

# the Achiever



**F**aith, determination and caring therapists have helped the Ford family overcome many challenges.



Achievement Centers for **Children**

## MIRACLE BABY

“Miracle” is usually the first word anyone who knows her will use to describe three-year old Michelle Ford.

Her mother, Lil, had a difficult pregnancy and doctors warned her that her baby would not likely survive. Her beautiful little girl, Michelle, was born prematurely and endured surgery on her first day of life to correct a blockage in her brain. The family was sent home with hospice care because of Michelle’s multiple medical problems. It was surprising that she was able to go home at all.

But Michelle’s character and strong spirit soon became apparent. Lil persevered in searching for just the right doctor to help them and was referred to a pediatric neurologist who did an MRI that showed a second blockage in Michelle’s brain. Two months after a shunt was inserted, Michelle was trying to smile. Acknowledging a deep faith, Lil never doubted her daughter’s possibilities.

Michelle began occupational therapy and physical therapy once a week at the Achievement Centers for Children’s Lakewood site when she was about a year old. “I love the therapists at the Achievement Centers—I don’t know what I’d do without them,” said Lil. “When we first went there, Michelle was a year old and I was all she knew.”

It took nearly three months for Michelle to begin to respond to her therapists, Regina Thompson and Melissa Zreny. At first she would literally shut herself down and fall asleep when it was time for therapy. Regina and Melissa kept working with her and gradually she began to blossom.

Now three years old, Michelle has overcome many challenges. When she began therapy at the Achievement

Centers, Michelle had low muscle tone, was unable to hold up her head and no one was quite sure of her cognitive abilities.

Although Michelle still has low muscle tone, she has now developed enough strength to push herself up into a sitting position and sit up independently. She can even use a walker with some assistance. “Michelle is a little fighter and we’re very proud of her,” says Regina.

Michelle is also able to communicate by speaking a few words, but mostly uses sign language. After a recent haircut by her mother, she signed the phrase, “Michelle is beautiful.”

Lil, a single working mother also raising two teens, is very involved with Michelle’s therapy and treatment. She actively seeks out special therapies, programs and services to help her daughter. Her voice is full of pride when she talks about Michelle’s progress. “She is pulling herself up to stand; I just can’t believe it and neither can her doctors.”

“It is amazing to watch Michelle speak, sign, eat, move independently—charming everyone she meets,” says Regina. “She is truly a miracle.”



## Message from the Executive Director

Patricia W. Nobili, MSSA



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4255 Northfield Road  
Highland Hills, OH 44128  
216-292-9700

**LAKEWOOD**  
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Lakewood, OH 44107  
216-521-5050

**CAMP CHEERFUL**  
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Visit our website  
[www.achievementcenters.org](http://www.achievementcenters.org)

If you would like to be removed from the Achiever mailing list please notify us in writing at: The Achievement Centers for Children, 4255 Northfield Road, Highland Hills, OH 44128.

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN,

I hope you will appreciate the newsletter stories from parents who describe how the services and programs we provide have made such a difference in their child's and family's lives. Feedback from those who use our services is one of the most important ways for us to make sure that we are best meeting the needs of children with disabilities and their families. We use these past and current experiences to continue to learn and grow.

We celebrate often at the Achievement Centers for Children, for the victories that are achieved, both large and small, in the lives of the children we serve. Importantly, we are also here to support families when their challenges seem too great to shoulder by themselves.

In order to help assure that these victories continue and that the support families so deserve continues, we must always be listening, sharing, creating and planning. Walt Disney once said that "You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful idea in the world, but it requires people to make a dream become a reality." We recently completed our plan and design for the next three years and I am very grateful to everyone who contributed to the development of our new strategic plan. The hard work and expertise of our board members, management team and numerous focus groups, including our staff, clients and donors, defined a plan that sharpened our focus and direction for our future. And now, as Walt Disney stated, it will depend on many people's efforts to turn this dream into a reality. We are very fortunate to have a knowledgeable and dedicated staff and board . . . and we are equally fortunate, as well as grateful, to have such a generous community that values and supports our work and the children and families who depend on us.

