

Matheny Therapist Named 'Practitioner Of the Year'

Donna Hoehn, PTA, ATP, has recently been selected as Physical Therapy Practitioner of the Year by *ADVANCE for Physical Therapists & PT Assistants*, a physical therapy news-magazine published by Merion Publications, Inc., based in King of Prussia, PA. Hoehn, who is a member of the physical therapy department at Matheny, was nominated for the award by another member of the physical therapy department, Nadine Klindt, DPT.

In her nomination of Hoehn, Klindt described her as, "the therapist that many of our tougher clients are assigned to. She develops long-lasting relationships with both the clients and their families. She is always available to assist with coming up with novel ways to get the most out of our clients."

Hoehn, a resident of Gillette, NJ, told *ADVANCE* that one of the favorite aspects of her job is working with people who have Lesch-Nyhan Disease, a rare genetic disorder. "Our facility," she explained, "specializes in the care of individuals with this very



Donna Hoehn with adult patient, Rasheedah Mahali

rare condition. The disease is often difficult to understand and even more difficult for patients and staff to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Being able to use a problem-solving approach to work with the patient and staff to develop and implement a plan and design new equipment with rehab

technology is very satisfying."

Explaining her approach to physical therapy, Hoehn told the magazine that she tries "to just slow down, take a deep breath

"I have been known to be a little more 'daring'."

and plan to have fun during each of my sessions...I have always been known to be a little more 'daring' in suggesting to try new activities, and the great PTs I work with have supported me."

Hoehn has an AS in PTA and a BS in biology from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison. Although she has been at Matheny for 10 years, she had volunteered at the hospital and school when she was attending Watchung Hills Regional High School. Five years ago, she

"fell in love" with a six-year-old who had been admitted to Matheny. She eventually applied to become his foster parent and later legally adopted him. Her son, Hoehn told *ADVANCE*, inspires her approach to both work and life. "My son," she said, "really captures what I try to bring to everything I do." 

Lu Huggins Devoted Her Life to Helping Others

Lu Huggins, Matheny trustee emeritus, who died on August 13, never let her own debilitating illness keep her from devoting her life to helping others. In fact, she often used her own illness to inspire others. As a classroom volunteer in the Matheny School several years ago, she served as a role model for Matheny students – demonstrating to them that someone in a wheelchair could lead an active, productive life.

In the late '70s and early '80s, Lu, along with her husband, Bob, would host semi-annual parties at her Basking Ridge, NJ, home for some of the Matheny students. She was concerned that, “the kids had no idea what life was like in the real world.



Lu Huggins at the 2009 Miles for Matheny with, from left: Alan Greener, Harrison Lynch and her brother, Leon Martel.

And no one in the community ever saw them.” That’s when she thought of having an event, such as a wheelchair walk, that the Matheny residents could share with the community. Lu finally saw her idea become a reality in 1998 when Matheny held a wheelchair walk

Outstanding Philanthropist at an awards dinner held by the Association of Fundraising Professionals-New Jersey Chapter.

Reflecting on Miles for Matheny a few years ago, Lu admitted that, “We never thought it would grow as large as it has, but the appeal has always been, ‘get the kids involved’.” She was thrilled that, “People were sitting on their porches clapping. The kids were so happy.”

Everyone who met Lu was inspired by her. She was a hero, a humanitarian and inspiration to everyone. Matheny thanks Lu Huggins for everything she did for us and the community at large. She will be missed, but her spirit will be with us always.



“She was a hero,
a humanitarian
and inspiration to
everyone.”

and cycling ride, followed by a small picnic. That was the first Miles for Matheny, which has grown to include several cycling rides, a 5K run and a kids fun run. In 2005, the wheelchair walk was named the “Lu Huggins Wheelchair Walk” in Lu’s honor. And in April 2006, Lu was honored as an

Save the Date!
MILES FOR MATHENY
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Full Circle 2009: Voice & Vision

Many of the patients at Matheny cannot speak clearly, or at all. But Matheny's Arts Access Program gives them a voice by enabling them to create fine art, assisted by professional artist-facilitators. Full Circle 2009: Voice & Vision, held November 14 in the Robert Schonhorn Arts Center, celebrated this innovative program with an exhibition of paintings, digital art and sculpture and a moving stage presentation encompassing dance, drama, poetry and film. Thanks to the community for their enthusiastic support of these artists and their awe-inspiring accomplishments!



