Upon entering the cheerful-looking classroom at Blythedale Children's Hospital, one takes note of all the familiar touches of a standard classroom... a brightly decorated mural, cubbies containing coats and boots, a teacher with a broad smile and a comforting voice. But upon closer inspection, one might take note of the special touches that set this room apart.

An elaborate color-coding system guides youngsters as they navigate their day; a complex dry-erase board helps staff track their students’ progress as they rotate through activity centers at 10-minute intervals. Every detail expertly tended to in order to provide a growing population of children with a jump start socially, emotionally and educationally.

In response to the rapidly growing awareness and recognition of autism and other spectrum disorders, as well as advances in early diagnosis, Blythedale Children’s Hospital has opened its Early Intervention Autism Program. The program serves children from approximately 18-months of age through three years of age who have been identified with a spectrum disorder, including autism, Asperger’s Syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, communication disorders, or Rett’s Syndrome.

“This is significant for several reasons,” explained Blythedale President and CEO Larry Levine. “Not only is Blythedale able to provide these children with a customized program, uniquely designed to meet the very specific needs of this younger population; but we are also able to offer parents the unparalleled level of confidence and security that comes from having such a high level of medical expertise on site.”

Blythedale’s program was developed in coordination with faculty from Teachers College – Columbia University. The program meets five days a week, in two, half-day classes – one in the morning and one in the afternoon – and is taught by Kimberly Simon, a special education teacher for students with disabilities (birth through 2nd grade) and an expert in intellectual disabilities and autism (see sidebar).

“There was certainly a need for additional programs for this age group in Westchester County,” said Simon. “Many of the existing programs tend to be for older children. For parents, a structured environment specifically designed for children on the spectrum, with low teacher-child ratios is very important. And I think parents are comforted by a hospital-based program; for example if they have a child with a seizure disorder, it’s very reassuring to know you have the best in medical services right there if you need them.”

Simon employs a variety of popular philosophies in the classroom, including Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-Challenged Children (TEACCH) and Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills – Revised (ABLLS-R). TEACCH utilizes a variety of methods and techniques for creating structure, such as picture schedules, which are based on individual needs and emerging capabilities;
Continued from page 1.

while ABLLS-R is a device for assessing skills in children with language and learning deficits.

The classroom is divided into centers, including a sensory area, play area, individual work area and fine motor skills area. Between centers, the children return to a “home base” where they are offered a brief activity to help ease the transition to their next center. In addition, children employ “picture schedules” to help visually prompt their transitions – something that is often carried over in the home environment.

“We communicate daily with parents via notebook,” said Simon. “Often, parents like to observe what we are doing in the class so they can carry it over to the home environment.”

Likewise, there is much carryover between therapy and classroom. While most children receive speech therapy, many have also been referred for occupational and sometimes physical therapy. Teachers and therapists communicate daily in order to transfer concepts and build on skills.

On one recent day, the children were enjoying wide-ranging activities related to winter… stringing mittens, exploring a toy medical kit filled with items needed to fight a cold, and creating snowmen from photos of themselves. Contrary to what may be a common perception of autism, three children gathered closely around a photo printer and enthusiastically celebrated as one another’s photos emerged.

The spectrum is wide-ranging, as are the skills of the children, explained Simon, particularly when they first are referred to the program.

“Sometimes the transition is harder than others… some children are less verbal, or display some of the more challenging behaviors associated with autism, but they seem to adjust to the routine within a few weeks,” she said.

Early diagnosis and early intervention programs are providing educators with an opportunity to provide services to a previously underserved demographic, at a time when their growing minds and bodies are most receptive to new concepts. Simon attributes the now-standard practice of screening for these disorders in 18-month-old children, and the prevalent coverage of autism in the mainstream media, as being crucial to diagnosis in increasingly younger children.

Charitable organizations, such as the Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, have provided assistance in funding the development and furnishing of the classroom.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism spectrum disorders are prevalent, affecting one out of 110 children. Children suspected to have a spectrum disorder (see related sidebar), may be eligible for services through the Early Intervention Program. In New York State, the Department of Health is the lead state agency responsible for the Early Intervention programs available in all counties.

At Blythedale, evaluation and treatment planning are performed by a multi-disciplinary team that may consist of therapists, physiatrists (rehabilitation doctors), neurologists, psychologists, certified early education teachers, audiologists, social workers, nurses, nutritionists, and other specialty consultants. Following the evaluations an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed by an Early Intervention Initial Service Coordinator, the Department of Health EIOD, a member of the evaluation team and parent. Once the IFSP has been created the child is approved for a center-based program and an appropriate referral is made.

