Congratulations, Melmark New England, on 10 years of educational excellence for every student, every day.
A Message From Our Founder

There are some things that shouldn’t have a price tag on them. People call them priceless. At Melmark we call them priceless, too. Not because they are out of our range financially but because our hearts are so hopelessly involved we can hardly believe what we are seeing and hearing and we know nobody will believe us. It could be something as simple as Sally, swinging safely in a seat large enough to accommodate her frame.

Those are the moments, whether in the classroom or out, when some special Melmark student like Sally astounds us. It happens long after the lesson is over and done. Perhaps the class is having a break. Believe me, EVERYONE knows what a break is. Having FUN together. Even the teacher is relaxed and smiling.

And that was the moment when Sally came up with that gem of knowledge so triumphantly. She got it! And did you see Sally’s face? She was as surprised as her teacher. She was just having fun when it popped right out of her mouth. And while she was laughing, she gave it back, and the entire class laughed out loud.

At Melmark we have learned to expect progress and witness miracles — but seldom in the same place twice. However, we have learned to count on it, for it will come. So, we take our “fun” seriously. We purchase innovative recreational items for adults, adaptive equipment for our outdoor playgrounds, even our beautiful gymnasium boasts equipment designed to present opportunities for success for the most needy student while we are at fun.

Not only do we take our “fun” seriously, but we recognize that the milieu in which our fun takes place, and the specialized equipment it takes to furnish it, demands major dollars and fundraising support. It’s not just a wooden plank for a seesaw, or a rubber tire for a swing, but some piece of “magic” designed for that special student to accommodate their unique needs, to encourage them to go higher, relax as they are learning and then watch out as the lessons take on meaning for them.

Living in a unique world fashioned for the developmentally disabled requires hands across that chasm that separates us; a reaching out with an eye to meeting the need that Melmark faces. It’s not unreasonable; it’s necessary, for the end results are truly priceless.

Learning by leaps and bounds even in our “fun” times.

Miggy Krentel
Melissa’s mother

“At Melmark we have learned to expect progress and witness miracles — but seldom in the same place twice.”
A Message From Our President

Dear friends and families,

When the spring and summer arrive each year, we all breathe a sigh of relief and look forward to more relaxed and fun-filled days ahead. In this Messenger, we celebrate the joys of this wonderful season.

For our front cover, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Melmark New England, we gathered up all the children and asked them to pose in front of their new school in Andover Massachusetts. I’m not sure how our team up there was able to make this picture happen, but don’t the children look terrific? Later in the magazine we zoom in on some of these students as they are making their summer happen, at the lake house, the amusement park and riding horseback.

In Pennsylvania, at this time of year, it seems we go from one celebration to another, with extended school year and adult programs keeping us grounded in the work of progress. I don’t know if it’s the warm weather, longer days or trips to the amusement parks, the beach, or the Phillies games, but everyone we serve comes to school or work with increased energy and enthusiasm. Having fun together builds the social skills, hobbies and interests that are so important in all our lives.

Also, in this Messenger we recognize and honor two outstanding women, both parents, one also, a Board Member. They are world-renowned artist, Audrey Flack and the multi-talented, Sharyn Van Reepinghen. In addition to what each of these women contribute to the world, they also give their all to Melmark and we are proud to have them in our family.

So, come along for some summer fun and once again, many thanks to all of you for your continuing support of those entrusted to our care.

Joanne Gillis-Donovan, Ph.D
President and CEO

“At this time of year, it seems we go from one celebration to another, with extended school year and adult programs keeping us grounded in the work of progress.”
Sharyn Van Reepinghen is the quintessential New Yorker: she was born in Manhattan, educated at New York University, and was employed by the cosmetics giant, Revlon, Children’s Television Workshop, and served as President of SJ. BLOCK and Associates, an executive search firm.

Early in her career, Sharyn was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Urban League. Working closely with Vernon Jordan, Sharyn helped to raise the League's public profile and further develop its advocacy efforts.

Following her marriage to Francois Van Reepinghen, a Belgian international banker, Sharyn moved to Paris, raising son, Ian. In 1986, the family returned to the United States (Chicago) and a second son, Peter, was born. Following pediatric heart surgery, Peter faced a number of serious medical and developmental challenges. Sharyn focused exclusively on his medical and developmental needs.