Right: Artist Cindy Shanks in front of her untitled painting

Below: Alice Luthy of Whippany and jazz pianist Rio Clemente of Randolph.



From left, Jack Silady of Pennington; Affinity Federal Credit Union Foundation's Beth Degan of Harding Township and Affinity's David Snodgrass and his wife, Debbie, residents of Doylestown, PA.

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Natalia Manning, center, performing her dance, "Into Your Eyes", with Teri Miller, left, and Julie Judlova.



Lynn Peterson's Teaching Philosophy: Building Rapport, Reinforcing Success

Lynn Peterson's teaching approach emphasizes building rapport with her students, facilitating discovery of their goals and abilities and utilizing the positive principles of applied behavior analysis. Peterson, a resident of Budd Lake, NJ, was named teacher of the year at the Matheny School in 2008-2009.

Peterson's students are often non-verbal and have many medical issues over and above their primary disability. "The way I teach," she explains, "is to ask for positive social behavior." A key element in encouraging that behavior is the use of preferred items of sensory input such as a favorite animal or toy. She also welcomes interaction in the classroom with physical and occupational therapists, a method that is key to Matheny's educational philosophy. "I learn so much from the therapists," she

says. "I get so many ideas from them."

According to Sheryl Gavaras, Matheny principal, Peterson is, "a warm and wonderful individual who has shown herself to be charismatic in her relationships with students, their trans-disciplinary team and parents. She is an asset to our school and the students she teaches."

Peterson graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in music performance from Drew University in Madison and completed the pre-school, elementary and special education programs at College of St. Elizabeth in Convent Station. She also holds a certificate in music education. Earlier this year, she toured Spain as a soprano with the Morristown-based Harmonium Choral Society.



Lynn Peterson encourages a response from Matheny student, Savannah Conrad, by using a preferred item of sensory input, in this case, a toy duck.



Child with Severe Form of Epilepsy Benefits from Matheny's Team Approach

Estela Perez of Bernardsville, NJ, recalls the spring day in 2007 when she came to Matheny with her four-year-old son, Nicholas. “We visited with our social worker,” she says, “and I loved the way they treated him.” Nicholas, who has Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, could not stand up, and his body was floppy. Today, says Perez: “He can stand up. His legs are stronger. He’s very alert. He’s saying some words. And he’s eating well.”

Lennox-Gastaut syndrome is a severe form of epilepsy with seizures beginning before four years of age. Nicholas is a day student in the Matheny School, and he has benefited from Matheny’s team approach. Therapists are integrated into the classroom, and, because Matheny is also a hospital, he has received care from physicians in its Center of Medicine and Dentistry and evaluations and treatment

**"His legs are stronger.
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in its Seating and Mobility Clinic.

For example, Cindy LaBar, MSPT, director of physical therapy, has been working with him on, “standing and stepping, sitting and posture and trunk strengthening.” Occupational therapist Tara Hopko, COTA, is concentrating on, “trying to get him to reach and explore his environment with his hands. He used to not like to be touched or use his hands.” Speech-language pathologist Sara Pisarchik, MS, CCC-SLP, points out that Nicholas’ family physicians switched him

to a ketogenic [high fat] diet, which greatly reduced the number of seizures he has. As a result, she adds, “he’s much more cheerful, and he is using switches to communicate on a basic level, something he hadn’t done before.”

Before visiting Matheny’s Seating and Mobility Clinic, Nicholas had been using a stroller rather than a wheelchair. “We were concerned with

Dentistry, which provides medical, dental and therapy care to both inpatients and outpatients, Sara Osman, MD, says Nicholas had been suffering from severe



Nicholas explores his environment under the watchful eyes of physical therapist Cindy LaBar, left, and occupational therapist Tara Hopko.



