

The Pyramid Experience

April 2009

Tallahassee, Florida

Volume XI, Issue 1

Troopers and Pavers Were Big Hits



FHP and Pyramid's Wade Malone – the start of a great partnership.



Troopers and C.W. Roberts Constructing, Inc., employees install speed bumps.

Recruits and Students Share Safety Concerns

**By Lana Smith
Director**

In early March, 35 recruits from the Florida Highway Patrol Academy marched in military formation to the front door of Pyramid Tallahassee.

Pyramid staff and students alike were impressed by the military discipline the soon-to-be-troopers displayed.

Displaying their flag and uniforms, the recruits filed in one by one to take a seat for

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Paving Firm, Troopers Make Pyramid Safer

**By Lana Smith
Director**

When the FHP recruits and instructors noticed the heavy traffic and speeding vehicles during their visit to Pyramid, they sprang into action.

They quickly contacted C. W. Roberts Contracting, Inc., whose owners quickly agreed to solve the problem.

Three weeks later the Pyramid parking lot was filled with lots of heavy construction

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New Licks And Expanded Horizons

By Danny Wood
Performing Arts Instructor

The performance department continues to broaden its scope.

With classes on singing, dancing, playing instruments, peer support, and skit writing, we are incorporating new and exciting material into our classes.

Michael Bradwell, Pyramid's dance, peer group, and "Rights of the Month" skit instructor, teaches classes that are engaging and exciting.

In his dance classes, Mr. Bradwell teaches moves based on the aspirations and abilities of the each student, and bases much of his choreography on moves the students bring in.

Tim Poole says, "Mike is a good teacher. I break dance, and I teach people about rights. And square dancing."

Next door, in music class, students work on a variety of pieces, including jazz, Motown, Broadway, country, indie, disco, rap, rock and roll, Michael Jackson, and reggae songs.

Student **Sean Gorak**, says "I think the songs we sing are very good. My favorites are *Wagonwheel*, *Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head*, and especially *Jive Talking* and the blues."

Music students have the opportunity to make music in many different ways. Students can choose to play bells, tambourines, drums, trumpet, violin, ukulele, electric and acoustic guitars, bass guitar, banjo and keyboards.

Nate Sailor, a dedicated music student,



Marjorie Emanel, Amy Kirkland and Gussie Walker perform at SAIL.

chooses to focus as much class time as possible on playing the keyboard. While Mr. Sailor is an accomplished whistler, drummer and singer, he says he likes playing keyboard because "it's my way of expressing myself."

"On keyboard I play what you could call a 'jazz solo' and right now I'm working on learning a C chord. I like learning new stuff."

Another aspect of the performing arts program is our performances in the community. Students have enjoyed performing at SAIL High, FSU's Medical School and the Mickee Faust Club.

Sunne Couver also soloed in the Pyramid Studios performance at the Engine Room recently.

This summer we will again be collaborating with Studios on their annual summer show at the Moon.

Support Growing for Pyramid Programs

By **Lana Smith**
Director



Ms. Smith

Despite continuing cutbacks to services and ongoing state budget difficulties, Pyramid employees are keeping our mission alive.

Our staff is determined to continue providing creative and quality services to our students. It often feels like an uphill battle, but we are working hard not to let it weigh us down.

Pyramid Tallahassee currently serves 165 individuals with developmental disabilities. We continue to grow despite funding reduction that limit the days some students are allowed to participate.

Even in this dismal economic climate, we find ways to challenge our students to broaden their social roles and outlook on life, while giving them the skills they need to be the best they can be.

We have maintained signature parts of our program such as student employment, and have even expanded our art and performance programs.

We have so far avoided the staff layoffs that have plagued many providers because we believe adequate staffing is essential to health, safety and dignity.

Pyramid staff have accepted the challenge of enlisting assistance from community groups, businesses, local leaders, families and friends to assist with parts of the Pyramid program

that in years past would have been supported by it's own revenue.

I am excited about the new relationships we are building with the Florida Highway Patrol and the Knights of Columbus to help us keep our mission alive.

We are also receiving critical support from a number of Florida State University schools, including the Art Therapy program, Communications Disorders program, the Medical school and the Visual Arts school. It is my hope and personal mission to add to our list of supporters. Over the course of this year, we will be reaching out to a widening circle of supporters.

