Behind The Scenes at Melmark
A Message from the Co-Founder

Dear Families and Friends,

Have you seen those TV ads presenting the paradox of trying to build a pyramid from the top down—pyramids with their very tops hanging from sky hooks patiently waiting for the bottom of the pyramid to collect itself and attach top to bottom. Obviously the premise is laughable. But I thought about Melmark and how we laid the foundation for the very same Melmark that is thriving today. Oh so long ago.

In 1965. Think about it. My husband, Paul, was an organic chemist; a far cry from the credentials needed for founding a facility such as ours. We had one thing going for us. We had faith. We felt that God was leading and that He would provide for any lack that we had. And He did.

And in 1997 Dr. Joanne Gillis-Donovan exhibited faith. She had faith to believe that she could build on this solid foundation of mission, backed by parents and supporters that would not only sustain this home and school that love built, but guide Melmark faithfully onward and upward. Had it all been a sham, it would have collapsed long ago. But it did not.

Melmark stands today as a testimony to the vision of two parents of a child with developmental disabilities, and to you who are reading this letter.

Today, as you walk through the halls, peer into the classrooms or visit the group homes, what is it that you feel? Do your eyes see happiness and love and friendship? Do your jaws drop in amazement when you see what some of our medically fragile students are able to accomplish? When you read the goals set by our teaching staff, do you wonder at their attainability? I did. But let me be the first to surrender. I have attained eighty-six years of living and it takes a lot to impress me, believe me. But I stand amazed at our residents’ abilities and our staff’s accomplishments. And, last but not least, I admire the capability of “hanging in there” when the days get long, the body gets weak, and when it seems that nobody is listening.

Please listen. Then, thank God with us for the world of Melmark.

From the mother of Melissa,

Miggy Krentel
Dear Family and Friends,

I hope that you all had the opportunity to enjoy the great fall weather that we experienced in Pennsylvania. Our children and adults took full advantage of all that autumn offered.

This Messenger highlights the fact that it takes many people with many diverse talents to keep Melmark running smoothly, but often you don’t know about them because they work Behind The Scenes. They include Donors, Board Members, Parents and Families, our Social Worker, Recruiters and Trainers, our Dining Services, our Quality Assurance, Facilities, Finance and Health Care Departments in Pennsylvania and in New England.

The children and adults we serve are supported by these staff with as much love, enthusiasm, and dedication as those staff that work directly with them. These less visible staff have continuing and meaningful relationships with those we serve, over time, and are more involved in their lives than might be expected. One of the things all of us at Melmark love is that we are a community who knows each other, enjoys each other, and works successfully together for the greater good of the those entrusted to our care.

I hope you enjoy your peek Behind The Scenes. I would be remiss not to introduce you to a very special “Behind the Scenes” group of ladies who have been supporting us with their time and financial support, some of them for as long as Melmark has been in business – our Women’s Executive Board (WEB) who tirelessly help with special events and decorations.

Thank you all so very much for keeping us in your hearts, for being interested in what Melmark is and does, and being partners in supporting the children and adults we serve.

I wish everyone the best of the upcoming holiday season.

Joanne Gillis-Donovan, Ph.D.
President and CEO

Cyndie Martin standing far left with the Women’s Executive Board, Dorothy Bond, Louise Elkins, Carolyn Sanville, Anne Parker, Nancy Buck. Sitting: Tillie Taylor, Nancy Kauffman, Dot Wilhelmy
Dominic Liberi was born in Philadelphia and has devoted a great deal of his energies to charitable, civic, and cultural activities and the betterment of his community.

Mr. Liberi received a B.A. in Political Science from Temple University and a J.D. degree from the Delaware Law School of Widener University where he was Associate Editor of the Law Review. He is now a Shareholder and Vice President at the law firm of Flamm, Boroff & Bacine, PC of Blue Bell, PA, where his practice includes representation of individuals, businesses, and banks in corporate law, real estate, and banking issues. His interests in community improvement and philanthropy remain strong. He has served on numerous nonprofit boards of directors including The Justinian Society and the Friends of the Italian Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Casa Farnese, Inc., a senior citizens housing complex in Philadelphia, Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site in Philadelphia and Melmark where he serves on the Finance Committee and as Chairman of the newly formed Development Committee.

Mr. Liberi enjoys volunteering his expert assistance in the development of planned giving and all aspects of fund raising. Prior to his legal career, Mr. Liberi served as an executive of the American Cancer Society in Philadelphia, raising millions for the fight against cancer while cultivating defining relationships with local and national charitable donors. As the newly appointed Chairman of the Melmark Development Committee, Mr. Liberi is working with a dedicated corps of other volunteers with high expectations. The group includes Anne Faulkner Schoemaker, Sharyn VanReepingenhen, Jeffrey S. Mitchell, Richard G. Phillips, Jr., Esq., and Eric Zee.

