Melmark Celebrates the 2008 World Series Champions
Dear Friends,

Sometimes, when my enthusiasm boils over, I scarce can find the words to express bare-bones praise for some accomplishment I have witnessed without sounding forced or false.

“They will never believe me.” I am apt to murmur. For it seems to me that I have used up all my words and that there is nothing fresh or new to say about what seems so valid and not worthy. How can I make someone who has never been on the campus of Melmark catch the wonder of the creative programs designed to meet the special needs of our special family?

Could I have ever dreamed of a Melmark, were it not for the birth of our sixth child, Melissa born in 1963. She is truly God’s special gift to Paul and I. Was it really that long ago? Often dreams born when the dreamers are well into life’s journey are “dead upon arrival.” They die before they get out of the dreamer’s head. And sometimes they die before they can be passed on to the next one waiting for that baton to be passed. Sadly, they never reach the next outstretched hand.

What if our dream of a home and school for children with developmental and physical disabilities had not been caught and carried by Dr. Joanne Gillis-Donovan, one with the same fire burning in her heart? What if God had not given her Marilyn, her sister with Down Syndrome, so her heart and soul would be moved to realize the dream? What if she had not been so uniquely qualified to run the race set before her?

And the dream widens… rippling out to our parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, yes, those who have been touched by the special needs of our special family… other dream catchers! For you see, as our dreams for our special children have evolved, Melmark’s needs and mission have grown.

Could I ever have imagined how creative and adept the Melmark staff has been to adapt to each new challenge presented to them?

In the end, I am left to quietly praise God with a thankful soaring heart. Can you catch the dream too?

Mildred E. Krentel
Co-Founder

“When we are dreaming alone it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality.”
Dear Friends and Family,

Everyone in this Messenger represents themselves and countless others who have caught the dream passed to us by Paul and Mildred Krentel twelve years ago. I, for one, am pleased that I was in the field to catch the dream and run with it, indispensably supported by an amazing team who saw all that Melmark was, and dreamed, with me, of all it could become. Dreams keep us focused on what matters going forward. Careful planning, accompanied by diverse targeted actions, implemented by dedicated, talented people, supported by families and friends like you, turn those dreams into reality.

It is a particularly wonderful time to talk about catching the dream, amidst the unabashed joy of watching the Philadelphia Phillies win the World Series. They caught a dream that had been eluding them for the last 28 years, just as the Red Sox did in Boston in 2004 and 2007. Neither team lost sight of their dream and each developed a plan, turned it into targeted actions and became dream catchers. We celebrate these two wonderful teams in this Messenger. I also want to underline that The Boston Red Sox have been an integral part of catching our dreams at Melmark New England and running with them.

And so, this Messenger is all about our own dream catchers: a dedicated and philanthropic Board member; a parent who works tirelessly as an advocate at the state level for programs and funding for young adults with autism; our diverse staff representing 44 countries who celebrated at this year’s annual Heritage Festival; the families and staff of Melmark New England enjoying their annual family picnic and 2008 Greater Boston Walk for Autism; our Melmark families and staff who participated in the Philadelphia Walk for Autism; the amazing volunteers of our very successful Pennsylvania and Massachusetts golf tournaments; our dedicated staff at Aston teaching our residents how to grow their own food; our creative marketing department who designed and planned our first professional conference at Melmark attended by more than 150 professionals, family members, and staff.

Thanks to your generosity, we will be breaking ground on our new Adult Day Center, after two years of infra-structure work. It will be an eighteen-month project. We are just finishing the new greenhouse at the Meadows thanks to a kind and generous parent. By February we will have the ramp and circular driveway in front of the Multi-Purpose Center completed. New school space, including six new classrooms, as well as teacher meeting space begins in the spring.

None of this would be possible without your continuing generosity and support. I thank each one of you for enriching the lives of those who most need our care.

I wish everyone holidays surrounded by the joy and warmth of family and friends.

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

“...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.”
As far back as he can remember, Richard G. Phillips, Jr. wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. Perhaps the source of his devotion to the betterment of humanity stems from having an older brother with disabilities. “It took me a long time to realize that my brother Tony had special needs. I was the baby of the family and received so much attention that, for the longest time, I remained unaware of the trauma that had impacted my family,” Richard says.

Eventually, the little brother learned to watch over his disabled sibling. Richard, his sisters and their parents stayed very close to Tony, even after he became a resident at Melmark. A family tradition of caring, support and sharing in Melmark’s governance continues.

Upon receiving his BA from Yale University, Richard went abroad and earned a Master’s degree from Cambridge University. When he graduated from Georgetown University Law Center, he had already interned with the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the law firm of Steptoe & Johnson and the U.S. Department of Justice. His focus remained on constitutional issues impacting the lives of those challenged by mental, physical or ethnic issues.

