

The Pyramid Times

June 2009

Panama City, Florida

Volume XI, Issue 2

AGE Classes Ignite Love for Learning

Holly Naughton
Adult General Education Teacher
Shaw Educational Center

Year in and year out, Shaw Adult Education classes at Pyramid provide education with a twist of excitement.

Through a Shaw Education Center grant, a teacher and a paraprofessional are assigned to teach Pyramid students.

“The classes are an integral component of Pyramid’s programming,” said Pyramid Director **Marcia Spurlock**.

Pyramid’s programming — and the AGE classes — focuses on the “3Es — educate, expose and experience.”

“Florida law guarantees the right to education and training,” Ms. Spurlock said. “I believe the AGE program is an exceptional way to achieve this goal.

“Without this program, the students would lose the opportunity to further their education, build additional skills and increase their independence.”

The school system will decide next month whether the grant will be renewed.

This year we have studied a range of topics, including personal hygiene, dental care, appropriate social skills, nutrition, medication

management, physical fitness, financial knowledge and money management skills, math, reading, science and more.

While the topics are important, the delivery style is what really has helped the students thrive.

The room is filled with excitement and encouragement

The students have had the opportunity to experience a variety of activities designed to get them involved in learning.

Learning experiences have been fostered through the use of various media, including video, internet, demonstrations, live insects, worksheets, games and activities.

Some groups participate in basic music classes while others are challenged by the freerice.com vocabulary website. Some students help to teach others. For example, **Leonia Varner** and **Dianne Phillips** of PCDC tutor classmates in reading.

Laura Hetzler volunteers with students who are visually impaired. **Joseph Cranmore** reads to other students and gained the confidence he needed to become a more fluent reader.

James Hooper of TLC is learning to tell time and gets so excited when he learns a new number.

(Continued on Page 2)

Education

(Continued from Page 1)

This year, Shaw classes also volunteered in the local schools by assisting St. Andrew's Kiwanis with filling and delivering Easter baskets to St. Andrews Elementary and Margaret K. Lewis School.

Five students also took a field trip to Massalina Head Start to read to the children. Ms. Hetzler, Ms. Varner, **Danika Thompson, Trudy Rowland** and Ms. Phillips read with enthusiasm as 20 Head Start students wiggled and giggled.

The students also participated in a ladybug release.

Ladybugs need warm weather to fly, but on this day it was cool. Instead of flying away, the ladybugs just crawled from one student to another until the warmth from the students' bodies transferred to the ladybugs.

Once the ladybugs were warm enough, they flew away. We released about 200-300 ladybugs.

Summer school classes are challenging each other with the freerice.com website.

The challenge is to see how

much rice we can donate in four weeks to the United Nations world hunger program. This is a vocabulary website that donates 10 grains of rice for every correct word.

No matter what we are working on, the room is filled with excitement and encouragement. We are proudly one of the loudest rooms at Pyramid, due to clapping, laughing and cheering each other on.

This year, working with Pyramid staff and clients has been an amazing experience for me. Thank you to all of you for your help, advice, support and hard work this year.

Rising Star Is Ready For Anything

By Rachel Eiland
Performing Arts Coordinator

James Cox of PCDC is a vocalist who has performed at several events, including our Grand Opening Gala and the Downtown Improvement Board's Open House.

Mr. Cox is a tenor with an amazingly flexible falsetto range. He takes daily voice classes, and is working on new performance pieces.

"I'm working on Anthem from Chess, and I like that," says Mr. Cox. When asked if he had any favorite songs, he said "Not really. Chess is the first Broadway show piece I've tried. I like different kinds of music."

He is always willing to try new things, and to



Mr. Cox

listen to new styles of music. He says that rap music isn't a favorite, due to some of the stronger lyrics, but that he likes some rap, depending on what it is.

