

# hms school news

HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy | Celebrating 125 Years | Founded 1882 | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania | FALL 2009

## Admissions to HMS Follows Diverse Paths



Katelyn Blaszczyk (right), dressed in Halloween finery, shares a moment with her one-to-one nurse, Maryann Pale.

Enrollment scenarios at HMS vary widely. Youngsters' needs, their parents' philosophy and expectations, their school districts' options and HMS's capacity to accommodate the students' challenges all play a role. Whatever the outcome, HMS works as a team with each family and their school district, proposing the most realistic recommendations for their child and evaluating the fit with HMS's program.

Katelyn Blaszczyk enrolled at

HMS in September at age 16, after receiving homebound services for three years because of a severe seizure disorder. Eight years ago, her school district recommended HMS, but at that time HMS could not safely accommodate her medical condition.

In spring of 2009, Katelyn's mother Donna, connected with HMS social worker, Nancy Hale, at a disabilities trade show. Because HMS has increased its capacity to

care for medically involved youngsters, Ms. Hale suggested an HMS tour and a current evaluation for Katelyn. Mrs. Blaszczyk discussed the option with her school district, and an official referral was made. Katelyn was offered admission and attends as a day student, with a one-to-one nurse.

Mrs. Blaszczyk is thrilled with the staff's proactive approach. "At HMS they hear a need one time and they run with it. I'm not used to people responding so quickly," she says.

Like Katelyn, Morgan Sidor, who is only five, received home services because of his medical fragility. When early-intervention services ended, his parents learned about HMS through Morgan's one-to-one nurse.

Morgan's mother, Hiroko, visited HMS. When Morgan's evaluation resulted in an offer of admission, he started one-day a week during ESY (Extended School Year) to monitor his stamina and build his tolerance for a school program. In September, he enrolled on a part-time schedule, slowly building up to five full days. His school district is involved and supportive of working out this customized plan, including transportation that allows Morgan to attend HMS.

School has been an adventure for Morgan after being home. Although safety initially prompted parental concerns over his attending school, Mrs. Sidor reports great satisfaction with all that he is experiencing at HMS.

Ryan Law, an 11-year-old, transferred to HMS this year from Overbrook School for the Blind, another specialized school.

*continued on page 4*

## HMS Merits Department of Public Welfare Certification

HMS's residential program has earned certification by Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare, Division of Youth and Families, recognizing the school's compliance with DPW requirements and capacity to meet students' needs. DPW's formal recognition is particularly significant when out-of-state families and their school districts consider an HMS placement and seek objective evaluation of the residential program.

Dee Avegnon, who has been named Director of Residential Services, led the process that involved several levels of evaluation, site visits by DPW representatives and detailed paperwork. Certification insures that employees in the residence meet state standards and that their employment and training records are in order. DPW evaluates the program's ability to meet students' needs and that all procedures are in place for each resident's Individual Service Plan. It also evaluates the physical site for comfort and safety standards such as adequate space and emergency evacuation plans.

Ms. Avegnon says that while the two-year certification effort was time consuming, it was eased by the fact that HMS had already formalized its internal policies and procedures for the residence at a level that exceed DPW standards. HMS's policies encompass not only students' safety and comfort, but also lay out a residential plan for practicing skills and for enjoying a high quality of residential life.



## Executive Director's Message

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD

This has been an exhilarating fall at HMS. We've integrated many new students. And with completion of the Gowen Education Wing, we've acclimated to new and renovated space for our programs. We love the opportunities it affords.

Larger, more comfortable spaces have been created to ease our work with students and accommodate their equipment. Several more spacious classrooms allow multiple activities to take place at one time. CNAs enjoy the convenience of better designed toilet and changing rooms. The art program relocated to a room with natural light in the hub of our education program. We are also renovating a larger, more accessible space for the Sensorium.

We now have a dedicated music space—the Nicholas Bracaglia Music Room. No longer an "itinerant" music therapist, Brad Biederman can maintain all of his materials and equipment in one place where students come to him for therapy, for small-group rehearsals and other music activities.

The Assistive Technologist now works from a centrally located office where she can respond more easily to staff requests and hold trainings. Nursing stations on both the lower and main levels ensure that nurses are accessible to students wherever their education and therapies take place. The Director of Residential services has moved to an office on the first floor of Harris Hall.

Our historic chapel, refurbished as the Vogt Student Center, is functioning well for resident students' after-school programs and as another location for group activities during the school day. The small dining room created as part of the new Harris Hall residence provides residents a cozier evening dining space as well as a quieter lunchtime option.