Estela Perez with Nicholas in his Matheny School classroom

his growth and development,” says OT Maura Mirecki, BS,OTR, ATP. “So, we were able to get a product that was a hybrid between a stroller and wheelchair. It has a high-low adjustment. He can use the high adjustment when he’s eating at the dining room table with the rest of the family. But it can be adjusted lower to function like a more conventional wheelchair.”

At Matheny’s Center of Medicine and

contracture of the feet, which prevented him from being able to stand. Surgery was performed by pediatric orthopedic surgeon, J. Andrew Bowe, MD, to lengthen his heel cord. Now, says Dr. Osman, “we’re getting ready to put him on a tricycle to increase his mobility. And we’re going to outfit him with a body jacket to improve his posture.”

“The work here has helped him a lot,” says Perez, but her experience with Nicholas should serve as a lesson to other parents who believe their infant or toddler may have a developmental disability or delay. “When Nicholas was about six months old,” she recalls, “I told the pediatrician I was worried about him because he wasn’t strong enough. The pediatrician said everything was normal. When he was one year old, he said the same thing, so I changed pediatricians. The new pediatrician said, ‘Why did you bring the baby in so late? He should be in early intervention.’”



Disability Advocate Award Presented To Friends of Matheny

The Friends of Matheny received Somerset County's 2009 Disability Advocate Award for individuals, businesses or organizations. The award, presented November 10 at the Somerset County Office for the Disabled in Somerville, was given for the group's "advocacy on behalf of Somerset County citizens with disabilities."



SCOFD coordinator Mark Malone, seated, presented the award. Standing, from left: Friends of Matheny president Pam Cembrook; Matheny volunteer coordinator Gail Cunningham; Matheny assistant director of philanthropy Janice Kriegman; and Friends of Matheny Board members Gail Knight, Dorothy Carter, Nancy Hojnacki, Cathy Wild and Judy Schneider. At right is Matheny president Steve Proctor. The Friends of Matheny is an auxiliary organization dedicated to providing support for Matheny. Since its inception in 1983, the organization has raised more that \$2 million to support Matheny's programs and services.

Thriving as an Overnight Nurse

When Stacy Pierrot, RN, mentions that she works as an overnight nurse at Matheny, the response from people in the community is often something like, "Oh, you must have so much patience!" But Pierrot believes it's the patients who display a remarkable amount of tolerance. "If they're thirsty," she says, "they have to wait for someone to get them some water. If they're cold, they need

someone to get them a blanket."

After working in the emergency room of an acute care hospital, Pierrot much prefers the atmosphere of Matheny. "I've never loved anything as much as I have this," she says, pointing to the connections that have been developed with the patients. Many patients are non-verbal, but Pierrot recalls her early days at Matheny when a patient she was told could talk wouldn't talk to her. "I'd been here about three months," she says, "and I went into her room to give her medication, and she looked at me and said, 'Stacy'." It's those kinds of 'Matheny Moments' she cherishes.

Pierrot, who has been at Matheny for two years, received her associate of applied science degree from Raritan Valley Community College in North Branch, NJ. Outside of Matheny, she has a special interest in learning more about venomous toxicology and infectious diseases such as Hansen's Disease. In 2005, she spent two weeks working with FEMA and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, caring for victims of Hurricane Katrina.



Stacy Pierrot, RN, checks on adult patient, Charlie Fieramosca, before going off duty at 7 a.m.



Therapy on Horseback: Healthy Fun

The combination of an activity that is fun and also therapeutic is hard to beat. But that's exactly what has developed from a partnership between Matheny and the Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center in Oldwick, NJ. Every spring and fall, Matheny brings eight students to SHHRC for an eight-week program that combines therapy on horseback with hands on and classroom education about horses.