According to Dr. Jay Selman, Blythedale’s Chief of Pediatric Neurology, “when autism or pervasive developmental disorder are suspected, a diagnosis is confirmed through tests conducted by a specialist, (such as a pediatric neurologist, developmental pediatrician or child psychologist).”

Simon speaks enthusiastically about
Potentially eligible children, living in Westchester, must be referred to the Westchester County Early Intervention Program at (914) 813-5094. For additional information about Blythedale's programs, please call Lisa Petrucelli, Coordinator of Early Childhood and Outpatient Programs, at (914) 831-2454. The Early Intervention Program is publicly funded and regulated by the New York State Department of Health, and in each County, by that County's Department of Health.

Meet Kimberly Simon

Kimberly Simon is a special education teacher for students with disabilities (birth through 2nd grade) and an expert in intellectual disabilities and autism at Blythedale Children's Hospital.

Kimberly graduated from Bucknell University with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and certifications in both Elementary and Early Childhood Education. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Intellectual Disabilities and Autism from Teachers College, Columbia University, which led to certifications in both Elementary and Early Childhood Special Education. While at Teachers College, Kimberly was both a masters fellow at, and a newsletter editor for, the Center for Opportunities and Outcomes for People with Disabilities. Presently, Kimberly is in the process of becoming a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and is a teaching assistant at Manhattanville College for a post-masters Applied Behavior Analysis course.

Kimberly began her teaching career as a substitute teacher in Melbourne, Australia. Following this teaching experience and incredible traveling experience, Kimberly returned to the United States and worked at Developmental Disabilities Institute in Long Island with preschool children with autism. She then spent two years working as a teacher in New York City, first in a general education first grade class and then in an arts-gifted third grade class. She made the decision following these two years working with general education students to follow her passion for working with children with autism and returned to school to get her masters.

Kimberly is engaged to be married in May, and lives in Tarrytown with her fiancé. In her free time, she enjoys training for the Avon Breast Cancer Walk (39.3 miles in two days), a feat she has completed each of the last three years.

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WPLJ Rings in the Holidays at Blythedale for the 18th-Straight Year

At the end of the annual “Holiday Spectacular to Benefit Blythedale” this past December, all the celebrities gathered on stage together and sang a rousing version of “Lean on Me” to the patients, family, staff and friends of the Hospital. There could hardly have been a more fitting way to wrap up the 18th-annual broadcast hosted by 95.5 WPLJ’s syndicated morning show, “Scott and Todd in the Morning”.

Broadcasting their final show of the year from the gymnasium named in their honor, D.J.s Scott Shannon and Todd Pettengill, along with the rest of the morning show crew, were on hand bright and early, welcoming Blythedale’s patients as the show kicked off at 6:00 a.m.

Recording superstar Rob Thomas returned for his 10th-straight year and was joined by Jason Mraz, along with perennial favorites Holiday Express and WPLJ’s own house band, The Snowballs.

Followers of Blythedale on the popular social-networking site Twitter received up-to-the-minute updates on their favorite auction items the morning of the broadcast, while broadcast attendees were able to follow the action on a large-screen TV displaying the live Twitter feed.

This year’s event has raised more than $300,000, and since the benefit’s inception, more than $3 million has been raised for Blythedale. The Hospital was delighted to receive $119,000 from the popular psychic and talk show host John Edwards. In addition, the TransSiberian Orchestra donated $24,100 from the sale of tickets to their holiday concerts (raising more than $120,000 for Blythedale over the last decade).

“We are extremely grateful to our friends at WPLJ and Citadel Broadcasting Corporation,” said Blythedale President and CEO Larry Levine. “There is simply no way to quantify all they have done for Blythedale in the span of almost two decades. In addition to...

WPLJ's Scott Shannon and Todd Pettengill chat with Rob Thomas on-air.

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The broadcast included an on-air auction to benefit the Hospital. Some of the items up for grabs included tickets to the station’s series of “Up Close and Personal” concerts, several autographed guitars, and the most popular item... lunch with Rob Thomas and his wife, Marisol.

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raising millions of dollars, they have increased awareness of our services throughout their listening area, and provided our children and their families with what is often the most memorable experience of their lives. We are deeply touched by their dedication.”

