 2021, when the school was fully virtual, and was made Assistant Principal/Director of Curriculum in October 2022. “I think our staff made virtual learning as successful as it could be,” she says unhesitatingly. “They made the lessons engaging—they made the tech work.”

When April 2022 rolled around, and a hybrid model—bringing students back to the school building every other week to allow more space for each student—was initiated, “the flexibility of the teachers was evident,” she says, commending them for their “proficiency providing hands-on and virtual learning simultaneously.”

The classroom is where Bruno spent most of her career before coming to Matheny, and she had years of experience



Matheny School Assistant Principal/Director of Curriculum Anne Bruno with student William Sullivan



working with kids who have autism before earning her administrator’s certificate in August 2020. Then she started looking for a new job. A friend who had worked at Matheny “loved it here. She said it was such a welcoming and open place,” Bruno remembers.

So, when she saw an ad for a position at the Matheny School, she applied. “The interview was actually fun,” she says “I knew right away that I would fit in.”

She explains that her job calls for her to “oversee the curriculum; be present in the classrooms helping students; work with teachers, reviewing and sometimes helping them to revise their lessons plans; hold weekly curriculum meetings; and put together classroom schedules for the students.” During her first 10 months on the job, she concentrated on helping make the virtual programs work.

“Our switch back to the classroom was monumental,” she says. “It’s great seeing kids so engaged, able to interact again with teachers and other students. And back to using iPads for fun.”

What does she hope to see in Matheny’s future?

“I would like to see students move around more, be able to switch classes in the high school for different subjects again, and experience more center-based learning,” she says. “With center-based learning, students rotate through centers set up in the room run by the teacher and instructional staff. In addition to the teacher’s curriculum center, another center could be tactile, while another more sensory. The students would rotate through all of the centers to experience different learning modalities and be able to fit more learning experiences into one class period.”

She would also like to focus some of her efforts on Matheny’s SLE and transition programs, which, she says, were strong pre-COVID-19. “With our capable team at Matheny, I would like to grow those programs back and make them even more comprehensive and experiential,” Bruno states. Structured Learning Experiences (SLE) are school-based activities designed to provide students with the

experiences of specific job titles or job groups, and to assist them in gaining employment skills. The Matheny School's transition program helps high school students 14 and older to plan for their lives after graduation in order to achieve their maximum level of independence and productivity.

Bruno says that reopening the school to fully onsite learning was in the works for months before the actual back-to-school date, with Principal Sean Murphy actively

"I've been with some of the students five to eight years. I've learned a lot from them. They've taught me to enjoy and appreciate the littlest, simplest things and to stay positive, and to live in the moment."

GLENN STACKHOUSE
SENIOR PHYSICAL THERAPIST, THE
MATHENY SCHOOL

spearheading the effort with a full advisory committee. Guaranteeing appropriate space on site for reopening was just one of the challenges. Ensuring maximum infection control efforts—headed up by School Nurse Angela Housel and Assistant School Nurse Vanica Eldridge—was an absolute necessity to the reopening, she says.

While everyone hopes an epidemic will never sweep through the State again, shutting down schools, sports, and other public venues, the Matheny School staff is ready for whatever lies ahead. But for right now, they're just happy to have students and staff back in the school building again.

"The reopening gave us a fresh start," Bruno comments. "Now is a good time to save what's best in our programs, but also to implement changes that will make the school even better." **MM**

Warm Welcome

continued from page 13

felt a sense of isolation and loneliness. The return to the program, and the social interactions, have greatly improved the clients' mental health."

Nurse Sharon Rizzi has worked for Matheny nearly 20 years—almost 15 of those at the Hillsborough Center. "Our new COVID precautions include daily client and employee temperature screening logs. Our team is very detail-oriented and this helps us notice any subtle changes in our clients, so that we respond quickly to their medical, physical, and emotional needs," she states.

"It's an exciting challenge for the Hillsborough nurses to maintain the health and wellness of the group home and community clients," she says.