Audiences at Pyramid might remember Mr. Cox from our Christmas 2007 show, where he played Mr. Cratchit in "A Christmas Carol," opposite **Leonia Varner** as Mrs. Cratchit. "I like to sing with him," says Ms. Varner.

Mr. Cox also has an interest in the visual arts and has a couple of paintings for sale in our gallery. He's looking forward to new challenges at Pyramid and elsewhere.

The 'Small Things' Are What Truly Count

"The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

~ Helen Keller

**By Marcia Spurlock
Director**

This quote speaks volumes to me. It is the small things that matter and help us meet our goals.

Pyramid has many "small things" to appreciate. A growing number of people are quietly providing the critical "small things" that ensure that Pyramid's exemplary services can be sustained.

Pyramid is a private non-profit company that has experienced huge reductions in Medicaid funding over the past five years. Without the help of our friends, our programs would be severely diminished.

Here are a few recent examples of people whose support has made a difference for our students.

Knights of Columbus Panama City and Panama City Beach just provided funds from this year's Tootsie Roll Drive. Those funds purchase programming and art supplies.

Part of our plan for our fabulous building downtown was to incorporate a gallery that is open to the public.

The gallery displays the artwork, jewelry, crafts and fabric art creations that the students



Ms.
Spurlock

have created. The artists receive commissions on each sale.

A neighboring business, LH Beads, had two display cabinets they were not using and graciously donated them to our gallery. They were exactly what we needed.

Jenna White and **Michael Hanna**, son of LH Beads owner **Lisa Hanna**, have spent many hours volunteering in our program. Both have given up precious spring-break and holiday time to enrich the lives of our students.

Mr. Hanna has spent hours working with the students on the computer, going on field trips with them and spending one-on-one time with **Kenny Onraet**.

"It was fun to have someone spending time with just me," Mr. Onraet said. "Michael is very cool."

Ms. White has invested numerous hours running errands, helping with classes and being an all around Girl Friday.

"Jenna is a hard worker who cares a lot about the students." said Instructor **Trenisha Brown**. "She was a great volunteer last summer and I am looking forward to her returning for this summer.

"I have begun a cooking class this year and I need her to help me teach the students how to make her brownies."

In the end, it is not the big things that matter. It is the "small things" that get us where we want to go.

Going and Coming, Staff Share Feelings

We have had some changing of the guard over the past few months. Two of those - one leaving and one arriving discuss their feelings here.

*Veteran Program Coordinator **Natasha Heard**, is accompanying her husband to his new USAF station in Alaska.*

While I am hopeful that the move will be a good one for us, I am saddened by what I will be leaving behind at Pyramid.

For the past four years, Pyramid has allowed me to grow professionally and personally in ways that I had not foreseen.

I shall truly miss the cosmic connection I shared with Instructor **Colleen Mercer**, and all the outlandish stories told by Instructor **Phyllis Fetner** that made me say, "Now, run that by me again."

I will never forget student **Willie Reed**. He always told me I needed to take a long vacation. When I told him I was moving to Alaska he said, "Well, you're finally getting to take your long va-

cation."

Joey Cranmore truly touched my heart when he made not one, but three going away cards and had all the staff and students sign them.

I will long to hear another of student **Diane Smith's** stories about all the places she goes shopping on the weekends.

I will miss my faithful staff coming to me and saying, "Super, we got a problem."

I have truly been blessed with meeting some of the most important people in my life. Thanks, everyone, for being a great extended family.

*As Ms. Heard leaves, we welcome her replacement, **Christine Sweat**. She comes to Pyramid with much experience and an open mind to the likes and dislikes of the students and staff.*

Greetings to Pyramid students and staff. I've worked in the Early Education field in many



Ms. Heard



April Collins, Christine Sweat and Kesia Blenn

capacities; assessing programs for quality care, observing and developing mentoring plans for staff, assessing children in a classroom setting, monitoring stages of development, and looking for areas of delays for early intervention.