Richard sees his subsequent service to U.S. Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Patrick J. Leahy as privileges.

How has his work in civil rights issues, international trade and public policy, high profile political campaigns, high tech and intellectual property prepared Richard for his advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities? He asserts that working with Senator Kennedy on issues that effected social changes empowered him to support laws that gave a voice to the invisible, the unheard, and the minorities that often go forgotten.

Richard G. Phillips, Jr. joined the Melmark Board of Directors in 2006, shortly after he became CEO of Pilot Freight Services, a thriving company led by his father, Richie Phillips. The opportunity to join in his father’s business was a logical expansion of his role as a principled corporate leader with an extraordinary social conscience. “Business is growing at a fast pace locally and internationally. I need to travel frequently and far. Thus, I am entrusted with the growth of a business that is impacting many lives, foremost, our 2200 employees,” he adds.

How would prestigious schools and an active part in the development of federal legislation prepare Richard for his new role on Melmark’s board? His reply is simply stated: “I help support Melmark’s mission because my brother receives superb treatment and others should have access to this level of care. I remain very active in public service because changes are needed that will benefit people and improve their lives. I feel a responsibility for those who cannot speak for themselves to help preserve their rights and better their lives.”

“I help support Melmark’s mission because my brother receives superb treatment and others should have access to this level of care.”
While growing up in Philadelphia, Mary O’Brien Maurer was acutely aware of the special needs of one of her five siblings. An older brother, Kevin, had a learning disability and the entire family helped meet his needs. Dennis, another older brother, soon developed a strong interest in special needs advocacy and Mary volunteered her assistance.

Mary chose a career in nursing and specialized in emergency medicine. She married David Maurer and continued to work in the ER as she raised her three children, Brian, Chris and Julie. However, by his third birthday, Chris started to exhibit language difficulties and promptly began to regress, losing his advanced verbal skills, developing hyperactivity and irregular behaviors. The medical diagnosis confirmed that Chris suffered from autism and he entered the Timothy School where he remained until his sixteenth birthday.

The Maurers visited many programs and searched for one that would meet their son’s many needs. They selected Melmark. “The school takes into consideration the development of a teenager while it also acknowledges the fact that the learning curve may have many steep ups and downs. It is a great nurturing environment,” she says.

“My advocacy role started early. However the needs of individuals with autism has really focused my energy. ”

Mary’s calm and soft-spoken demeanor hides a committed activist whose unrelenting advocacy lead to her selection as a member of The Pennsylvania Autism Task Force, a strategic group assembled by PA Secretary of Welfare Estelle B. Richman. Mary worked with over 250 volunteers and produced the blueprint for the development of a comprehensive plan to insure the future and growth of individuals with autism. The plan led to the creation of The Bureau of Autism Services, presently under the direction of Nina Wall-Cote.

“The number of individuals with intellectual disabilities continues to increase; we must strive to provide greater lifetime support,” she says. According to Mary, grass-roots advocacy has made a critical change in Pennsylvania but there is still much to be done.

Listening to Mary’s passionate commitment, one wonders if and when she manages to relax. She recounts a recent trip to Ireland, her interest in skiing and spending time with friends. Her closeness to her family is evident and her smile broadens as she tells of her mother’s recent surprise birthday party. “With all my siblings and fifty family members, it was a blast,” she says.

“My advocacy role started early. However the needs of individuals with autism has really focused my energy.”
Go Red Sox...
What could be a more appropriate statement about Melmark and what we do than this year’s Heritage Festival slogan? Melmark’s diversity both among our staff and those we serve, allows for the entire community to grow and learn from each other. Our ability to welcome staff from many different cultures, and have them work so well together is a critical resource as we continue to provide high quality programs and services. With a great deal of pride, every year our staff participates in the Melmark Heritage Festival. This year’s celebration, Melmark’s third annual festival, was very well received. The event creates an air of excitement as staff prepare and share food recipes from their native country; plan their colorful wardrobe for the Fashion Show; and participate in international sports and dance competitions.

The most stirring of all the events is the Parade of Flags in Center Circle, when staff proudly march behind their home country’s flag (44 countries this year!) and sing their country’s national anthem. It is an extraordinary sight, as the flags ring the perimeter of Center Circle for a few days before and after the Heritage Festival. Most inspiring is that all wave under the American flag that flies from the Center Circle flagpole.

When the Festival ends, staff begins sharing ideas and plans for next year. Diversity is recognized and promoted 365 days a year at Melmark, but for one day it truly gives everyone the opportunity to celebrate as one – Unity, Respect, and Appreciation.
Family Fun at Melmark New England

The Dream is caught in Massachusetts

On September 20, Melmark New England held its annual family picnic. More than 150 staff, students and their families attended.

