

# hms school news

HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy • Founded 1882 • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • JULY 2015

## Executive Director's Message

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD

Across the country, graduates are celebrating the culmination of years of hard work in school as they transition from one stage of life into another. At HMS, too, we are celebrating. This year, six students—Steven Bomze, William Geilfuss, William Hackett, Eubie Hodges, Marlee Luckinbill, and Emily White-man—are graduating from HMS and transitioning into their next stage of full-fledged adulthood. They have learned skills to move toward that stage as engaged, active participants who will make choices, develop friendships and spend their days involved, planning and enjoying leisure activities, keeping up with their physical and communication skills, volunteering, and even attending classes.



Everything we do is intended to open doors for our students and students like them to experience life as fully as possible. In this newsletter, you'll read about each of our graduates, and also about one current and one former student who have recently reached significant goals - one became an Eagle Scout and the other, earned a college scholarship.

At HMS, we focus on the individual, the whole child, as a well-rounded participant in their family, community, and learning environment. The expertise our team brings to their education and care, and our understanding of the importance of providing an environment that is responsive, one in which our students can meet, learn from, and emulate students like themselves is why we're so concerned about a policy statement being considered by the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. This proposed administrative policy would encourage school districts to place all students in inclusive classrooms,

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## Parent's Corner

By Verna Hart



Once upon a time back in 1984, I was excited about my first teaching position in New York City. During my interview the principal expressed that I would be working solely with the special education students. After accepting this opportunity, I went to work ready to inspire, educate and create works of art with the children. My classroom was made up of a diverse group of children with physical, emotional and educational needs- which placed them all under the special needs "umbrella."

I learned so much from my students; they taught

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# Meet our Class of 2015



**William (Billy) Geilfuss, 21**  
King of Prussia, PA  
Years at HMS: 9 • Day Student

**Most significant accomplishment at HMS:** Learning to express himself through his communication device. When Billy started at HMS he wasn't using one, and in a very short time he was experimenting with several devices to find the one best suited for him. He uses his device to let the staff and family know his feelings, control his music selections and volume, and decide which activity he wants to participate in with the class and at home. Billy has made great strides and has developed social skills, patience, and will continue to learn and mature as a confident young man.

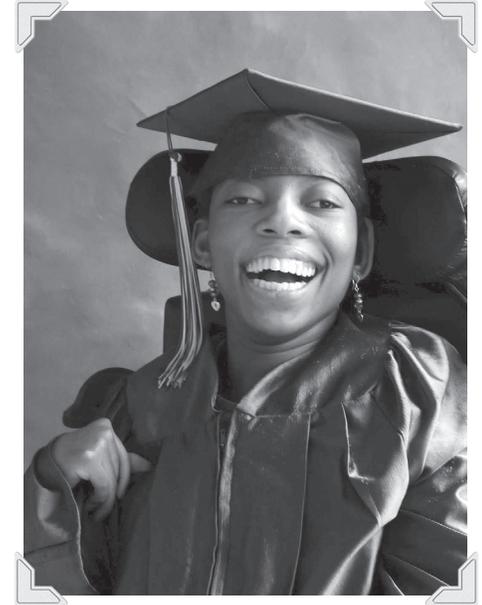
**What makes Billy unique:** Billy has an infectious smile that lights up a room and always makes everyone he comes in contact with happy, no matter what kind of day they are having. He has a unique laugh, laughing at the silliest things, like singing "Happy Birthday" or the sound of a

vacuum cleaner or someone sneezing. Billy has so much patience, dealing with various caregivers, doctors, and still keeps smiling. He is truly a treasure to us all.

**Plans for after HMS:** Billy will be attending a day program at Centerpoint Training Facility in Worcester where he will enjoy music therapy, arts and crafts, sports, computers, neighborhood trips and meet new friends. Billy would like to remain in contact with many of his friends and teachers at HMS and looks forward to attending next years' prom and Alumni breakfast.

**Favorite extra-curricular activities:** For Billy, it's all about being outside, especially with a nice breeze blowing. He likes to help his Dad with yard work and going shopping with him at the local outlet mall. He likes going to car shows and feeding turtles, fish and sitting outside on the patio with stepdad Mike, and hanging out with Aunt Mary Jo and Uncle Dave. Billy loves all types of music and enjoys attending concerts with Mom and Carol and visiting Carol's dad in Lancaster. Billy loves swimming in the pool at the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City and walking on the boardwalk at night, listening to the music, rides and feeling the wind in his face. He is on the Upper Merion Hero's challenger baseball team and enjoys playing ball with his friends. A die-hard Phillies fan, going to the ball park with Mom and Mike is always a favorite pastime of Billy's.