So as we continue to learn from our past, work tirelessly in the present, and plan for our future, we ask for your continued support and commitment. Together we can create much brighter and more successful todays, as well as more promising tomorrows, for children who have been given so many challenges to overcome so early in their lives. Thank you for caring!

Sincerely,

Patricia W. Nobili, MSSA  
Executive Director



**ACCREDITATION and LICENSURE** The Achievement Centers for Children's programs and services are licensed and accredited by many entities, including:

American Camping Association

Certified Medicaid Provider

Ohio Department of Education

Ohio Department of Health

Ohio Department of Human Services

Ohio Department of MR/DD

Ohio Department of Mental Health

Member, Cuyahoga County Early Intervention Collaborative

Numerous agreements with area universities and colleges

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

# REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT OFFERS SUMMER ADVENTURES



**T**his past summer, the Rehabilitation Department of the Achievement Centers for Children began a new series of “Summer Adventures” sessions for

children with special needs ages 15 months to 10 years.

Designed as “Specialized Summer Therapy Programs for Children with Special Needs,” for some children it was an alternative to the regular treatment sessions they normally have during the year. Several school systems paid specifically for the sessions because they qualified as therapy programs that met the children’s IEP (Individualized Educational Plan). A grant from the Saint Luke’s Foundation helped us create the new series.

Some children who attend the Achievement Centers on a regular basis throughout the year were eager to participate in a group-oriented Summer Adventures program because it gave them a chance to try skills learned in individual sessions with their peers. Others looked forward to the intensity of the individual programs to concentrate on significant personal goals.

Four separate programs were offered, each with a distinct focus on a particular set of skills:

**SPEAK AND SAY** concentrated on helping children diagnosed or suspected of having developmental dyspraxia of speech get off to a strong start and increase their communication abilities during an intensive five-day program that met twice a day for 30 minute sessions.

**KEEP ON MOVIN’** offered an intensive one-on-one physical therapy focus for children of all ages with neuro-motor

dysfunction and was designed to increase muscular strength, flexibility and functional movement patterns. Sessions were two hours long, three times a week for three weeks.

**FUN IN THE SUN** was a theme-based therapy and learning group designed to encourage peer interaction and early literacy, provide parent education and ultimately improve carryover for therapeutic intervention in the home setting.

**FEELINGS, FRIENDSHIP & FUN** offered children ages 3–5 and 6–10 with social and/or behavioral challenges the opportunity to learn appropriate social skills through a variety of interactive games, language and sensory activities in a fun group setting.

The sessions were goal-oriented and therapists even assigned “homework” to reinforce skills learned at the program. Parents were invited to participate in the sessions and help their children with new accomplishments.

“We could tell that in the three weeks she had gotten a lot stronger and more motivated,” said a mom whose daughter participated in *Keep on Movin’*. “She made progress on all of her goals and we will continue to work on them at home.”

Another mom said what she liked best was the educational piece for herself, the way the therapist worked with her son on his goals, and most of all the relationship that developed between the therapist and her son.

Because of its great success, more information about an expanded 2007 “Summer Adventures” program will be available in early 2007 on our web site, [www.achievementcenters.org](http://www.achievementcenters.org) or by calling Susan Hyman, manager of rehabilitation services, at 216-297-9700 ext 244.

## KUDOS TO OUR COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS!

MANY THANKS TO HOME DEPOT employees Marcia Jones, Rebecca Brown, Anthony Dibarto, and Basilio Frusteri (pictured below) who graciously volunteered their time and skill to install a fence at Champ Camp during a two-day project in May and June 2006. Their efforts helped insure the safety and well-being of all our “Champ” campers!



Forty-five dedicated employees from **DELOITTE & TOUCHE** (pictured above and at left) generously donated their time and tested their

stamina while mulching the landscaped beds at the Achievement Centers’ Highland Hills location on June 9, 2006. Thanks for helping to make our grounds look so inviting!