Obviously, life is "rich" at the Hillsborough Center, and staff is always looking for ways to make it even better for the clients. So, what will the new organizational structure bring to the table that doesn't already exist?

The four components that make up the new "life enrichment therapies" department at Matheny are anything but new, says Todd Deremer, Coordinator of the Hillsborough Adult Learning Center. "Recreation therapy, music therapy, the Hillsborough Adult Learning Center, and Adult Services on the Matheny campus have all been around for a long time. What IS new is that the organizational realignment has put them together under one administrative head," he explains.

"The realignment makes sense," he states. "All four components provide services to enrich the lives of participants. One uses music and another recreational modalities. The two adult services programs—at Hillsborough and on the Matheny campus—offer a little bit of everything."

These enrichment activities were clearly threatened in early 2020 when COVID brought in-person learning and social activities at the Center to a halt. "Before COVID all of our clients had individual classes of their choice all day every weekday," says Deremer. "We had 30 to 35 different classes." During the quarantine,

the Center's staff kept things going as best they could via a wide spectrum of virtual programs.

Since May 2021, the Center has been bringing clients back to the building, starting with a few at a time and building up gradually; and slowly life there has almost returned to what it was before the shutdown. Deremer says they have new direct support professional (DSP) staff who are "great," as well as the dedicated nurses, instructors, and social work staff, all of whom work together.



Nicole Hambrick (pictured above), a DSP who has worked for the Center for about one year, says she always looks forward to coming to work. Her job is "hands-on" and includes assisting clients with all aspects of their everyday needs. What gives her particular satisfaction is "helping everyone learn so many different things," she says, and "when they get off the vans in the mornings, and they see you and recognize you and smile." In under a year, she says happily, "I've learned how to communicate with our clients and have established good relationships."

She loves her work, and loves what the Center is able to provide its clients. Does she have any hopes and wishes for the Center's future?

"What I wish," she says, "is that Matheny could get more awareness from the outside world—so people who might not know about this Center could benefit from the great things that go on here. Everyone is so happy to be back here." **MM**

A Year of Achievement and Acclaim

“Arts Access artists have complete freedom to explore a world that is **defined only by their unlimited creativity and unique self-expression.** The creative process is filled with hundreds, more likely thousands, of artistic choices, all within a single painting.”

EILEEN MURRAY
DIRECTOR, ARTS ACCESS

As the world reopened in the Spring and Summer of 2022, and many people returned to their pre-COVID-19 activities, Matheny’s Arts Access participants celebrated a banner year of creative vitality and recognition. Through long months, when the infection was at its most threatening, these artists persisted, connecting with their Arts Access facilitators via Zoom, and producing extraordinary artwork that found its place in galleries, museum exhibits, and in-person and virtual shows.

In Washington, DC, the works of three Matheny Arts Access visual artists were chosen for a juried exhibition of Outsider Art, “Outside Forces,” on display from September 3 to October 22. This 16th annual show, hosted by Art Enables, showcases “outsider” artists nationwide.

The term “Outsider Art” encompasses artists with no formal training; those who do not follow conventions and trends; and those who create art primarily for self-expression. Many of them are from traditionally underrepresented groups, including individuals with disabilities, some of whom are nonverbal and whose art communicates thoughts and feelings that often had no outlet before.

“Arts Access artists have complete freedom to explore a world that is defined only by their unlimited creativity and unique self-expression. The creative process is filled with hundreds, more likely thousands, of artistic choices, all within a single painting,” explains Eileen Murray, Director, Arts Access.

The three artists—whose works were featured in the show—are not novices to the artworld.

James Lane—a participant in Arts Access since 1993—is an abstract artist who enjoys experimenting with new colors, techniques, and shapes. He was one of four Arts Access artists whose paintings were exhibited at Sotheby’s in New York City in February 2019. His paintings have also been shown at the Zimmerli Museum, UMDNJ, The Atrium Gallery, Zebu Forno in Morristown, and *Full Circle*, an Arts Access annual event.