**What Billy will miss most about HMS:** Everything! Favorite teacher Courtney and his classmates, art with Eiko, dance therapy and plays with Rachel, the loving, caring staff and CNAs who go beyond the call of duty, all of the fields trips and overnight Tuesdays.



**Eubie Hodges, 21**  
Wilmington, DE  
Years at HMS: 6 • Day Student

**Favorite extra-curricular activities:** Eubie loves to go bowling and to travel to go see her relatives

**What Eubie will miss most about HMS:** She'll miss the educational atmosphere, and being connected to a school that has goals for her to excel and improve her skills. HMS School is a learning environment that empowers and educates its students, equipping them for the world they will navigate their lives in.

**Favorite part of HMS Experience:** Spending my days with my teachers, friends and my nurse Lisette.

**Most significant accomplishment at HMS:** Eubie's most significant accomplishments include her improved abilities to drive her power wheelchair and communicate more effectively. Prior to attending

HMS School, Eubie's potential to do either was not seen or considered "real goals" for her to attain.

Becoming one of many students at HMS striving to new levels of independence inspired her to reach new goals. Eubie is very eager to become a better wheelchair driver and communicate effectively. While hospitalized, she was able to express herself and communicate her needs to her doctors and nurses.

**What Eubie would tell a new student coming to HMS:** "You will love coming to school!"

in the area. There are some very special staff members and guest musicians at HMS who have developed ways for Steven to participate in music. He is thrilled by any opportunity to create his own music as Steven enjoys active involvement in activities. Eiko Fan, the art specialist, developed a method for Steven to express himself through art, something that he has not been able to do for years due to his progressive disease. Steven also enjoys swimming and exercising at the YMCA.

**What Steven will miss most about HMS:**

Steven will miss the staff at HMS. He enjoys the HMS community, the staff and volunteers who have chosen to spend their careers and time enhancing and improving the lives of those with significant disabilities. Kevin Rafferty has a soul of gold that he has shared with Steven and will stay with him for years to come. He will miss the many support staff and volunteers who make him laugh out loud and appreciate his sense of humor.

**What makes Steven special:** Steven's temperament is a gift. He is a determined and patient person who is excited by any small accomplishment. He is a master teacher, coach, and exemplar. He has educated the many people he has met about life and love. His family is truly blessed and remains incredibly proud of him.

**Plans for after HMS:** Steven is desperately seeking volunteer opportunities. He has been volunteering at a local recreational center 2 hours a week and is looking for other opportunities. Keep him in mind if you need a talented volunteer with a great deal to offer!



**Marlee Luckinbill, 20**

**Secane, PA**

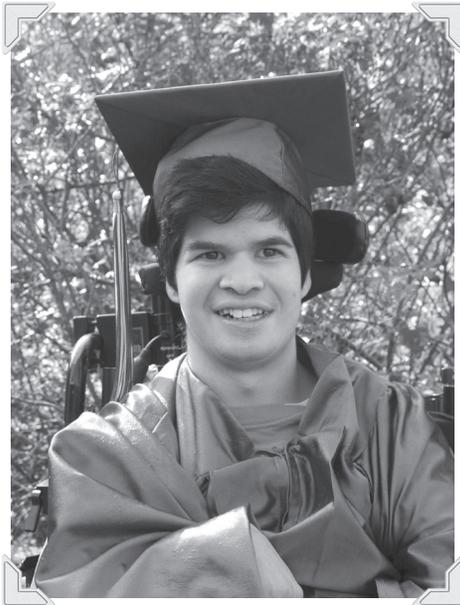
**Years at HMS: 14 • Day Student**

**Plans for after HMS:** Marlee will be attending Melmark when she turns 21.

**Favorite extra-curricular activities:** Marlee's favorite things to do are meet up with friends, listen to music and take long walks.

**What makes Marlee special:** Marlee never gives up and is always open to learning new things. She is extremely loyal to her friends and cares about developing trusting relationships. Marlee demonstrates a strong sense of compassion for others. She loves dogs and dogs love her. She has named two of her dogs with the same names as favorite HMS staff. She enjoys planning social activities and celebrations. Marlee loves to laugh. She has an unending sense of humor, which draws people to her.

**Most significant accomplishment at HMS:** Marlee's greatest accomplishment is being Marlee. Being Marlee means never giving up and always willing to try new things. She never forgets a name, or a face



**Steven Bomze, 20**

**Wynnewood, PA**

**Years at HMS: 2 • Day Student**

**Favorite extra-curricular activities:**

Steven has an intense love and strong interest in learning about music. He can be found at the many outdoor music festivals

**Graduates**/From page 3

and has many friends. She is an amazing person. In her time at HMS, she has learned to use a variety of communication systems. She also has learned to navigate different power mobility systems.