The construction phase for these projects demanded considerable patience and sacrifice. We're pleased to confirm that all have proved to be well designed and responsive to the needs of students and staff. We're very grateful both to our donors for making these improvements possible and to our staff for their flexibility.



## Guest Reader Sensations

Tommy Travers gets ready to touch "Jackie" the skink, with help from assistant teacher Karen Levin during a visit from Laurie Smith Wood, education director for the Elmwood Park Zoo. Emily Aiello looks on.

## HMS Enjoys Capital Improvement Projects

The final phase of renovations to HMS's Gowen Education Wing is complete. The capital improvements effort that started several years ago with groundbreaking for Harris Hall, a state-of-the-art student residence, has now come full circle. Construction took place in several phases to allow uninterrupted school operations.

Students and staff are fully utilizing the enlarged classrooms, dedicated music room, new art room, activities room for resident students, more conveniently located nurses stations and critical office/training space for assistive technology. The school's day and residential programs now occupy separate wings, each designed to best accommodate students' needs and activities, yet also integrated, with a comfortable flow between them.

Receptions were held in recent months to dedicate the refurbished chapel as the Vogt Student Center in memory of Lorine E. Vogt, long-time HMS board member, benefactor and chair of the capital campaign; the Gowen Education Wing in honor of the Gowen family, whose members have served HMS since it founding in 1882; and the Nicholas Bracaglia Music Room that memorializes Nick, a much-loved HMS student.



## Hands On Learning

Skyler Granville demonstrates his communication device for Friends Central School students and their faculty chaperone during their first day at HMS as part of a three-day Service Learning Project. The teens will also return for two days next spring.

## NEW SAVE THE DATE!

September 28, 2010

*"Serving All Students: Meeting the Needs of the Child with Complex Disabilities"*

at PaTTAN King of Prussia

A symposium for special education professionals hosted by HMS School has been rescheduled.



## Visiting Legislator

PA State Representative Tom Murt greets Carolyn Millar, a student from his legislative district, during his recent tour of HMS to observe the school's specialized services.



## Halloween Antics

Above: The three witches of HMS cast their spell at the Halloween dance. From left, Abby Guthrie, Shannon Ward and Ashley Overton, with assistant teacher Alyshia Reid.

Below: Ryan Law relaxes among his bathtub bubbles, with a smile from his dad, Steve.

## Mary Ann Wilson: "Raising" HMS Students for 47 Years

Mary Ann Wilson took care of HMS students for 47 years before retiring in June. With warmth and understanding, she helped generations of youngsters adjust to HMS and enjoy school life.

Caregiving has been central to Mrs. Wilson's identity both at home and at work. She took responsibility for a younger sister and brother after their mother's death, and she reared a daughter.

She arrived at HMS in 1962 to become a house mother, at that time caring for children with polio. She shares anecdotes about youngsters she cared for and life at HMS almost 50 years ago. Over the decades, Mrs. Wilson saw many changes, as polio epidemics waned and the school focused on children with cerebral palsy. Today, she says, students' needs are so much more involved. But her philosophy in working with children has remained consistent.

She combines firmness and expectations with affection. "You have to get involved with the kids and let them get to know you...If a child is trying to tell you something, you



Mary Ann Wilson have to take the time to listen while they get their point across," she says. "You need to treat these children the way you treat your child at home."

Mrs. Wilson takes pleasure in watching children progress over time and believes in pushing and encouraging them to acquire new skills. "You can do it," she exhorts. "When you've worked hard with a child and you see later on that he has kept the skill, it's a great satisfaction."

Retirement has been short lived. Mrs. Wilson has returned a few hours a week to help with lunchtime feedings. She smiles, "HMS has been like my home away from home."



As a house mother at HMS in the early 1960's, Mary Ann Wilson fixes a young resident's hair.



## Parents Corner

By Catania Tomlin

It has been a long hard journey for a better future for my daughter. My name is Catania Tomlin and I'm the mother of a young lady, age 20, with cerebral palsy and severe developmental disabilities. Shanea is my reason for moving on. We had to overcome many obstacles, having a different opinion from our school district on Shanea's educational needs. I felt that her high school's Multiple Disabilities Support class was not giving her enough. This struggle became overwhelming for me, and for a while, I gave up. Even through it all Shanea never stopped smiling that smile that encouraged me to do what I believe was best for her.