One of Mr. Liberi’s favorite quotes is from Sir Isaac Newton,

“If I have seen farther, it is from standing on the shoulders of giants.”
In 1975, shortly after his birth, Chris was diagnosed at Johns Hopkins Hospital with Cornelia De Lange Syndrome, a very rare genetic disorder that manifests itself in a number of physical and behavioral characteristics, developmental delays, and medical anomalies. Subsequently, his diagnosis included epilepsy and central language deficit. He was deemed autistic-like.

Chris’s father’s work called for frequent relocations; the young family traveled extensively. Unfortunately, no school could suitably accommodate Chris’s special needs. He became non-verbal and developed severe behaviors. His medications did not seem to help the struggling boy who often suffered from seizures. The family was determined to seek schooling alternatives and, in 1985, the decision was made to bring Chris to Melmark, where a team approach to Chris’s medical, therapeutic, and behavioral needs helped him progress steadily.

Soon Chris learned to be self-sufficient, more verbal, and was taken off psychotropic medications. Chris appeared happier and content. He made great strides in communication and social skills. He learned to dance, ride a bike, and smile.

In December 2005, Chris moved to a Melmark waiver home, in nearby Malvern, where his family often visits. “This is a resounding success story,” declares Chris’s mother, adding “My son’s success is due to the thoughtful planning of his program by his dedicated Melmark staff. His transition was carefully planned and he was included in every step of the process.”

The close relationship between family members and Melmark staff created a secure environment for the thirty-something young man. Chris frequently calls his mother on the telephone. He loves to have his own house key, and often delights in riding his tricycle on the quiet path around his new home. He also takes walks to his favorite pizza shop where he is always welcome.

Ask Chris’s mother what Melmark accomplished for Chris and her response is succinct. “A hug,” she says with tears in her eyes. She explains that her son had never expressed love or affection until one day, as he was spending the weekend with her, he quietly walked in the kitchen where she was preparing their meal and gave his mother a hug. Then he walked away. “He was twenty three, and, for the first time in his life, he told me that he loved me!” she recalls, still visibly emotional about that precious hug.
Melmark’s social services leader is Abby McGillivray, a seasoned problem solver and an extraordinarily caring woman who came to Melmark in 1995 with a solid social welfare/social work educational and clinical background.

In addition to her personal and family experience, Abby’s work as a psychotherapist and as a skilled social worker at Melmark has clearly shaped her philosophy. Abby has dedicated a lifetime of service to those who are not empowered, those who struggle with physical or intellectual disabilities.

Abby’s work at Melmark is multi-faceted; her responsibilities span a wide array of services for residential and day children and adults including, clinical reviews, staff supervision, advocacy with the Department of Human Services, medical issues, transitional planning evaluation, and follow through.

In her interdisciplinary approach to clients, Abby is the “bridge” that provides continuity and helps develop protocol for clients. As a talented musician, Abby loves to play at the holiday gatherings. She acts as “big sister” to young adults whose disabilities tend to inhibit their social lives.

Abby makes a difference in each and every life she touches. As a member of a profession which is committed to social justice and human rights,

Abby McGillivray is among the best in the profession.
The Human Resources department provides a wide variety of services to all of Melmark’s staff. That sounds easy enough. Just go hire qualified staff, train them in every aspect of their job, manage them, support them, and everything will be fine. Although it sounds easy, it is a complex task.

The positive impact that each and every employee has on the success of the mission to serve our students, residents, and workshop attendees takes far more. Employees have needs and service requirements as well. As those needs change, so must Melmark change its approach in providing up-to-date human resources services. We work in a dynamic environment. Just as the needs of those we serve evolve and grow, so to do those of our staff and potential staff.

The variety of services coming out of the Human Resources department ranges from recruiting, training, benefit administration, risk management, employee information systems, payroll, employee relations, and governing policy and procedures. All of these processes are necessary to remain as one of the 50 Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania (2 years in a row) and to retain a dedicated staff that is committed to the integrity and quality of Melmark’s programs.

The importance of recruiting and training the right people to work with the children and adults served by Melmark is the key to our program success. Not only must a candidate be technically qualified for a staff position, but they must also appreciate and understand our mission.

At Melmark, that responsibility is coordinated among Michelle Lisman, Recruiter, and Melissa Vitkay, Associate Director of Staff Development, and Tracy Maxwell and Juan Araujo, Staff Development Associates. Both of these areas, recruitment and staff development, are important parts of Melmark’s Human Resources department.

Michelle Lisman regularly travels to colleges, job fairs, and other recruiting venues throughout the region presenting Melmark’s employment opportunities. Her positive message about Melmark’s mission initiates follow-up action and job applications. Once the application has been completed, the recruiter and the appropriate department head reviews the application to determine the “best fit” within Melmark’s programs.