I am excited about the developing collaboration with our sister program, Pyramid Studios. Our artists and performers are increasingly joining with Studios in joint events.

Pyramid's two centers in Tallahassee are widely viewed as effective programs for people with developmental disabilities. There is a growing awareness among the public that our students contribute significantly to the life of our community.

We see public awareness steadily increasing the level of support available for our students, even in the face of financial difficulties many people and businesses are experiencing.

It seems as though hard times do bring people together for things they find meaningful. Certainly, we have found new friends this year to help us through.

We are grateful for your support.

Elections Provide Living Civics Lessons

Nate Sailor wasted no time diving in to his new responsibilities as president of the Pyramid Student Council.

Immediately after his election Mr. Sailor met with the director to discuss his first order of business, which was to help institute new student rules on smoking, eating and cell phone use.

He plans to represent Pyramid throughout the year at special events. He got his first opportunity when Florida Highway Patrol recruits visited. He impressed the recruits by making them feel welcome with his charm.

He also wants to hold true to



New Student Council President Nate Sailor.

his campaign promise to mentor and counsel other students.

His election followed weeks of intense campaigning complete with applications, office sponsors, slogans on flyers speeches and paper ballots with the candidates photos.

Lloyd Smith was elected Vice President, **Amy Kirkland** was elected Treasurer and **Rebecca Roberts** was re-elected as Secretary.

The candidates astounded the crowd with their credentials, ideas, and prepared speeches.

President Sailor told the voters "I would change myself; I want to mentor others."

Other candidates promised to promote a sense of belonging, or to help others.

Knights of Columbus Support Pyramid

The Tallahassee Knights of Columbus have agreed to support Pyramid Tallahassee with a Tootsie Roll Fund-raiser on April 17 and 18.

The Knights will be at the Oak Valley and Lake Ella Publix supermarkets and the new Walmart on Monroe Street from 5-9 p.m. on Friday, Apr. 17 and the follow-

ing day from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

We would like to invite our students and families to support the Knights of Columbus and Pyramid by joining us in volunteering and donating generously.

Please call Lana Smith at 850-574-4978 to sign-up for times slots and locations.

Tootsie Roll Sites

Lake Ella Publix

Oak Valley Publix

Monroe St. Wall-Mart

The Knights of Columbus, a Catholic service organization, is a major contributor to services for people with developmental disabilities.

Music Classes Unlock Musical Talent

Joe Freeman is an excited and engaged student who enjoys singing, dancing, and helping people whenever he can. He attends Pyramid Tallahassee five days a week and loves coming to music class.

One of Joe's important roles in music class is playing the harmonica. He is an accomplished player, and has developed several different techniques that he uses for harmonica solos.

He particularly enjoys jamming to the blues and to Buddy Holly. When Joe starts playing, he really gets the other students motivated to sing and dance.

Building on the breath control and coordination he's developed while working on his harmonica playing, Joe has also started to play the trumpet.

Joe is a natural trumpet player, and he likes to show staff and other students the progress



Under the tutelage of music instructor Danny Wood, Joe Freeman masters the mysteries of the trumpet.

he's been making.

He is improving quickly. It is a joy to watch him grow as a musician and performer.

Let Spring Planting Begin At Pyramid

The winter has been long and cold but that has not deterred us from cultivating our beautiful garden.

On any given day you will find our students and our gardening guru, **Jim Prater**, tending the garden and grounds.

Pyramid students have been

hard at work all winter growing an abundant variety of herbs and vegetables.

Gardening classes are currently planting and germinating seeds in preparation for the spring garden.

A few of our students, such as **Benjamin Robinson**, have even started tending their own

small plots, taking on individual responsibility for the planting and maintenance.

As a leader on the lawn crew, Mr. Robinson serves as a mentor to his fellow students and has been an integral part of the program's success.

Mr. Robinson says "I like to

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Program Promotes Appropriate Interaction

**By Eric L. Brown
Program Coordinator**

Hand shaking, appropriate vocal tones, appropriate words/language, not invading personal space, expressing gratitude or appropriate greetings.