I'm looking forward to becoming more acquainted with staff and students alike.

In the classrooms, I've observed compassion in the hearts of the staff and a desire to help students achieve their goals.

*Another new recruit is **Kesia Blenn**. She replaces **Fabian Varela**, who left to pursue EMT training, as a visual art*

(Continued on Next Page)

Staff Changes

(Continued from Page 4)

instructor. She holds an Associate's Degree in art and is working on her Bachelors in Psychology through Troy University.

This whole thing is a new experience to me. I'd never been inside the world of people with disabilities before.

The thing about Pyramid that made such an impression on me was the emphasis on the need for society and individuals to see the person for whom *they* are and not their disabilities.

The students amaze me at times. They seek love and approval unremittingly. Their

emotions are raw and honest.

In my class I like to play different types of music. The other day I looked over at **Frances Alexander** and was amazed.

She was completely wrapped up in the music. The emotions brought on by this song could not have been better summed up than with a picture of her face.

I feel the same way sometimes but have been trained not to allow those emotions to show for fear that someone may see me.

All the nonsense of day-to-day life is absent to them. They are so thankful for the simplest joys in life, the joys we come to take for granted.

This job requires a certain humility, sense of humor and compassion. At the end of each day I'm utterly exhausted but my days always end with a smile and I am thankful for that. I realize that I've found more than a job.

I've found a place where I can be creative and constructive and make a difference... whether by proudly assisting **Angel Harris** or showing **Jonathan Crowley** that patience can pay off particularly in the field of art.

*We would also like to welcome Instructor **April Collins**. Ms. Collins brings years of experience and a calm nature. Students have really adapted to her and her unique teaching style.*

We Love Being Part Of Downtown

Our downtown location has brought us many exciting experiences and opportunities.

We are proud to be a part of the Downtown Improvement Board (DIB), which has given us the royal treatment.

We participate in Panama City's First Friday, in which we open our art gallery and

display and sell our students' artwork and jewelry.

There are lots of vendors and great music all along Harrison Avenue. It is marvelous to see how our community comes together for that event.

Pyramid hosted Main Street After Hours as the featured business of the month through

the DIB.

We enjoyed meeting other business people, good wine, excellent food and exceptional company.

James Cox of PCDC wowed the crowd with his rendition of "I Can See Clearly." Several students from the community and PCDC attended.

Students Participate In Community Camp

By Rachel Eiland
Performing Arts Coordinator

Pyramid Panama City students went to camp in June, but not as campers.

Jonathan Crowley, Danika Thompson, John Betts, Leonia Varner, and Tim Pollachek worked with the Kaleidoscope Theatre in Lynn Haven, assisting with its 2009 Kids Camp.

The one-week camp offered classes for community children, ages eight through 17. In that week, students attended classes in acting, costuming, technical theatre and other topics.

On the last day, they performed short plays and musical numbers that they had rehearsed during the camp. Pyramid Performing Arts Coordinator **Rachel Eiland**, a longtime camp volunteer, directed one of the plays.



Ms. Eiland

Before the camp, Pyramid students learned about stagecraft, props, costumes, sound, set and lighting design.

During the camp, Pyramid's volunteer technical and design crew put their training into action, collecting and creating the props, costumes and set pieces.

By the time camp was over, Pyramid students had an excellent basic understanding of what goes on backstage.

Kaleidoscope was founded in 1971 and is a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation. Its mission is to produce quality theatrical productions, to provide community participation in the creative process of staging live presentations, to showcase local talent and to develop an audience with an appreciation of live theatre as an art form.

Students Truly Showed Her The Love

By Marcia Spurlock
Director

It was a little human drama not unlike the little things that happen daily, almost unnoticed.

On this day, everyone noticed, and it was a beautiful scene to witness.

Angel Harris, who uses a

wheelchair, had worked for a long time to learn to walk, and with the assistance of her therapists, had progressed to walking a few steps.