Philip Fisher has been an active participant in both the dance and fine art programs at Arts Access. In his visual art, he captures viewers’ attention with his daring combinations and layering of various shapes and colors. His choreography has been featured in several *Full Circle* shows.

Lee Papierowicz—who joined Arts Access in 2019—experiments with different techniques and styles, often putting her unique spin on photographs and reference pictures. The first dance she choreographed, “Confident,” a tribute to her cousin in the military, was presented at the 2019 *Full Circle*, with Lee as one of the dancers. She loves the outdoors and skis with adaptive equipment.

These are just a few of the exceptional works of Arts Access artists that were chosen to be included in exhibits throughout the State and country in 2022. More to come in the next issue of *Matheny Matters*.

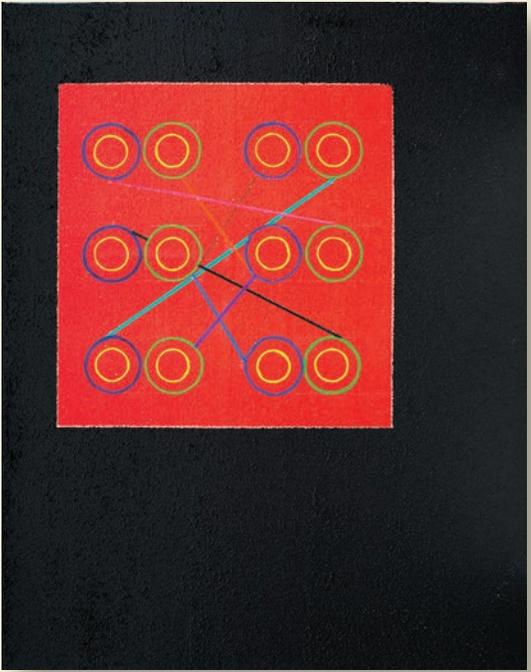


Title: *Untitled*
Artist: James Lane



Title: *Art*
Artist: Philip Fisher

Title: *Mysteries of Love*
Artist: Lee Papierowicz



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Always Great Friends

In October, The Friends of Matheny presented a \$100,000 donation to Matheny CEO & President Bill Kent and Board of Trustees Chair Bill Kraus, Esq. The group has donated more than \$3 million to Matheny.





A Decades-Long Partnership

This year Matheny received \$50,000 from the Delta Dental of New Jersey Foundation for specialized dental equipment to provide care to developmentally disabled children and adults, as well as personal protective equipment and a direct support professional/transporter to ensure patients' comfort during dental treatment. The Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Delta Dental of NJ, which has helped provide access to dental care for the underserved since 1986. The partnership with Matheny began more than 20 years ago.

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Celebrating **75 Years** of Matheny

A 75th Anniversary Celebration on October 13 brought Matheny supporters to the Peapack campus for an evening filled with activity. Tours of the art room; a welcome from Board of Trustees President Bill Krais; Matheny President Bill Kent's presentation focusing on highlights of his first 18 months on the job, the strategic plan, and Matheny's plans for the future; and a showing of the video, *Matheny: 75 Years of Enriching Lives & Growing Abilities*, were all on the menu. The evening ended on a high note with a musical performance by Matheny Adult Day Program participants.





Happy Anniversary miles

The **25th anniversary** of Miles for Matheny on Saturday, June 4th, attracted cyclists, runners, walkers and other Matheny supporters to the J. Malcolm Belcher Fairgrounds in Far Hills. Miles 2022 included cycle rides, a 5K run, a kids' "fun run," and the Lu Huggins Wheelchair Walk, where Matheny children and adults do a lap around the field with family and friends. CBS-2 NY reporter John Elliott broadcasted live from Far Hills, highlighting the events, Matheny's work and community impact, and The Friends of Matheny's Second Chance Thrift Shop in Gladstone.

It was a great day for the crowd of Matheny residents and students, well-wishers, and athletes, who enjoyed the camaraderie, food, and many activities, and the event was a highly successful fundraiser, too.

SAVE THE DATE FOR MILES 2023
June 3 at the Far Hills Fairgrounds





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