Kinyua, son of Human Resource Manager Mercy Mutindwa, hams it up for the camera.

Parents look on as their children play in the giant castle bouncer.

Karen Fitzgerald and Peter Troy manned the grills.

Melmark New England student, Cogan enjoys lunch with staff and his family.

Peter Alabiso and his son Michael talk to one of the guests at the picnic.

Melmark New England student, Sam, plays on the playground.

Melmark New England student, Sam, enjoys lunch with staff and his family.
ONCE AGAIN MELMARK ENJOYED PERFECT FALL WEATHER ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2008 SETTING A BEAUTIFUL STAGE FOR THE 3RD ANNUAL HUBERT J. P. SCHOEMAKER CLASSIC. THIS PREMIER GOLF EVENT BENEFITING MELMARK HONORS THE MEMORY OF A MELMARK PARENT AND BOARD MEMBER, HUBERT J. P. SCHOEMAKER, PIONEERING SCIENTIST, COMMUNITY LEADER AND FOUNDER OF CENTOCOR AND NEURONYX.

Hubert’s vision and dedication helped to establish the Philadelphia region as a national biotechnology center. His passion and generosity were especially focused on Melmark, where his daughter, Maureen, has resided for the past 27 years. Against this backdrop of love and generosity, Dr. Schoemaker’s family, friends and colleagues have focused their own generous spirit and enthusiasm in support of this amazing charitable event.

This year’s Schoemaker Classic Co-Presented by GlaxoSmithKline and Accenture, hosted close to 230 golfers at three of the areas most prestigious courses: The ACE Club, White Manor Country Club, and Waynesborough Country Club. This event, which supports
Melmark’s many programs and services, would not be possible without the careful planning and dedication of the Schoemaker Classic Advisory Board, Co-Chaired by Lee Ahrensford, President, Ahrensford & Associates; Mickey Flynn, President, Pennsylvania Biotechnology Association; and Denny Willson, President and CEO, Cytokine PharmaSciences, Inc.

“Since 2006, it has been extremely gratifying and fulfilling to have worked on a team that has raised over $1 million in net proceeds for Melmark; indeed, the inspiration behind the event is directly related to how Hubert Schoemaker lived the final years of his life, with courage, dignity and humility,” noted Lee Ahrensford, Hubert’s friend and a founding Co-chair for the Schoemaker Classic. In addition to a great round of golf, the event featured a $1 Million Shootout in which 15 lucky golfers, whose names were drawn at random, attempted to score a hole-in-one on the 9th hole at Waynesborough for a grand prize of one million dollars. Golfers also tried for a hole-in-one at a designated hole on each of the courses in hopes of winning a new car. Golf was followed by an exceptional dinner and exciting silent and live auctions, with close to 300 guests in attendance. The Classic’s net proceeds totaled $370,000 bringing the event’s three-year total to $1,015,000! Proceeds from this year’s classic will support a number of vital capital projects at Melmark’s Berwyn, Pennsylvania Campus.

On behalf of Melmark’s Board of Directors, staff and the many children and adults we serve, thanks to all the sponsors, golfers, auction donors, dinner guests and volunteers who made the 2008 Hubert J. P. Schoemaker Classic a great success.

Jamie Stahle, a Melmark New England Board member and parent, with his wife Karyn and their son Tyler.

Master of Ceremonies Mark Menery helps Charlie Alex welcome the guests to the dinner.

Along with Jim and Angela Alex, and golf pro Mike Menery, Peter Troy and Margot Regan were the lead members of the event committee.

Jim Alex, a member of Melmark New England’s Board of Directors, with his wife Angela and his son Charlie. The Alex family chaired the first *fore* Melmark New England in 2006 and has remained the driving force in the continued success of this annual event.

Former Red Sox left-fielder Jim Rice (second from left) devoted a big part of the day with the golfers. Here he poses with some lucky fans!

Larry Cancro (above), a member of Melmark New England’s Board of Directors with his wife Luise and daughter Laura Marie. Larry helps secure auction items for this annual event and Luise and Laura Marie spent the day helping behind the scenes.
About a year ago, one of our fantastic Aston staff members, Latrice Jones, had the great idea of planting a garden with the clients. So this spring, we jumped into action. With the support of staff, especially Bawu Harris and George Armah, the residents of Aston A and Aston B, planted cucumbers, corn, tomatoes, and potatoes. For two months, residents and staff enjoyed “tending their garden.”

Our residents learned a lot from this experience. They witnessed first-hand the growth cycle – planting the seed, watching the plant develop and grow, and harvesting the vegetable. They also learned that for anything to grow it needs care and attention. Watering their plants was something that the residents looked forward to as they returned home from work. They felt a sense of ownership and they willingly came out to do their job. Another positive aspect of the garden project was that it offered great outdoor activity for everyone.