Shortly after Peter turned two years old, the family moved to Hong Kong. Peter learned to ride horses and attended British early intervention programs, but there were few educational services for children with special needs. In 1992, Sharyn and two other concerned parents joined together to form The Springboard School, a program that has taken its place in Asia as the premier special education program.

The Van Reepinghen family returned to New York in 1997. Three years later, the family’s strength was tested when Francois suddenly passed away; a devastating loss for the family, but especially for Peter.

Sharyn and Ian began to search for a residential school for Peter and found Melmark. It has been a rewarding experience for Peter and his family. Peter has successfully transitioned to a community-based home and works at a local Genuardi’s Family Market. To round out his life, Peter still actively rides at the Thorncroft Equestrian Center and loves being around horses, especially “Grant,” his favorite horse at Thorncroft.

In addition to her service on Melmark’s Board of Directors, Sharyn is also involved with a number of community service agencies that focus on issues relating to minorities, women, and people with special needs.

“I thoroughly enjoy being a part of the Melmark community and seeing, first-hand, all that it has done for Peter and our family.”
Many of us recognize Audrey Flack as the mother of Missy, an adult program participant, or as the wife of Bob Marcus, chairman of Melmark’s Board of Directors. However, like many others in the Melmark community, there is another side to this Melmark family member that presents her unique gifts and talents.

Audrey Flack was born and raised in New York City. From an early age, Audrey demonstrated an interest in art. She attended the High School of Music and Art where she won the St. Gaudens medal. After graduating college at the top of her class at The Cooper Union, she proceeded to study art in the fine arts program at Yale University. She was awarded her Bachelors in Fine Arts from Yale in 1952.

Following Yale, Audrey returned to New York for further study of the human anatomy at the Art Students League. Her professional career has spanned a number of mediums: she has received critical acclaim as a painter, sculptor, and photographer. Her work is in the collections of major museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the National Museum of Art in Canberra, Australia. Audrey was the first photorealist painter to have work purchased by the Museum of Modern Art; she is widely considered to be a pioneer in the field of photorealism.

Audrey is noted for her powerful images reflecting the strength of women. She is recognized as one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century; along with Mary Cassat, she was the first woman included in “The History of Art” text.

Recently, Audrey expanded her creative horizon with the formation of her bluegrass band, The Art Officials. The group includes Audrey’s talented friends and musicians who share her appreciation for traditional bluegrass music and famous artists. In June, they performed at the Organization for Autism Research benefit, Other Voices, at Carolines on Broadway in New York City. The night included her daughter, Hannah, joining her onstage for a song with lyrics about autism.

When not picking the banjo, Audrey continues to focus on select sculpture projects.
One evening in May, I had the pleasure of taking Mr. Bill O. and Ms. Meg G. to dinner. As we planned our evening, we all agreed that “spaghetti and meatballs” sounded good, and we were off to Fellini’s - a small Italian restaurant in Newtown Square.

We arrived at the early part of the dinner hour, and the restaurant was not yet busy. Our waitress was very friendly; I encouraged both Bill and Meg to order their favorite items. As we nibbled on Bruchetta, we shared stories, and talked about places that we would like to visit.

Our dinner arrived to an exclamation of “Mama Mia” from Bill, making all of us, including a nearby fellow diner, laugh. We sampled each other’s entrees and then began to enjoy a very good meal and lively conversation. The waitress stopped back and asked how we were doing; Bill replied, “Marvelous!” Another waitress visited us, convinced that she knew Bill, but could not remember exactly how they met.

As dessert was served, Meg looked up with a puzzled look on her face; her dish of lemon sorbet was garnished with a frozen wedge of lemon that she could not easily separate from the sorbet. After a team review, we figured out a way for Meg to thoroughly enjoy the sorbet and the frozen slice of fruit.