**William (Buddy) Hackett, 21**

Wallingford, PA

Years at HMS: 8 • Day Student

**Most significant accomplishment at HMS:**

Buddy learned to use a communication device. He can initiate social interactions and also help inform others when he is in pain or discomfort. Also, staying awake through Eiko's Art Class (I love art, but it's during my nap time).

**Plans for after HMS:**

Buddy will be attending an Adult Day Program at Our Lady of Fatima in Secane, PA

**Favorite extra-curricular activities:**

Buddy plays Challenger Baseball and Basketball with the Ridley Challenger league and Coach Phil. Buddy plays Topsoccer with the Swarthmore College students,

and swims in his own backyard and at the Mary Campbell Center

**What makes Buddy special:** Buddy always has a happy, fun-loving attitude. He likes to laugh, enjoys music, watching TV, going for walks and enjoys being with family. He and a fellow graduate classmate have developed a true friendship.

**What Buddy will miss most about HMS:**

He will miss all of his teachers, therapists, caregivers, and classmates, especially Courtney and Jessica. Buddy enjoyed the proms, and all the plays and performances over the years. He will miss dance with Rachel, and Skyping with Janice. He will truly miss you all!



**Emily Whiteman, 21**

Morton, PA

Years at HMS: 15 • Residential Student

**What makes Emily special:** Emily is special because she has a unique personality. She loves to sing and dance. She has a great sense of humor. She enjoys saying "hello" to everyone that she meets. Her

smile and laughter brighten every day.

**Favorite extracurricular activity:** Emily's favorite extracurricular activities are playing games, listening to music, watching YouTube videos, and doing crafts with her friends and family.

**Favorite part of HMS experience:**

Emily's favorite part of the HMS experience was working with staff, volunteers, peers and family who were always kind and considerate. Her favorite activities and classes in schools were art and music.

**What Emily would tell a new student at HMS:**

Emily would tell a new student at HMS to enjoy the experiences created and go with the flow. It is a unique place with staff who are always there to encourage growth for all the students. They always focus on the strengths of each students, and help them be the best that they can be.

**Most significant accomplishment at HMS:**

Emily has made many major accomplishments while at HMS. Her top three accomplishments include becoming independent with the power wheelchair, being able to feed herself independently, and becoming more verbal. Emily now uses more words to ask for what she wants or needs, and she will tell you how she is feeling.



## HMS Awards and Recognitions

### An Eagle takes Flight

This year, **Christian Matcovich**, a 20 year-old HMS student, became one of the few people living with Cerebral Palsy to become an Eagle Scout. His goal since he was 6-years-old, Christian joined the ranks of his older brothers, who are also Eagle Scouts, by using his



augmentative assistive technology to communicate and his boundless resilience and drive to accomplish all the tasks set before him. With the help of his family and HMS team, Christian demonstrated his communicative competence by saying the Scout Oath and Law, fully participating with his peers to complete his Eagle Scout Project and responding to the questions presented to pass his Boards of Review.

### HMS Alumnus receives scholarship

**Kwame Mills Wilson**, an alumni of HMS school, graduates from The School District of Philadelphia's Widener Me-



morial School this year and is a recipient of a Comcast Leaders and Achievers Scholarship. He will be attending the Community College of Philadelphia in the fall.

### Film on HMS and GFS Collaborative goes Gold!



In April, "On the Other Side of the Fence" received the Gold medal for a Television Documentary on Social Issues at the New York Festivals Awards, recognizing the World's Best TV and Film. In addition, United Nations Department of Public Information, in collaboration

with the NYF, selects entries that exemplify the aims and ideas of the United Nations and honors them with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI) awards. "On the Other Side of the Fence" received the Bronze UNDPPI Award for extraordinary public service.

### Awards for Caregiving Excellence

This year's winner of the HMS School "Mary Ann Wilson Award for Caregiving Excellence", and the "Direct Caregiver of the Year Award" from the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC) based in Washington,



D.C., went to **Lauren Dukes**, who is responsible for training and coordinating CNAs at HMS. Nominated for many reasons, from her caring and skilled engagement with the students, to her role in the new recruitment program for nursing care, Lauren recognizes the uniqueness of each child and successfully coordinates their personal care and feeding schedules with our skilled staff. Lauren's years of

**Awards**/From page 6

experience and the strength of her relationships with all HMS students make her an excellent trainer who is often sought out by students and staff members of all disciplines who recognize her complete understanding of the students' needs.