On this day, Ms. Harris and her therapists decided it was time to step it up. She would try to take the long walk back to her classroom.

As Ms. Harris walked into

class, with a therapist on each side, every student started to clap and cheer.

Ms. Harris's face broke into a huge smile, and she seemed to stand a little taller.

The reaction of the other students was spontaneous. They instinctively sensed that it was a big deal and wanted to cheer her on.

On-site And Off, Experts Teach Students

By **Kathy Day**
Community Coach

We recently toured WMBB channel 13 and FOX 28 where students got the chance to go on camera and know what it feels like to talk about the news and inform people about the weather.

They met local media celebrities such as **Jerry Tabatt**, **Justin Keifer** and **Wayne Gentry**.

We are currently taking tours of hurricane safety routes so our students know how to evacuate the area if needed.

We are also taking a tour of the National Guard Armory where the Red Cross will

teach us how to prepare our homes for hurricane readiness.

Red Cross member **Ken McVay**, has already visited so our students can be prepared if a hurricane strikes.

Linda Hawk, of Kaleidoscope Theater, came to tell us about the theater's production of "Oliver."

She taught our students a piece of the choreography and song and had them dancing and singing in no time.

We also had **Jason Hedden** of the Gulf Coast Community College theater department discuss character development and the Stanislavski ac-

tor training system.

Next month, the Elder Belly dancers will teach our students some quick and easy dances.

And we still have a strong influence in our community as volunteers.

We can now add reading to the children at a local Head Start program to our many endeavors.

At Pyramid, we believe in the education, experience and exposure of each and every student. We get as many students as possible into the community. When that is not practical, we bring the community to them.

Newcomers Add Zest to The Pyramid Family

Over the past quarter, we have gained students who have brought new interests and energy to our program.

Aaron Eldridge of TLC enjoys his performing-arts class, as he loves to dance and has also volunteered at Bay Center nursing home.

Amanda Docko enjoys meeting new people and has already made several friends.

She has taken a job in the kitchen and doesn't mind showing up the veterans.

John Waller comes storming into the jewelry class, creating and looking forward to his first paycheck saying "Hi" to staff every morning.

Ricky Phillips enjoys arts-and-crafts. He has shown great interest in performing arts and 'playing' the piano.

His smile lights up a room.

David Sanders enjoys arts and crafts. He is quiet, but very outspoken when it comes to activities he enjoys.

We would like to welcome **Trudy Rowland** back. She has come right in and picked up where she left off, remembering old friends and making new ones.

Panama City Pyramid

524 Harrison Avenue
Panama City, FL 32401
Phone: 850-872-8105
Fax: 850-872-0507

Email: mspurlock@pyramidinc.org
Website: www.pyramidinc.org

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

Coming Up

June 22 — Red Elephant in Panama City will donate 20 percent of sales to Pyramid all day long. Just tell your server you are supporting Pyramid.

July 3 — Pyramid closed in observance of 4th of July.

August 1— Pyramid Fort Walton Beach production of *Thru the*

Looking Glass at Choctaw High auditorium. *Art show at 5:30 p.m.; Curtain 7 p.m. Free admission, donations appreciated.*

August 14 — Pyramid Studios production of *Ritmo's Love Story* at The Moon in Tallahassee. 5 p.m. Art Show. 7 p.m. curtain. Free admission, donations appreciated.

What Do You Have Lying Around The House?

As a non-profit organization, we can always use donations of just about anything. Here are a few things that we are in special need of:

- Frames for Artwork — any size.
- Artists' canvases or canvas panels — any size.
- Beads, jewelry supplies.
- Drawing supplies: pencils, paper, sketchbooks.
- Painting supplies (brushes, paint, watercolors, paper)
- Colored glass, for mosaics or fused glass jewelry.
- Guitar, other musical instruments.
- Scripts or sheet music
- Fabric, yarn, quilting or sewing notions.