After an employment offer is accepted, the training process begins. All new staff members undergo an extensive training program directed by Melissa, Tracy and Juan. On a rotating basis, each of the training leaders addresses essential life-saving skills such as CPR, first aid, fire safety, Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations, medication administration and the safe operation of Melmark’s transportation vehicles. New employees also receive training specific to the program that they will be supporting.

Together, Michelle, Melissa, Tracy and Juan are a key resource for Melmark’s direct care staff. Their ongoing encouragement and support of our staff allows Melmark to continue to maintain its leadership role in the field.
Summer Fun!
Behind the Scenes
with Quality Assurance

Chris Tabakin, a young man full of energy and love for the people we serve, is Melmark’s Director of Quality Assurance.

His responsibility is three-fold: first and foremost to protect the health, safety and welfare of the individuals served. Second, make sure that we are in compliance with all of the various organizational, local, state, and federal requirements. Finally, he helps to coordinate ongoing improvement for the organization.

Chris is at his best when he is around the adults and children we serve. He loves to be out and about problem solving, interacting with individuals, and helping whenever possible. He regularly visits most program areas gathering information, evaluating situations, or reviewing a work environment to ensure safety. Every day brings new challenges, but he is the man to face them on behalf of the residents and staff at Melmark. Chris had this to say about his position, “Quality is vital. It needs to permeate an organization at all levels and become a culture. I see that at Melmark and that’s why I am here and I want to help advance that quality.”

We are so glad that a man of such integrity and high values is heading this “behind the scenes” department at Melmark.

Behind the Scenes
in Dining Services

If it is true that “an army marches on its stomach” then a school that feeds 800 individuals a day needs a Napoleonic approach to its culinary needs.

What would you make with 70 lbs of potatoes, 90 lbs of vegetables, 120 lbs of ground beef, 30 gallons of soup and 400 rolls? The answer is simple: Lunch for Melmark children and adults and employees! It begs the next query: What do you serve for dessert? 650 homemade cookies.

When Janis Hayes came to Melmark in 1993, she brought nearly two decades of experience in food services management. Even Napoleon Bonaparte would be proud of Janis’ accomplishments. As Director of Food Services for Sodexho, she supervises six employees and four Melmark residents who prepare and serve three meals a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.

“I love cooking for the children and adults of Melmark!” she says. “I work with a committee of residents. We select recipes, plan daily menus, and create special holiday meals. They tell me about their favorite dishes and we pick and choose so everyone finds a selection that suits their taste.”

Janis and her staff work from 5 am until 7 pm; ice, sleet, or snow. Her kitchen stocks a 5-day supply for emergency situations. “We consider our children and adults as a second family,” Janis explains. All special dietary restrictions, food allergies, tastes, special textured purees are taken into consideration. Janis and her staff attend regular training programs to keep informed about sanitation requirements, rules and regulations imposed on food handlers. A “Serve Safe” certification is also required.

Thank you Janis and team for all you do here at Melmark.
Melmark’s Facilities Department and General Services staff work behind the scenes to keep the buildings and grounds attractive, functional, and secure. The departments’ primary goal is to provide a pleasant environment where the individuals who make Melmark their home can live, learn, and grow to explore all the options that life offers. Both areas also strive to provide a workplace that gives Melmark’s employees the facilities necessary to make all of this possible.

Whether renovating buildings, repairing equipment, removing snow, or simply keeping the water running and the floors clean, the Facilities Department and General Services staff are on the job.

However, there is another facet of the department’s involvement at Melmark that isn’t “part of the job.” Over the years, the friendships formed between many of “The Crew” and the folks we care for here at Melmark have meant a great deal. They have become journeys of awareness and appreciation (sometimes life altering), expressed in conversation over a cup of coffee, a smile, a high five for a job well done, a trip to the ball game, or leading Sunday Chapel.

Melmark is a special place, because we serve very special people.
To an outside observer, the daily operation of the Finance Department is like watching a sports team. Each member brings dedication and talent to their “position,” and as the team works together in support of Melmark, the result is a winner!

“We really focus on teamwork,” points out Wendy Kelly, Payroll and Contracts Manager. “When you consider the different roles – Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Cash Requests, Payroll, Senior Accountants, Controller, and Chief Financial Officer – we have to work closely together in support of the children and adults that Melmark serves.”

The positive attitude in the Finance Department directly benefits both the individuals served and Melmark’s staff. On any given day, the finance staff is busy processing check requests or paying bills so that the direct care staff will have the necessary resources to support those served in our program. Additional responsibilities include preparing monthly budgets and other financial reports for program directors, senior administrators, or the Board of Directors so that Melmark can continue to maintain a strong financial base. And of course, every 2 weeks the Finance Department prepares and distributes payroll checks to the staff. “It’s great seeing 550 smiles twice a month,” Wendy says with her own smile.