## Thanks to . . .

FIREFIGHTERS from the Village of Highland Hills who visited the Achievement Centers for Children on June 29, 2006. Chief Art Timmons, Captain James Lang, and Firefighters McKenzie, Rosewicz, Fusco and Novick spent time with the children in our child care and Champ Camp programs, who thoroughly enjoyed learning about fire safety and exploring the trucks and fire equipment.



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## ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS INTRODUCES NEW CONSULTING SERVICE

The Achievement Centers for Children recently launched *Achieve Consulting*, which provides consultative services, educational training and workshops to educators in public school districts and agencies that have students Pre-K–3rd grade who are diagnosed with autism.

“Instances of this devastating disorder are sharply on the rise and many area school systems are challenged in educating these children with autism,” said Mary Beth Koss, Manager of Achieve Consulting. “The Achievement Centers for Children has spent the last seven years creating an effective blended model of teaching methods for educating children with autism. Because of the phenomenal success we have achieved in working with children with autism in our own classrooms, we have launched Achieve Consulting to replicate this model in the broader community.”

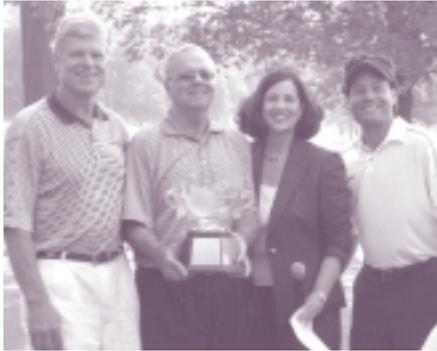
Training topics may include behavioral issues, sensory challenges, social difficulties and strategies to implement within school settings. Services range from individual programming to full program development.

The new service also helps schools and agencies with specific project needs such as observational assessments for an individual child, behavioral management plans, classroom environment recommendations, social skills interactions, and more.

To find out if your school could benefit from this new service, contact Mary Beth Koss, Manager of Achieve Consulting, at 216-292-9700 ext 243 or [marybeth.koss@achievementctrs.org](mailto:marybeth.koss@achievementctrs.org).



## Achievement Centers for Children Special Events



## STRATEGIC PLAN ESTABLISHES LONG-TERM GOALS

Substantial commitment by everyone involved with the Achievement Centers has allowed us to create a long-term, three-year strategic plan to define the focus and direction of our agency. Our sincere thanks for the leadership of Paul Clark, Strategic Planning Committee Chair, and Bruce Higley, Strategic Planning Committee Vice Chair.

Driven by the increasing need in the community for the unique holistic and interdisciplinary services for children with disabilities and their families, the Achievement Centers established four main goals from the planning process:

1. Expand current programming and add new services in response to community needs, thus broadening our "Circles of Support" for children with disabilities and their families.
2. Continue to raise the quality standard of our programs and services, providing the very best environment for those we serve and our staff.
3. Maintain a significant level of charitable service, providing over \$1 million in charitable/subsidized care each year.
4. Ensure sound finances, increasing both earned income and charitable contributions so we can continue to fulfill our mission.

The objectives were defined with information gathered from our board of directors, management team, and client, donor and employee focus groups. We are pleased to begin this journey with such a clear roadmap toward the future.

### **BLUE CHIP BLUE TEE**

*August 7, 2006*

This longtime Achievement Centers' fundraising event is called "Blue Chip" to signify a first-class event and "Blue Tee" because it is a highly competitive, challenging round of golf at Kirtland Country Club that requires all participants to have a verifiable USGA handicap. This year, almost one hundred golfers took to the links in support of the Achievement Centers, raising over \$80,000.

### **A MOST EXCELLENT RACE**

*June 25, 2006*

With more than 700 participants, the Achievement Centers' Friends group and key sponsors Elk & Elk, Edgepark Surgical and Nook Industries helped us raise over \$76,000 for Camp Cheerful. A new, specially-designed web site link made it easy for supporters to make pledges online.

