



Family News

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3

APRIL 2009

Coming Up at SMHDC

April 25
3 p.m. Family Forum
4 p.m. Family Night

April 26
4 p.m. Virginia Arts
Festival Concert

May 8
10 a.m. Graduation

May 17
4 p.m. Prom

Tell Us How We're Doing

Please tell us what you think of the newsletter and what kinds of information you'd like to see in future issues. Also, let us know if you'd prefer to receive *Family News* by email.

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Library to Be Built at St. Mary's Home



Carmen Gerena, executive administrative assistant, reads "The Rainbow Fish" to 8-year-old Angel. A library being established at SMHDC will be filled with a variety of children's books.

St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children is establishing a Youth and Family Resource Library, where residents can have fun with their siblings, family and guardians and strengthen their communication skills, leading to more independent lives.

Volunteer Paige Thomas came up with the concept. Paige and her three children regularly read with the children at SMHDC. At her recent birthday party, Paige asked guests to donate books to St. Mary's children instead of giving her presents. Some 200 books were brought back to the Home, much to the delight of staff and children.

A corporate grant is making it possible for SMHDC to install the Library in part of the Family Room just off the main lobby. Bookshelves, tables, chairs, carpeting and framed artwork on freshly painted walls will section off the area nicely.

The Library will be stocked with children's books of all varieties. The children of SMHDC will run the Library, pasting library card pockets on the books and checking out the books to others. They will use voice output devices that allow interaction among non-verbal children,

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Joshua Receives Respite Care

My name is Joshua. I'll be 4 in May. My mom, two great-aunts and I live in an old farmhouse in Isle of Wight County. Respiratory illness and seizure disorder are problems I face daily.

The staff at St. Mary's Home recently implemented the Ketogenic Diet as a viable treatment for seizure control. It is a high-fat, low-carb diet. The diet is carefully monitored by a physician, dietician and nurses.

I came to St. Mary's Home for respite care and became the third child to undergo the treatment. I am partway through the process and seizure activity has decreased significantly. I can't explain it scientifically — I'm just a kid — but the change is awesome.



Joshua with Stephanie Bailey, a recreational therapy assistant at St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children.

— by Brenda Carney, one of Joshua's great-aunts

Meet the New Physical Therapy Interns

Two new interns have joined St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children in the Physical Therapy Department, working with a gentle touch to create a therapeutic environment.

Jackie Reese, 27, is a massage therapist and certified pharmacy technician. She went back to school to become a physical therapy assistant, and she's set to graduate in May from Tidewater Community College.

Jackie wanted to do a pediatric rotation in order to broaden her experience. At SMHDC, "it's very different, but it's rewarding to be able to work with the kids to see the progresses that do happen," Jackie said.

Jackie is originally from San Diego and now lives in Virginia Beach. Her daughter, Giselle, was born in January.

Nicole Ellis, 24, of Chesapeake, visited SMHDC last year and listed the Home as her top choice for a pediatric internship. "I love it here," she said. "I just wanted to get a chance to work with the kids. These kids are lucky because they live in a place where they are able to get the physical therapy they need."

Nicole will graduate in May from Old Dominion University with a doctorate in physical therapy. She already holds a bachelor's degree in exercise science from Elon University in North Carolina.



Above left: Jackie Reese works with Quamaine, 10, in front of a colorful mural in the Physical Therapy department. Above right: Nicole Ellis helps 7-month-old Kamaia stretch out on a therapy ball.



Putting the PT in Peanut Butter

When Soozie McLain, director of physical therapy, learned that food banks were low on supplies of peanut butter — a much-needed staple — she knew she had to do something about it.

Soozie and the entire PT Department recently finished up a peanut butter drive at the Home. They collected 61 jars of the goey stuff to donate to the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia. "St. Mary's staff and families rose to the occasion," Soozie said. "PT was the catalyst."

Soozie McLain, left, and Anne Freeman, right, hold the peanut butter collection box while surrounded by PT staff, from left, Nicole Ellis, Jennifer Reasor, Kathy Brobst, Barbara Graeff-Taylor and Rebecca Lowrance. Staff not pictured: Lynn Regna, Rhonda Bailey, Judy Peltz and Jackie Reese.

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such as a box-like device that when tapped is programmed to verbalize words such as "Your book is due back in a week." While residents can go to the Library, the Library also will go to them. A Library on Wheels will provide a selection of books and a computer that can be taken into the children's rooms for one-on-one reading and fun.

The Family Resource section will provide books for families and guardians to learn about living and interacting with their children with disabilities.