Many never think of the importance that these skills bring to appropriate social interactions.

Many of the individuals we serve often fail to display these skills and as a result, are limited in their social interactions with others.

The Communications department was developed in order to assist those individuals who lacked the necessary skills needed to engage in effective social interactions with others.

When most think of a communications department, often sign language training and speech therapy are the first thoughts.

Well, the Communications Department does work to enhance these skills in our students on a basic level. However, that is only the tip of the

iceberg.

Many of our students have displayed an inability to have effective social interactions due to displaying maladaptive behaviors or simply becoming frustrated due to not being able to communicate their needs or desires.

*Communications
Department eases
frustration of being
unable to
communicate*

The Communications Department assists those individuals to increase the ability to have meaningful interactions by stressing the importance of greeting others appropriately, shaking hands rather than hugging or simply saying "hello."

Appropriate vocal tones and choice of language is also an important portion of effective communication.

Training is provided to assist students to recognize that yelling or screaming is not an

acceptable means of gaining someone's attention as opposed to raising their hands if in class or in a respectful tone asking for the person to talk to them.

Training is also provided to students to increase their ability to provide personal information when it is necessary.

The need to know and be able to present information such as name, phone numbers and address can prove to be very instrumental to ensure safety to our individuals in the community.

Many are training to write, type using the computer or recite the information.

The Communications Department also consists of a computer lab, which has been named Independent Studies.

This computer lab has been instrumental in the development of many students' abilities to attend classes and participate in group activities.

It has provided many with the opportunity to engage in preferred activities, while be-

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Ms. Walker Combines Work, Performance

By Amy Harvey
Program Coordinator

Ms. Gussie Walker has been a student at Pyramid Tallahassee for almost two years, and in that time she has made quite an impression.

Each day, Ms. Walker works very hard performing the variety of tasks expected of the students who are employed in the kitchen.

She takes great pride in her accomplishment and proudly proclaims with a radiant smile



Ms. Walker

“I love making a paycheck.”

Ms Walker, however, has proven herself to be not only an enthusiastic and diligent employee, but also a talented performer.

She is a member of the Pyramid choral group and recently performed at SAIL High School. She is very much looking forward to her chance to further showcase her tal-

ents in future performances.

Ms. Walker embodies the spirit of Pyramid. She exemplifies what the opportunity to have your interests and talents recognized and nurtured means in the lives of our students.

Ms. Walker's accomplishments serve as a great motivation and inspiration to her peers as well as for Pyramid staff. We would like to extend our deepest thanks for her hard work and dedication.

Communication

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coming acclimated to group class settings.

Students often work to improve their independent computer skills, internet navigation and use of emails.

Transitions into new environments have at times been a difficult feat for some students.

Some students who presented with maladaptive behaviors began their journey in the

Communications department, but now move throughout the center, participating in other classes and forming meaningful relationships.

The program provides the individual with the opportunity to adjust to the new environments by providing a comfort and support system.

The Communications Department hopes to assist our students in enhancing their skills, which enhances everyday life and social interactions.

Wish List

Musical instruments of all types
Sewing Machine
Cabinets with doors (metal, wood, or Rubbermaid)
Landscape plants and gardening supplies
Ceramic tiles or patterned dishes
Gardening tools
Mini refrigerator
Microwave
Board games
Paper Shredder

More Space Means More Variety for Art

By **Marureen Raftery**
Arts Coordinator

Over the winter, the visual arts department grew — in space and opportunity.

More space has allowed us to offer different projects, each specializing in a particular medium or technique.

Recently, Instructor **Cathy Esland**'s class has been exploring fiber arts. **Tanana Akins**' class is creating paper mache sculptures. "We are doing different stuff," said **Derrick Grimsley**.

We also gave mobile art a stationary home. Rather than



Derrick Grimsley at work

travel about the facility offering arts and crafts in different areas, mobile art set up shop in the new unit.

That gives students who often spend most of their time in one or two areas the chance to

spend time in a new creative environment.

Independent art graduated to a larger space to offer more marketable art possibilities such as jewelry making, recycled art projects, painting, 3D art and wirework.

Our goal is to make a working art area that will challenge students, stimulate creative abilities and help them to express their unique visions.