### **SPARKLE, SHIMMER & SHINE**

*November 11, 2006*

This year, our annual black-tie gala at the Intercontinental Hotel & Conference Center will honor Alexander Cutler, president & CEO of Eaton Corporation. The evening benefits the Achievement Centers for Children and Cavaliers Charities, a fund of the McCormick Tribune Foundation. In addition to fabulous food and entertainment, guests can bid on dazzling auction items such as a four-day retreat for two at the legendary Canyon Ranch Spa in



Tucson, Arizona; an overnight stay for six, including two rounds of golf, at the Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio; and a personal birthday telephone greeting sung by music legend Lionel Ritchie. For participation and sponsorship information, contact Maggie Musnuff, Special Events Coordinator, at 216-292-9700 ext 226 or [specialevents@achievementctrs.org](mailto:specialevents@achievementctrs.org).

## Did You Know?

- THE RECENTLY-ENACTED Pension Protection Act of 2006 includes a provision that permits qualified taxpayers to make direct charitable transfers from their Individual Retirement Accounts. The new law provides an exclusion from gross income for otherwise taxable IRA distributions of up to \$100,000 per year from traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs for “qualified charitable distributions” made during 2006 and 2007 by plan owners who have attained at least age 70 ½ on the date of distribution to the charity. For more information about this, contact your attorney or accountant.
- DOES YOUR COMPANY do matching gifts? Many employers sponsor matching gift programs and will match any charitable contributions made by their employees. To find out if your company has a matching gift policy, speak with your Human Resources representative. If your company is eligible, request a matching gift form from your employer, and send it completed and signed with your gift. We’ll happily do the rest. The impact of your donation can be doubled, providing twice the funds to support the programs and services at the Achievement Centers.
- THE ARC OF OHIO, whose mission is to advocate for human rights, personal dignity and community participation of individuals with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities, through legislative and social action, information and education, local chapter support and family involvement, has a list serve that is a powerful source for sharing information. You can add yourself to the Arc of Ohio List Serve by sending an email to [arcoho@rroho.com](mailto:arcoho@rroho.com).
- CUYAHOGA COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES Issue 19 will fund critical programs and services provided by community agencies and organizations that help more than 400,000 children, seniors, seriously injured persons and others in need. Please join us in support of Issue 19 when you vote on November 7. Visit [www.issue19.org](http://www.issue19.org) or call 216-357-2352 for more information.

●  
*Staff members  
(clockwise from  
upper left)  
Sue Barton,  
Kristine Snell,  
Barb Obiaya, and  
Jennifer Harris*  
●



## STAFF NEWS

**A** service-oriented organization like the Achievement Centers for Children is only as good as the people who deliver the services. Our reputation for excellence continues to grow because of our many skilled, caring and committed employees like these:

**SUE BURTON**, the administrative assistant who greets all the families at our Lakewood facility, was selected as the winner of our 2005 annual staff award. Described as an extraordinary professional who is the glue that holds the Lakewood facility together, Sue is known for her quiet but dedicated leadership.

**KRISTINE SNELL**, a social worker with our Family Support Services, was selected as the 2006 Outstanding Prevention Professional by the Ohio Children’s Trust Fund, a state-wide government organization that provides leadership and funding for prevention of child abuse and neglect throughout Ohio.

**BARB OBIAYA**, Manager of Family Support Services, received the 2006 Cuyahoga County Community Mental Health Board Provider Agency Employee Recognition Award in the Supervisory Staff category. A longtime professional and community advocate for children with disabilities and their families, she is deeply admired by her staff, clients and peers at the Achievement Centers.

**JENNIFER HARRIS** joins the Achievement Centers as Manager of Education. Jennifer earned a B.S. in Speech Pathology and Audiology from Ohio University, a M.Ed. in Special Education from Cleveland State University, and a Ph.D. in Urban Education and Special Education Policy from CSU. Jennifer previously was an assistant professor of education at CSU for two years and worked for the administration arm of Head Start Disability Services for seven years. She lives in Lorain with her husband and three-year old daughter.