SHHRC provides an experienced staff, trained horses, dedicated volunteers and a facility accredited by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). Matheny brings therapists, teachers, nurses and aides along with the students. While one group of students is riding, another is in the barn feeding, grooming and familiarizing themselves with the horses. A third group is in a classroom with Matheny teachers and aides, learning about horses in a different atmosphere from their traditional school day.

"The way a horse moves is very similar to the way a human moves," explains physical therapist JoAnna Skripak, DPT. "When our students sit on a horse, they are getting that movement as if they were walking." The horseback riding and education sessions are funded by contributions made to Matheny's Community Connections program. 



From left: SHHRC volunteer Debi DeLorenzo, 17-year-old Matheny student Gregory Kuhrt, Matheny occupational therapist Wendell Lumapas and volunteer Renee Chervenak.



From left: SHHRC volunteer Sarah Holman, 8-year-old Matheny student Katherine Gaudio and Matheny physical therapist Lisa Tumminelli.



Above, From left: SHHRC volunteers Christine Michels and Rich Swenn, 19-year-old student Bozena Geraghty and physical therapist Jana Gebhard.

Matheny on Fox 5's 'Street Talk'

Physical therapist JoAnna Skripak, occupational therapist Tara Hopko, Liz Geraghty and her daughter, Bozena, a Matheny residential student, all appeared as guests on Fox 5's "Street Talk" to talk about the therapy on horseback program as well as other Matheny activities designed to improve students' and patients' quality of life. Geraghty, who pointed out that Bo "was laughing the whole time she was on the horse," appreciated that, "she was enjoying a new venture that also had a really good medical benefit."

Fox 5 host Andy Adler was "struck by the fact that you're focusing on what these children can do, not what they can't do."



From left: Bo and Liz Geraghty, Fox 5 host Andy Adler, occupational therapist Tara Hopko and physical therapist JoAnna Skripak.

Our Special Thanks...

A tribute to recognize occasions like birthdays and anniversaries, to honor a friend, or in memory of a loved one takes on special meaning when it also helps the many children and adults at Matheny.

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If you have any questions about making a gift, please contact Janice Kriegman, Acting Director of Philanthropy, at (908) 234-0011 ext. 315 or jkriegman@matheny.org.

After Early Intervention, 3-Year-Old Boy's Progress is 'Phenomenal'

In October 2008, two-year-old Owen Prior was diagnosed as having an autism spectrum disorder, which translates into irregular social interactions and communications and/or limited interests and repetitive behavior. "Although we were aware something was different about Owen," his mother, Pamela Prior, recalls, "it is never easy for parents to have their fears confirmed."

For the Somerville, NJ, family, there was already a support system in place. Owen had been receiving help via speech therapy, occupational therapy and developmental intervention through the Somerset County Special Child Health Services Early Intervention program. His speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist and special education teacher were all provided through Matheny's Community Services program, and, according to Prior, "the overwhelming support we received from them, to this day, takes my breath away. They quickly became, not only therapists for Owen, but also a support system for me. They were always ready with a hug, a shoulder to lean on or an understanding ear to listen."

"They welcomed phone calls if a situation arose that I was unsure of, and they provided much-needed information on where we could turn when Owen aged out of the program in July 2009. They, along with Linda Newsome, director of Matheny's Community

Services program, took time out of their personal lives to assist us as we advocated for services for Owen."

Without early intervention, Prior believes Owen, "would still be afraid to



Pamela Prior and her son, Owen

touch sand, would not run barefoot in grass and definitely would not be shouting, 'Ready or not, here I come!'" Today, Owen is in full-day preschool in

"All of the Matheny professionals took time out of their personal lives to help us."

the Somerville School District's ABA (applied behavioral analysis) program, and, in his mother's words, "he's doing phenomenal! Just the other day, he bumped into me, and he turned around and said, 'Oh, sorry!' That's something he never would have noticed before."

Samantha Krongold, OTR, the

Matheny occupational therapist, says the importance of early diagnosis and treatment cannot be overemphasized. "It's much easier to treat a child," she adds, "before they develop bad habits." Krongold, a resident of Flemington, also stresses the importance of working with the family. In early intervention, she says, "the mother is the pilot; we are the co-pilots. We're only there one or two hours a week; it's a partnership. It's important for parents to learn how to read their child and respond appropriately. It's my job to help the parents interpret that."