The waitress delivered our coffee and we asked for our check. The owner approached our table with a smile on his face. He explained to us that the gentleman who was sitting next to us for most of our meal had paid for our dinner before leaving the restaurant. He thoroughly enjoyed observing the interaction between the three of us, but Bill’s “Mama Mia” comment apparently made his night. The owner said he had never seen such a random act of kindness, and he quietly told the other diners of this generous deed. As Bill, in his own special way, figured out that he would not have to use his own money to pay for his dinner, he turned to the owner and with a flourish said, “Then I’ll definitely be back again!”

The story does not end there. The waitress who recalled meeting Bill, called me the next day. She mentioned that her grandmother was a close personal friend of Bill’s mother, Molly O’Shea, and that their families had been friends for years. The waitress, while studying special education, had visited Melmark and The Meadows Program as part of her course work. All in all, it was a very good night – we benefited from a generous act of kindness and made a new friend.

There is a real value in treating others as we like to be treated, with a strong desire to “pay it forward.” To our generous dining friend, the three of us and the other diners in that restaurant truly appreciated your act of respect and kindness. We will not forget it and will certainly try to brighten another person’s day as we travel along life’s path. What started off as a simple night of dining turned out to offer so much more to all of us.
Among a number of Adult Day Workshops at Melmark, Workshop 2 truly represents the heart of Melmark’s mission. Led by instructor Nancy Smalley, the workshop focuses on both supportive arts and crafts activities, enrichment programs, and community service for those adults with significant disabilities.

Each morning, Nancy, and two staff members who assist her, welcome eight adults to the program. Workshop 2 is a “hand-over-hand” model, meaning that there is strong staff support and guidance as participants complete their projects. While Neris Alejo is helping an adult sand a woodworking project or add the finishing paint touches to a jewelry box, or a small model plane, another adult is receiving help in adjusting her CD player so she can listen to the latest in Rhythm and Blues music. Nearby, Odell Pewee is teaching a program participant how to plant a seed, nurture it and watch it grow. Within a few weeks, the adults with “green thumbs” will transplant the seedlings into their small garden and watch them develop into full plants.

There is a full range of program activities for the adults including baking cakes, rug hooking, painting sun catchers, and preparing herb pots for kitchen window gardens.

The adults and staff of Workshop 2 understand community service and the need to help others. Each month, Nancy and the staff organize magazines and books donated by Melmark’s staff and distribute them to the residents of area nursing homes. The smiles of the nursing home residents, along with their new friends are a great reward to our staff.

Everyday, the adults and staff of Workshop 2 prove that each of us possesses talents and abilities that make for a better world. With a little bit of patience, respect and kindness we can see the beauty in simple things – such as a young seedling or the smile of an older adult – that reminds us of the inner gifts that we all can share.

Please feel free to stop by and visit Workshop 2. You will be greeted by friendly program participants like Laurie C. who will proudly show you their work with a sincere welcome and a warm smile.
Lisa B. has proven to be a responsible, conscientious, kind and understanding participant in all the Meadows workshops. She gets the job done and follows her schedule in all of her work areas with a positive attitude and a smile. Lisa is a role model, a friend, a wonderful daughter and sister, and most recently an aunt to one-year old Dylan. For these qualities, and more, the Meadows Program picked Lisa B. for Citizen of the Year. Great job Lisa!

ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Jason G. emerged this year from a non-swimmer to being able to swim up to 6 lengths of the pool in each session. He is enthusiastic and does his best to improve his swimming skills each week. Jason is a wonderful example of what can be done with effort, practice and repetition. Although he has only the use of one arm when he swims, he has developed an effective stroke that allows him to swim laps with very little assistance. Jason’s effort, commitment to practice, and love of swimming earned him the title of Athlete of the Year.

Jason’s parents cheer for their son.
Our Spring Festival

Each year our Spring Festival draws in parents, staff, residents and guests from the community. It is a time of fun, fellowship and great food is always offered thanks to our kitchen staff from Sodexo.
In the spring of 1997, a Rockdale Youth Baseball Association’s coach, Eddie Bagwell, invited a child with a physical disability to play baseball with the other children on his team. As he watched this dedicated 7-year old, Michael Moore, attend every game and practice, he was impressed, not only by Michael’s ability and determination to navigate his wheelchair around the field, but also by the enthusiastic cheering and support that Michael received from his 5-year old brother. Representing America’s pastime at its best, a noble mission – The Miracle League – was born.