## AN INTEREST SPARKED

When Janeen and Don Sparks visited Camp Cheerful recently and saw the barn and riding arena where children with disabilities receive therapeutic riding lessons and hippotherapy, they jumped at the opportunity to lend their support.

The Sparks own and operate Shoreline Companies, a local company that transports, warehouses, and brokers the transport of freight throughout the United States. The company is based in Strongsville, and the Sparks live in North Royalton.

They chose to use their donation to “adopt” the stall that houses Nick, a four-year-old Haflinger horse who has been part of the equine programs at Camp Cheerful since early 2006. Nick caught the Sparks’ attention because he shares his name with one of their grandchildren.

“We are very thankful for the blessings and health of our family including our 14 grandchildren. Camp Cheerful just touched our hearts,” said Janeen Sparks.

The Sparks’ donation will be used to cover the care and feeding for Nick throughout the year. Horses that are in optimal condition provide the best possible therapeutic intervention for the children enrolled in our equine programs.



A sign will be placed on the stall for the next year so that everyone who enters the barn will know of the Sparks’ generosity.

You or your company can adopt a horse stall, too! Call the Development Office at 216-292-9700 to find out how.

## Caring Counselors Make a Difference at Camp Cheerful

Every child has their own individual quirks and differences, whether or not they have a disability,” said Michele Mettai, mother of veteran camper Matt Mettai, age 13. “The staff and counselors at Camp Cheerful really take that into account during his camp sessions.”

Matt, who is blind and has microcephaly, has been attending week-long sessions of day camp at Camp Cheerful since 2000. Camp offers many traditional experiences such as arts and crafts, campfires, fishing, nature study, and canoeing, but swimming is his favorite activity. Matt, who also participates in therapeutic riding sessions during the rest of the year, likes to come to Camp just to have fun.

Michele says the counselors at Camp Cheerful have been very responsive in working with Matt’s special needs. To provide a more integrated treatment plan, his teachers came to camp to share with the staff the ways they approach his behavior challenges. The group also discussed ways to focus on senses other than sight during his camp activities.

“I was especially impressed this past summer, because the staff did a ‘test-run,’ sort of a simulated camp day for the new counselors with just a few children attending,” said Michele. “This allowed the new counselors to experience—in a very limited and highly-supervised setting—the various types of abilities and disabilities they’d be working with during the summer. What a great idea for the new counselors.”

Even though the memory of summer is still fresh, Matt is already looking forward to next year’s camp!



*Matt Mettai (far right and above), age 13, enjoyed spending time at Camp Cheerful last summer with friends and staff.*

## ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN

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### About the ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN

Founded in 1940 as the Society for Crippled Children, the Achievement Centers for Children provides a wide variety of rehabilitation, recreation, education and family support services for children with disabilities and their families. We serve over 3,000 children with disabilities and their families each year.

Our mission is to work with children with disabilities and their families to strengthen abilities and create opportunities for lifelong achievement in society.

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## ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN

### Services by Location

*The Achievement Centers provides services through a variety of locations, including schools, day cares, homes, and at the Achievement Centers' three facilities. The following is a list of services according to location.*

#### On-going Home visiting (offices at the Highland Hills location)

Early childhood mental health counseling; Early intervention program for children ages birth to three with special needs; Home-visiting services for at-risk children, ages birth to three; Day Care Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

#### East/Highland Hills

Child Development Center day care for children with and without special needs; Preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; Kindergarten through second grade for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; Social work and counseling; Physical, speech and occupational therapy; Champ Camp (summer day camp program); Parent support groups

#### West/Lakewood

Preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; Social work and counseling; Physical, speech and occupational therapy; Parent support groups

#### South/Strongsville/Camp Cheerful

Social work and counseling; Physical, speech and occupational therapy; Recreational Activities; Residential and day camp programs; Therapeutic Riding and Hippotherapy; After school programs