We also want to allow our students to be more independent in setting up their own projects and finding the materials and tools that they need.

She Has Discovered Her Artistic Potential

I don't know how many times we heard "I can't do it!" from **Merrill Diggs**.

In visual arts, there are innumerable materials, techniques, mediums, and tools. Making something from all the variables is daunting.

But with a little guidance, support, and coaxing, Ms. Diggs has persisted. Since her initial resistance, she has become self-directed, focused, and productive. She

"I didn't know I could make all this stuff." — Merrill Diggs



has worked with paint, pencils, pastels, wire, beads, and more. She has created gourd art, wire sculpture, paintings,

drawings, and jewelry.

Ms. Diggs has discovered her artistic potential. She has become more discerning in her choice of projects and materials. One can almost see the ideas bubbling in her head as she sets down to work.

The icing on the cake is that Merrill's art is marketable. She is earning money from the sale of her art. That makes her a working artist!

Ms. McDonald Embraces Right of Expression

One of the greatest freedoms is the Freedom of Expression. This thought certainly has not been lost on one of Pyramid Tallahassee's most encouraging students.

Amanda McDonald returned to Pyramid Tallahassee in July of 2008, and expressed an interest in writing articles for the Pyramid newsletters. Ms. McDonald also set a long-term goal of developing her own newsletter and possibly a Pyramid yearbook. We were impressed by her ambitions and her dedication. Ms. McDonald has demonstrated talent and is an inspiration to us all.

We have often joked while she writes. "When you win the Pulitzer Prize don't forget about the little people," we'd say. Ms. McDonald always replies, "I'll never forget about you."

Ms. McDonald has written and typed five articles so far. The first article entitled, "All about Amanda McDonald."

It Was Difficult, But I Didn't Give Up

**By Amanda McDonald
Student Columnist**

"My name is Amanda McDonald and I came from Panama City where I grew up.

I have two sisters named Laura and April. They both moved to Tallahassee to go to college at Florida State University. I decided to build a house in Tallahassee so I could be by my sisters. I went to Life Links for four years, and then I went to Pyramid on Tennessee Street for a year and left and came back. I have had Cerebral Palsy all my life.

I graduated with a regular diploma at Rutherford High



*Ms.
McDonald*

School in May of 1995.

It was hard because I had to pass the high school test to graduate. It was hard for me to do because it took me longer because I had

Cerebral Palsy. I accomplished so much, however, despite being in a wheelchair.

When I was in middle and high school, I had my own aide to take notes, because I couldn't write without my aide or a computer. I really worked hard in high school, because it was difficult, but I

didn't want to give up.

It didn't matter how I did, but I did it on my own. My sister Laura was so upset with me because my graduation was on her birthday, but we had combined parties for both of us.

Two years later, after my graduation, the whole family went to Nashville, TN, for a week.

Now when I look back, I turned out to be a wonderful young lady.

I want to make people see what I went through, to be happy, successful and be the best person that I can be."

Students Respond At Their Own Pace

By Jennifer Barron
Program Coordinator

Progress occurs in different ways and pace for people with developmental disabilities.

Sometimes progress comes quickly, in visible ways. For others, small changes build until one day you realize that the individual's life has improved significantly.

Still others make little progress for years, then suddenly explode to a new level. One of our students, who shall remain nameless, is a shining example of the latter.

For years, he needed the security of the repositioning room. He resisted all efforts to engage him in activities outside "his" room.

We had created a job for him in the repositioning room, but our staff believed he was capable of far more.

For years, staff gently but relentlessly of-

fered him other options, to no avail.

Then, one day last year, he responded, "I'm ready to go to other areas now."

First, he attended one class outside the repositioning room. Little by little, he expanded the number of activities and the length of time he would participate.

Now he changes classes up to five times a day, interacting with peers and numerous staff and fully participating. He has just enrolled in an art class, and he loves it.

With patience and consistency, he has adjusted to the changes, is learning new skills and is happy with his expanded life.

His story isn't unique, but is a dramatic example of staff recognizing potential, patiently encouraging the individual and understanding that each grows in his or her own way and pace.