The Miracle League began in suburban Atlanta with 35 players and four teams. From the outset, the Miracle League’s focus has been on providing recreation for all children who play baseball, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Today, there are over 200 Miracle League Organizations throughout the country and Puerto Rico, serving 80,000 children and young adults on 80 adaptive playing fields. Based on the great interest in the program, there are 100 additional fields presently under construction.

This spring, Michael Donovan, Melmark’s Marketing Coordinator, introduced Melmark’s Children’s Residential Program to the Miracle League.

Every Saturday afternoon, Melmark’s vans leave Center Circle and head to a state-of-the-art field located in Schnecksville, PA. Although it takes an hour to reach the Miracle League of the Lehigh Valley, with the help of dedicated staff and volunteers, Team Melmark (playing as the Tampa Bay Devil Rays) gets to all the scheduled games on time.

The rules of the game are simple, every player bats once each inning, all base runners are safe, every player scores a run before the inning is over (last one up gets a home run) and each team and each player wins every game. To protect the players, the field itself is composed of Mondo Super X Performance turf, the same rubber surface material used in track events at the Olympic Games. Local community children, family members, and volunteers serve as ‘buddies’ to assist the players while at bat and in the outfield.

Alexis de Tocqueville once observed, “to understand America, you must understand baseball.” In the case of the Miracle League, to understand the best of the American people and the best that baseball has to offer, all you have to do is attend one game. There is no complaining, anger, or selfishness. A child with multiple disabilities plays alongside a child who is terminally ill. Dugout friendships develop between a player with Down Syndrome who is sitting next to a player with Cerebral Palsy, who is sitting next to a player with autism. To witness their fellowship and joy is an absolutely amazing experience.

Thanks to all the players, staff, and volunteers who made Melmark’s first season such a big success. Until next year – Go Rays!

To find out more about the Miracle League of the Lehigh Valley, visit www.miracleleaguelv.org.
ADVANCEMENT NEWS

Foundation Partnerships In Action

W. W. Smith Charitable Trust

In December 2007 Melmark submitted a proposal to the W.W. Smith Charitable Trust requesting support to renovate bathrooms in the Martha House and Matthew House residences. Beginning in 1977, Melmark has long enjoyed support from the W.W. Smith Charitable Trust. Recent grants from this foundation have supported renovations in Miller, Engle, and Gate Houses. The Trust’s unique vision of philanthropy provides support to local organizations that assist the most vulnerable children and youth.

In early spring Michelle Montgomery, Grant Administrator from the Trust, received a tour of the houses from Dr. Francis Baird, Melmark’s Director of Foundation Relations, Eric Zee, a member of the Board of Directors, and Dave Boyd and Jim Calvarese, Co-directors of the Facilities Department. In April 2008 Melmark was awarded a grant of $24,000 from the foundation for the project and an additional $10,000 challenge grant in order to attract additional donations toward the $44,000 project goal. We are most grateful to the W. W. Smith Charitable Trust for our ongoing partnership and the Trust’s belief in our mission.

Ronald McDonald House Charities

Thanks to a generous grant of $25,000 from Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMCH) of the Philadelphia Region, and globally, Melmark was able to create a fitness room in the Multi-Purpose Center. The fitness room includes a wide variety of exercise and strength building equipment that will enhance the health and wellness of all those in our care.

On June 14, 2008, as part of the Annual Melmark Spring Festival, the children and adults served at Melmark, their families, friends and staff welcomed Marlene Weinberg, RMCH board member, and Gene Kimble, Director of Operations, Delmac Management Corporation, which operates a number of McDonalds in the region. In her remarks, Dr. Joanne Gillis-Donovan stated “in addition to our many thanks to the Ronald McDonald House Charities, we are also grateful to McDonald’s for their partnership in the development of Melmark’s vocational programs.”

A Very Special Event

Planning for the Third Annual Hubert J. P. Schoemaker event is well underway. The Schoemaker Classic Advisory Board, co-chaired by Lee Ahrensdorf, President, Ahrensdorf Associates, Mickey Flynn, President, Pennsylvania Biotechnology Association, and Denny Willson, President and CEO, Cytokine PharmaSciences, Inc., has been working to secure sponsorships and auction items for the 2008 Schoemaker Classic.