“Among the present staff, the years of service to Melmark range from 18 months to 35 years,” Wendy notes. “We all came to Melmark from different work settings.

Behind the Scenes in Finance

Our collective experience helps us address a parent, staff member, funding agency, or vendor’s questions or problems.”

Always ending on a positive note, Wendy states: “The best days for the Finance Department are when a young adult stops by for his or her personal money to take a trip to the mall or a visit to their family. They are showing their independence and growth and that’s what Melmark is all about.”

From left to right (starting at bottom left):
Colleen Dechant, Controller
Sandy Taylor, Payroll Coordinator
Carol Harvey, Staff Accountant
Lynn Byerly, Chief Financial Officer
Maxine Ansbach, Staff Accountant
Tosha Taylor, Accounts Payable Coordinator
Karen Ingram, Accounts Receivable Coordinator
Wendy Kelly, Contracts Manager
Over the last 10 years, we have come to serve many different groups of individuals, each with their own health care needs, funding sources and regulatory requirements. We have the ever-increasing children’s school, residential and day programs. We have adult federal/state co-pay programs: the Intermediate Care Facility for the Mentally Retarded and Community Waiver Homes. We also have campus residential programs that are completely funded by the State called Private Licensed Facilities or PLFS.

In response to these changes, during the past ten months, all of our nurses, have been engaged in a strategic planning process. This process has focused on maximizing the nursing talent we have by adjusting some of our administrative structure and nursing lines in response to these changes in our population and programs.

Building on our primary care nursing model, we are moving toward an even more localized system of nursing services. In the new structure, there will no longer be a centralized Health Care Executive Director of a single, centralized Health Care Department. Instead, healthcare oversight will be decentralized over Child, Adult and ICF/Waiver Programs.

Each of these programs will have a nursing service designed to meet the unique needs of the individuals in each of those respective programs. Each service will have a senior nurse in charge.

Ellen Setter will be this charge nurse for the State funded adults; Lovinu Simmons for the ICF and Arlene Muller will be responsible for the children’s area.

The new model has been fully designed and is expected to be implemented in February. Our nurses will select the program they would like to work in, with extensive training being offered to both the nurses and support staff. As with all new designs, we will implement it, monitor it, and redesign whatever elements are indicated.

Congratulations to all the nurses on a planning process well done.
Behind the Scenes at Melmark

Each day, public school vans bring 73 day students to the Melmark New England school building on River Road in Andover, Massachusetts. Additionally, the 36 residential students arrive in their house vans accompanied by their teachers and overnight staff. As they enter the school, our receptionists, Sonia Mitchell and Marguerite Poleo, greet them. Another school day has started.

Mercy Mutindwa and Mary Alleva staff the Melmark New England Human Resources Department. Both Mercy and Mary focus a majority of their efforts on recruiting direct care staff, teachers, and ABA counselors, while also providing a full range of HR support for the staff.

Brian Liu-Constant is the Director of Early Childhood Programs and Dr. Florence Di Gennaro Reed is the Director of Professional Development, Training and Research; both focus on ensuring the highest level of program success and outcomes.

Frans Van Herp leads a staff that maintains the physical facilities where our students live and learn. Fran is assisted by John Connolly and Humphrey Mutindwa as they make sure that the school and residences are clean, safe and inviting everyday.

Throughout the school day and in the evenings with on-call support, the school nurses, Lindsey Davey, Krista Hudson, Ali Phair and Nursing Assistant Renee Daniel manage the daily medical and health care needs of our students.
Cynthia Catania, along with Dr. Florence DiGennaro Reed, regularly present a training and orientation session that help our talented staff to become even more effective teachers and therapists.

Our three administrative support staff, Vanessa Wellington, Stephen Young, and Karen Fitzgerald keep the voluminous amounts of paperwork on track.

Marie Liang, our Accounts Receivable clerk, addresses the invoicing, contracts, and tuition collections for our programs, allowing us to maintain strong daily operations.

Jim Gowan, Coordinator of Vocational Training, leads our vocational services program. Two of our students, Chris and Sam, are accompanied by Jim after returning from their workday at the Andover Inn, located on the Phillips Andover Academy campus.

Managing our information and technology needs are Stephen Girard and Scott Galbraith (seated) who provide the network, desktop and technology support for the New England program.

To ensure that each day goes smoothly in our school and community homes, there are many dedicated, “behind the scenes” staff members who are often not seen, but whose help is critical to the success of our programs. Thanks to all!

*All in all, it is yet another successful day at Melmark New England.*
Reaching for the Stars  ★ Melmark Gala 2008

Saturday, March 29, 2008

Park Hyatt Philadelphia at the Bellevue