Valentine's Day Dance

There was love in the air as the partiers came by the van load from Leon ARC, Tallahassee Developmental Center, Gadsden ARC, Pyramid Studios and elsewhere.

They were dressed in their finest ready to dance, eat, and laugh at the Pyramid Tallahassee Valentine's Day lavishly decorated gala.

One of the highlights of the dance was watching **Joyce Mendelson** smiling, singing, and dancing, she commented, "I had the time of my life partying with my parents."

Garden

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work hard in the garden" and boy does he ever! Students are also reaping the benefits of the garden by preparing and enjoying fresh salads at least once a week.

The gardening department is also proud to announce that we will begin hosting a produce market in the spring.

We will be selling a large variety of vegetables and herbs as well as garden crafts, all produced by our talented students.

See you at the market.

Troopers

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their initial orientation.

Afterward, the troopers divided into four groups, were introduced to the Pyramid leadership staff and went to various areas to offer training on pedestrian and seat belt safety.

Within minutes, the recruits, students and staff started warming up to each other.

So much so that some of the troopers displayed their muscles and ability to do push-ups upon request while others enjoyed singing several rounds of the “Bad Boys” song from the hit TV show COPS.

The trooper’s many questions were answered by staff between sessions.

Pyramid students also did not disappoint in this area. **Lloyd Smith** asked “Can you get a ticket on a lawn mower?” Much to his surprise, he found that you can.

Mary Ann Sanderford asked “What would happen if I ran over someone with my wheelchair?” The recruits told her that, in fact, her wheelchair could be considered a weapon if

she did it on purpose.

FHP officer **Walter Liddell** expressed his enthusiasm and said “These recruits have learned more in the first thirty minutes of being here than in all their hours of training about disabilities.”

“This is one of the most incredible things that we have ever had happen since I’ve been at Pyramid,” exclaimed **Lana Smith**.

I am so thankful to **Lt. Daniel Hinton** and his team for giving us the opportunity to teach others about the wonderful people we know and serve everyday. And it is a great experience for our students to have fun with first responders and people in uniform instead of just when there is a crisis.

Afterward, the recruits and Pyramid staff took several photo opportunities.

With Pyramid staff and students hanging out of the doors and spilling unto the sidewalk, the recruits again took formation and marched back to their bus.

The troopers rode past waving and even indulged the Pyramid students with a short display of the siren and flashing lights.

Speed Bumps

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equipment, 20 C.W. Roberts employees and 20 troopers.

Within hours, speed bumps and a new wheelchair ramp were in place, parking spaces were repainted and every pot hole in the lot was filled.

I had tears in my eyes watching them all work. This is going to make this place much safer for our students.

Andy Bailey of Bristol was the supervisor of the crew and had everyone working together making sure that a quality job was done.

We can not thank the Florida

Highway Patrol and C.W. Roberts Contracting Inc. enough for making such a huge contribution to Pyramid.

In a time where everyone is scrapping just to get by, it is an amazing experience to see people demonstrate so much charity towards others.

Tallahassee Pyramid
2645 W. Tennessee Street, Unit #5
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Telephone: 850-574-4978
Fax: 850-576-1048
lsmith@pyramidinc.org
www.pyramidinc.org

We believe in what we do.
We make a difference.

Coming Up

- April 10 Easter Celebration - All day activities on site
April 17 & 18 Tootsie Roll Sales with Knights of Columbus at Publix and Walmart
May 15 Pyramid Tallahassee Outdoor Music and Art Festival - 6 p.m. at
 Pyramid Tallahassee on Tennessee Street
May 22 Memorial Day Celebration - All day activities on site
June 5-7 Family Café in Orlando

Yesterday *In Memory of Quentin Starling, Bobby Johnson and Eddie Fletcher*

By Bridgette Francis
Administrative Assistant

It seems as if it was only yesterday

We watched Bobby enjoy his magazines

If only time could stand still for that moment

It wouldn't seem like a dream

It seems as if it was yesterday

*Quentin answered the phones and greeted
you at the door*

We were always able to do less

Because he did so much more

It seems as if it was yesterday

We glowed at Eddie's beautiful smile

How do we wish we could see it again

Even if it's for a short while

We know it's not yesterday

And we know we're not alone

Because you are looking down at us

From your heavenly home