The residents all had big smiles on their faces as they watched the vegetables grow from a small plant to a produce item that they recognized from their shopping trips to the supermarket. Growing the corn was the most fun for all. Every afternoon the residents would harvest ears of corn that were ready to be picked; pull the husk and remove the silk; and then turn the corn over to the staff who placed it in the pot for cooking. While the corn was cooking, other residents helped cut tomatoes, cucumbers or prepared a potato salad for dinner.

Throughout the summer, 16 residents lives were enriched because of a creative idea that allowed everyone to get their hands dirty together. Thank you Aston A and B staff for all of your hard work and support for this project.

written by Annemarie Berg
Melmark’s First Community Conference

A Journey to Adulthood

written by Michael Donovan

On July 31st, Melmark hosted a professional conference, in our newly renovated multi-purpose center, entitled “Journey to Adulthood.” The conference was designed to address the common issues confronting families and caregivers of older students with autism spectrum disorders who are transitioning into young adulthood.

Peter F. Gerhardt, EdD, president and Chair of the Organization for Autism Research (OAR), was the keynote speaker for the conference. Over 150 family members, special education professionals, social workers, and Melmark staff members attended the all-day event.

Dr. Gerhardt’s morning presentation, “Bridges to Adulthood for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Targeting Skills for the Next Environment,” focused on behavioral issues as well as ways to train and support an individual with autism spectrum disorder for what Dr. Gerhardt called, “participation in life.” Throughout the presentation, Dr. Gerhardt engaged in an informative and lively exchange with audience members.

Conference participants enjoyed a buffet-style lunch in Center Circle under beautiful, sunny skies. For many of the attendees, it was their first visit to Melmark; after a short walk, all were impressed by the campus and program offerings.

The afternoon session was a panel discussion led by Dr. Gerhardt with Dennis McAndrews, a Berwyn-based special-needs attorney and expert in disability law; Dr. Stephen Luce, Melmark vice-president for clinical training and research; Dr. Anthony Rostain, director of the social-disorder program at the University of Pennsylvania; Nick Lian, financial adviser for Merrill Lynch; Abby McGillivray, Melmark director of social services; and Mary Maurer, a pediatric nurse and parent of a transitioning young adult with autism. A question-and-answer session followed the panel discussion.

Also attending the conference was Pennsylvania Speaker of the House, Dennis O’Brien (R-169) who authored the recently passed House Bill 1150 which requires private insurers to provide treatment coverage (up to $36,000 annually) for individuals under the age of 21 who have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. Speaker O’Brien, along with Nina Wall Cote, the Department of Public Welfare’s Director of the Bureau of Autism Services, updated the audience on recent initiatives and resources designed to assist caregivers as they develop transition plans for a young adult with an autism spectrum disorder.

The conference focused on behavioral issues as well as ways to train and support an individual with autism spectrum disorder.
The Dream Walkers of Massachusetts

On Sunday, October 19, more than 20,000 people participated in the Greater Boston Autism Speaks “Walk Now for Autism” at Suffolk Downs in East Boston. Melmark New England sponsored a team and many of our students, families and friends took part in the festivities, helping to raise thousands of dollars for Autism Speaks.

Melmark New England student Billy takes a moment to make a sun catcher at the Melmark New England table. Each participant in the information fair was asked to provide a hands-on activity for the children.

Melmark New England parent and member of the Board of Directors, Larry Cancro, addresses the crowd before the walk. Mr. Cancro is also the New England Chapter Board Chair for Autism Speaks.

The Melmark New England team help set up the school’s booth. An information fair was held prior to the walk.

Crowds pass through the information fair prior to the walk.

Many Melmark New England students and staff participated in this event.

Walkers take to the track at Suffolk Downs.
“Team Melmark,” a group of participants, that comprised Melmark staff, their families, and friends, enthusiastically participated in WALK NOW Philadelphia, which was held Saturday, September 20, at Citizen’s Bank Park in South Philadelphia. WALK NOW is a fundraiser for the Autism Speaks Foundation, which focuses on raising support for autism research, awareness and outreach.

Michael Donovan, Marketing Coordinator, served as team captain for the third year in a row. “This is a great event that brings the entire autism community together. Families, staff and those we serve look forward to the event and support it every year. As a group, Team Melmark raised $1,660 for autism research.” Michael said.

With beautiful early autumn weather, 10,000 supporters walked along the concourse level and the outer perimeter of the Phillies home field. Peter McGuinness, Director of Admissions and Michael Donovan represented Melmark at the Resource Fair for interested families and caregivers.