Prior agrees with Krongold's comments about early diagnosis. "You've got to fight for your kid," she says. "You know something's not right; you may not be able to put your finger on it. But I did push for it. I had to kind of fight with the pediatrician to get him evaluated, but he agreed to it eventually." Every one of the Matheny professionals, she says, "took time out of their personal lives to help us. They were thinking about our family, not only when they were in our house, but after hours. These women were remarkable because of the love and dedication they provided when they entered our life."

Krongold, who has observed Owen interacting and initiating contact with his peers at his preschool, describes his progress very simply. "When early intervention started," she says, "he waved good-bye." When EI ended, she adds, "he was saying good-bye." 

Jets' Jay Feely Connects with Matheny

“You reach a point when your child needs more than you can give them. It's comforting to know there's a place like Matheny.” New York Jets place kicker Jay Feely was speaking from experience. His brother, Michael, was mentally and physically disabled all his life, dying at the age of 26 in 2001. “My mother,” Feely told dinner guests at the Matheny Golf Classic, “had to do everything herself, spending days in the car driving to different doctors.” Feely, who visited Matheny the day before the golf outing, said, “What I saw during my visit was how much Matheny helps disabled children and adults to lead a fuller life.”

“ I saw how much Matheny helps disabled children and adults to lead a fuller life.”

Funds raised at the golf outing, held September 29 at the Somerset Hills Country Club in Bernardsville, will help support the Matheny Center of Medicine and Dentistry, which provides much-needed medical, dental and therapy care to Matheny inpatients and people with disabilities in the community. Eagle sponsor for the outing was Murray Hill-based C.R. Bard, a leading multinational developer, manufacturer and marketer of medical technologies in vascular, urology, oncology and surgical specialty products.



Above, From left: NY Jets Flight Crew member Jessica, 14-year-old Matheny student, Shane Szott, Flight Crew member Laura, Andrea Szott of Morristown (Shane's mother), Jay Feely and his three-year-old daughter, Abigail.

Below: Adult patient Jessica Evans selling 50-50 tickets to Delta Dental's Bruce Silver of Randolph



Above: Jay Feely at Matheny with adult patient, Gerald Tavares



Below: Cleveland Browns linebacker Jason Trusnik, left, with C.R. Bard executives, from left, Todd Schermerhorn and Tim Collins of Mendham, Brian Kelly of Basking Ridge and Steve Long of Mendham.

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'Workshop on Wheels' Visits Newark School District

Matheny's 'Workshop on Wheels', made possible by a grant from the Merck Company Foundation, serves as a mobile workstation that is stocked with a variety of wheelchair seating cushions and backs, seating evaluation supplies, wheelchair tires, accessories, hardware and tools.

This enables Matheny's rehab technicians to travel to facilities and private homes throughout northern and central New Jersey, providing emergency services, such as performing repairs on-site. If more major repairs should be necessary, equipment can be transported to and from Matheny's rehab engineering shop quickly and efficiently. Clients include several school districts in Bergen, Essex and Union counties as well as such organizations as the Woodbridge Developmental Center,

Spectrum for Living and the Sussex County Arc (SCARC).

Matheny is working regularly with the Newark School District, conducting a clinic every two weeks for staff at

the Belmont-Runyon School, which has a program for medically fragile students. Marda Herz, MSPT, a physical therapist in the Newark School District, says Matheny's rehab technicians consult with school therapists to decide what needs to be done to equipment for the B-R students. "After those consultations are held," she explains, "the Matheny technicians make recommendations. The one thing that Matheny offers that no one else does is the service upon

delivery. They install, they set up, they instruct. It is a pleasurable working experience, not only for me, but for the teachers."



Physical therapist Marda Herz consults with Matheny rehab technician Jon DaSilva about a Belmont-Runyon student's seating needs.