Several years ago, I ran across a woman whose daughter was an old classmate of Shanea's, and we had much to talk about. I asked if she was pleased with her daughter's school. She started telling me good things about HMS. That information was all I needed. Soon after, I visited HMS. I knew this was my mission from the minute I stepped foot in the door. I felt that this was the place for Shanea—it was very well equipped to handle her needs. Eventually, I had to handle negotiations through a lawyer and go to some hearings but it was all worth it in the end.

Shanea is now in her second year at HMS. The staff is great. She is doing well, and the school has helped bring out another side to Shanea, that I always knew was there. The school is helping me plan for her transition into the future. This was my goal and for once I'm pleased with the program. This was my journey to HMS—a long hard journey, but Shanea and I never gave up, Shanea with her smile and me with determination.

## Correction

In the Summer 2009 issue, a photo caption on page 2 misspelled the name of Alyshia Reid, assistant teacher. We sincerely apologize.

# Admissions to HMS Follows Diverse Paths

*continued from page 1*

His parents approached HMS about ESY because he was undergoing major orthopedic surgery and needed a program that could accommodate his medical issues. They were pleased to find both nursing staff and a therapy/education team who were comfortable handling Ryan. HMS worked together with his school district to plan for ESY.

"We found out quickly that Ryan was making progress in areas we wouldn't have imagined while recuperating from major surgery," says his mother, Lee. Communication and mobility were becoming bigger issues in his education plan.

"The HMS staff 'gets' Ryan," she adds. "They were working on communication, power mobility and mobility in general...Around the four-week mark we realized this might be it." She gives kudos to their West Chester School District for making the transition happen in time for the new school year and to Overbrook for preparing Ryan for this next step.

When Eric Dreisbach turned five, his parents looked at a variety of school options, including HMS, but felt most comfortable with a nearby public school classroom that provided special education and opportunities for mainstream integration. When the program closed, Eric moved to a classroom that offered fewer supports for youngsters with complex issues.

Sandra Dreisbach, Eric's mother, rediscovered HMS at the school's 125th anniversary conference. After research, numerous visits and weighing the advantages of HMS's program over a local school with more integration in their community, Eric's parents chose HMS. At 14, Eric made an easy transition and no longer required an aide to work individually with him.

HMS's specialized programs attract out-of-state placements as well as local students. Abigail Guthrie, age nine and in her third year at HMS as a day student,

comes from a rural school district in California whose representatives agreed that her needs require a highly specialized program. Abigail's mother, Megan, researched and visited HMS.

"I was shocked, scared. I had never seen a segregated setting with nursing and therapy services," she says. "Her old school is on the grounds of a public school and mainstreams its students for some activities. But I knew HMS was what Abby needed."

The Guthrie's school district representatives also visited HMS. Following Abby's evaluation and an offer of admission, the Guthries and their district negotiated an agreement. Mrs. Guthrie transports Abby to HMS daily from her apartment in Philadelphia.

"It's a huge decision and challenge to our family life..." says Mrs. Guthrie, "but I've never seen Abby so happy. She has truly found her home at HMS."

Families who live at a distance can agonize over whether to enroll their youngster in HMS's residential program. At age 15, Marc Riegler from Churchville, PA, is in his second year as a 5-day resident. His parents were concerned as he approached middle-school that his needs for specialized instruction to support areas like communication and power mobility were increasing. They visited several schools and consulted with a United Cerebral Palsy advisor. Their school district representatives worked with HMS administration to identify transition goals and a program for Marc.

Marc's family worried about a long daily commute, but also struggled with his being away from home during the week. "It's been wonderful," says Lance Riegler. "We see a huge difference in a year. Everything is at your fingertips at HMS."



Morgan Sidor, pictured with his father, James, is now experiencing school life because HMS can accommodate his medical issues.



## HMS School News

Fall 2009

A publication of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy, dedicated to reporting about student life, school programs and important events.

### Anne P. Wilmerding

President of the Board of Trustees

### Diane Gallagher Ph.D.

Executive Director

4400 Baltimore Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
215/222-2566; fax 215/222-1889  
admin@hmsschool.org  
www.hmsschool.org

HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting children from any locality without regard to race, religion, gender or country of origin.

The Mission of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy is to educate, nurture, and care for children and youth with motor impairments who may also have other disabilities resulting from brain injury with the goal of assisting each individual in achieving his or her maximum potential. HMS School aims to facilitate independence and improve the quality of life for its students in a safe and secure environment so they can lead fulfilling, stimulating lives in their present and future environments.