The purpose of the event is two-fold: to honor Dr. Hubert J.P. Schoemaker for his numerous accomplishments and achievements in the pharmaceutical and biotech sciences and to recognize Dr. Schoemaker’s passion and generosity for Melmark. The funds raised from the Schoemaker Classic support Melmark’s exceptional programs and services.

This year’s Classic is scheduled for October 20, 2008 and will be played on three of the region’s premiere courses, Waynesborough Country Club, White Manor Country Club and The ACE Club. We are looking forward to another very exciting and successful Schoemaker Classic. Please visit www.schoemakerclassic.com
When Melmark New England began in 1998, there was one residential community home for our students. Now, there are five homes in communities close to our Andover school location. Our residential program currently serves 37 of our 108 students, ranging from ages 7 to 21.

For the past few years, Melmark New England has made the most of summer fun by renting a vacation home for the students we serve. The cost of the stay is paid with donations from our residential families and fundraisers during the year. Each of the five residences take turns staying at the vacation home over a 10 day period. For the last two years, we have stayed at a house on Lake Ossippee in Freedom, New Hampshire. The students at our Bayberry/Dracut residence have renamed it “Lake Awesomipee” because they enjoy their time there so much.

The students and staff enjoyed both swimming in the lake and soaking in the hot tub, canoeing, feeding ducks and hiking. These annual vacations provide a special way for our students to create happy memories with their peers. Staff members enjoy sharing “traditional” summer vacation activities like roasting marshmallows with the students. The students and staff are looking forward to their stay again this year!

Summer is also a wonderful time for other recreational activities like visiting local amusement parks and outdoor swimming.

The 4th of July holiday week is one of two annual vacation periods for Melmark New England when the day
school is closed. A number of residential students and staff had a fantastic day at Six Flags New England during this vacation week. It was a beautiful day and the students and staff enjoyed playing games, going on the rides and eating lunch. The older students especially loved riding the big roller coasters like “Superman.” They all had a great time despite the holiday crowds.

Melmark New England is fortunate that the “Challenge Unlimited” horseback riding program with Ironstone Farms is nearby our Andover School. Many of our students participate in this program that provides both indoor and outdoor horseback riding to individuals with a wide range of physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities. The students learn how to get on the horse, provide commands for the horse to stop and go and how to care for a horse. All in all, the summer in New England presents opportunities for our students to continue their learning but to also add a healthy dose of fun and outdoor recreation opportunities.
Each year, everyone at The Melmark School looks forward to our Field Day and Graduation Ceremonies. This year was no exception! All the members of our different teams were dressed up in their theme spirit t-shirts. They enjoyed a great day of exercise and fun. Our School staff was right there guiding, helping and enjoying the festivities with their students. Friends and families attended our 2008 graduation ceremony to cheer the accomplishments of our graduates.
Joy Bells
2008 Concert Schedule

• THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2008
  1:00 p.m. Concert
  Traditions of Hanover, Bethlehem, PA

• WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2008
  1:00 p.m. Concert
  Atlantic NE District Church of the Brethren
  Fall Senior Adult Fellowship Luncheon
  At Yoder’s Family Restaurant, New Holland, PA

• SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2008
  Evening Concert (Time to be determined)
  Disabilities Ministry Banquet
  Church of the Open Door, York, PA

• MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2008
  Evening Concert (Time to be determined)
  Hubert J. P. Schoemaker Classic
  Waynesborough Country Club, Paoli, PA

• SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2008
  3:00 p.m. Concert
  Vera Cruz Evangelical Congregational Church, Emmaus, PA

• WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2008
  1:00 p.m. Concert - Wellington at Hershey’s Mill
  West Chester, PA

• SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2008
  7:00 p.m. Concert
  Grace Evangelical Congregational Church
  Akron, PA

• SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2008
  4:00 p.m. - St. Ambrose Church
  Schuylkill Haven, PA

• FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2008
  Afternoon Concert (Time to be determined)
  St. Thomas of Villanova, Christmas Luncheon
  Rosemont, PA

Melmark
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