**Inspiring Through Film**

REELBLACK PRESENTS, which promotes “discoveries and rediscoveries in African-American film”, closed out their 12th season by shining the spotlight on some of Philadelphia's brightest talent with a special night of short films. One of these films was “Skyler”, a short film by **Eiko Fan**, our Artist in residence. The film is about HMS student **Skyler Granville**, a young man who shows



us his passion to express and communicate to the world through his paintings, which he creates with his feet. These and 7 other honored films were shown in June at International House in Philadelphia.

**Congratulations to ALL!****Parent's Corner**/From page 1

me how to be patient, tolerant, inclusive, inventive and how to advocate for them. We simply brought out the best in one another. One day, one of my fellow teachers gave me a poem that I hold in my heart called “Keymakers”.

*Some people see a closed door, and turn away.*

*Others see a closed door, try the knob, if it doesn't open...they turn away.*

*Still others see a closed door, try the knob, if it doesn't open, they find a key, if the key doesn't fit...they turn away.*

*A rare few see a closed door, try the knob, if it doesn't open, they find a key, if the key doesn't fit...they make one.*

A decade would pass, and in addition to being an educator, I became a parent, and now advocate for three differently-abled kids of my own. My eldest daughter Eubie, a surviving identical twin born with cerebral palsy, and her siblings Romare and Zaire, fraternal twins born prematurely at 25 weeks gestation. Eubie's educational needs would require a school that could see her potential and unlock the boundaries once placed upon her in the public school system. HMS School was indeed that educational setting. A place where she could finally soar and reach new goals. HMS is an oasis of teachers, therapists, nurses, aides, etc., all of them “Keymakers”. I am forever grateful for the entire staff at HMS and their dedication to making a difference in the lives of these unique students and their families.

**Director's Message**/From page 1

particularly in early education. We fear that the proposed statement by the OSEP will limit such possibilities by forcing a one-size-fits-all education upon students like ours, forcing them into classrooms that do not offer specialized and integrated supports or the opportunity to develop a peer group.

Our guiding philosophy requires us to work towards meaningful inclusion of all students as evidenced above, but we also firmly believe that the decisions about programs and placement are best made by the student's IEP team that includes parents and the professional educators who know each child best—not set by policy that takes away the power of the IEP team as guaranteed by federal legislation, IDEA. Programs that will support the individualized needs of students with complex disabilities are not necessarily synonymous with included classrooms, regardless of age.

In July, our school and people across the nation will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Leading up to that celebration, we are joining with other Philadelphia organizations for a special Art in City Hall exhibition, Creative Voices—the ADA at 25. The exhibit, which opened June 8th and closes July 31st, features the art of Philadelphia area artists with disabilities, including six of our own students.

While our primary job is educating our students, we made a commitment in our

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# Graduation 2015!





4400 Baltimore Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

## HMS School News | Graduation 2015

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

Marie Logue | *President of the Board of Trustees*

Diane Gallagher Ph.D. | *Executive Director*

4400 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19104  
215/222-2566; fax 215/222-1889

[www.hmsschool.org](http://www.hmsschool.org)

HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting/serving students from any locality without regard to race, color, religion, disability [except as limited by PDE program approvals], ancestry, national origin, including limited English proficiency, age [within school ages] or gender.

HMS School educates, nurtures, and cares for children and young adults with complex physical disabilities resulting from cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury or other neurological impairments, with the goal of enabling each to reach his or her maximum potential. We promote independence and improve the quality of life for youth in a safe and secure environment so each can lead a fulfilling, stimulating life now and as an adult.

Please consider a gift to HMS School through your organization's United Way campaign by designating HMS as the recipient. HMS is #00240 on the donor choice form for the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey and is listed on the UW website, [www.uwsepa.org](http://www.uwsepa.org). HMS is also eligible to receive United Way funds from other regions.

## Director's Message/From page 6

strategic plan to spread our knowledge to the larger community beyond our walls. Participating in this exhibit and joining with other like-minded organizations for events like the UCP 5K enables us to teach others about what our students, as individuals with complex disabilities, can do. Our teachers and therapists regularly present at conferences, to educate educators who work with students like ours about the new strategies we have developed. We guide parents of children with disabilities by writing articles for the nationally-circulated *Exceptional Parent* magazine, about important issues such as feeding and transition.

Finally, it is with great sadness that I share news of the loss of two of our beloved students this year, Emily Aiello and Niajah Deeds. Both added immeasurably to our family, as friends and classmates. We deeply miss Emily and Niajah, who live on in our hearts.

Congratulations to each of our graduates and their families. You are role models for our students of what they can achieve and the independence they can attain.

Wishing all of you a wonderful summer.