The Dannon Company again supplied employees to staff the auction lines and collect donations of toys at the door, while Fuji employees were also on hand photographing patients and making them prints. Perennial favorite Silvio’s Restaurant (Thornwood), Artuso’s Bakery (Thornwood), Starbucks (Mamaroneck), Main Street Sweets (Tarrytown), Morton’s Steakhouse (White Plains), and Dannon all provided scrumptious treats for those in attendance.

“It takes a lot of people to bring something this big to life, and every one of these business owners unselfishly donates their time and talents because they believe in our mission and want to make the day even more memorable for our children,” said Director of Community Relations Lena Cavanna. “During a time which for many is of such great economic uncertainty, they all go above and beyond to provide our families with a truly one-of-a-kind experience.”

As in years’ past, as the event came to a close, Rob Thomas was still making his way through the room and his throngs of pint-sized admirers, cheerfully posing for pictures, signing autographs and giving abundant hugs.

“Playing Blythedale is always my favorite part of the holidays,” said Rob Thomas. “I think the spirit of the staff and volunteers there is infectious and really what the holiday is about. It’s even more impressive when you realize they do it all year round.”

If you would still like to make a donation, please contact Chief Development Officer Betsy Bowman at (914) 592-7138, ext. 411 or email to betsyb@blythedale.org

my favorite part of the holidays.” ~ Rob Thomas

Jason Mraz and Rob Thomas perform “Stand By Me”.

Former patient Parker enjoys a visit from Santa.

Dannon provided many helpful volunteers to assist with the event.
Child Actors Present $2,000 Donation to BCH

When child actors Rory and Declan McTigue recently celebrated their sixth birthday, they decided to do something more meaningful than simply have a birthday party with friends and family. The twin brothers, who appear regularly on TV shows including All My Children and Law & Order, chose to forgo any birthday presents and instead asked their friends and family to make donations to Blythedale.

In December, Rory and Declan visited Blythedale to present nearly $2,000 they received in donations made to the Hospital in honor of their recent birthday.

“We are delighted to receive this very special donation. We are especially grateful to Rory and Declan for making this all happen,” said Betsy Bowman, Chief Development Officer for Blythedale Children’s Hospital.

Sterling Cellars Toasts Blythedale, Raises $11,000

Last month, Sterling Cellars in Mahopac hosted a premium wine tasting event to benefit Blythedale, and raised more than $11,000 for the Hospital. The event was attended by more than 120 wine enthusiasts, and featured wines from the top five U.S. importers. Donors had the opportunity to sample a variety of fine wine, along with the opportunity to purchase wine at a discounted price. Guests also enjoyed samples of the fine cuisine provided by Gino’s Trattoria, also of Mahopac.

“You can’t help but want to support Blythedale when you see the extraordinary work they do on behalf of children,” said Scientific Electric President and event coordinator Tom Jocelyn. “We’re thrilled the event was such a success.”

“We are so grateful to Sterling Cellars, and to Tom, for holding this event. It is because of ongoing support from businesses and the community that we are able to do so much for the children at Blythedale” said Betsy Bowman, Chief Development Officer for Blythedale Children’s Hospital.

BCH Joins Forces with Team Continuum Again

Over the past three years, runners have raised more than $125,000 in support of Blythedale from Marathons in NYC, Boston, and London, through our partnership with Team Continuum. Thank you to all who “ran and raised” for us.

To find out about running for Blythedale in the 2010 ING NYC Marathon on November 7, please contact Director of Annual Giving and Special Events Carey Dalton at (914) 592-7138, ext. 303, or email to careyd@blythedale.org. Runners for 2010 are asked to raise a minimum of $2,950 per runner, but are encouraged to go beyond that on behalf of the children of Blythedale.

42 Continues ‘Chef’s Tasting Menu’ to Benefit Blythedale

Dining at 42, the award-winning roof-top restaurant in downtown White Plains, is more than an extraordinary culinary experience. It is also an opportunity to help fund new amenities for patients and parents at Blythedale Children’s Hospital.

When Chef Anthony Goncalves introduced his new “Chef’s Tasting Menu” last fall, he also announced that a $10 donation would be made to Blythedale Children’s Hospital in Valhalla for each tasting menu served. The popular promotion has already raised nearly $3,500 for the hospital and Chef Goncalves has announced he will continue the “Chef’s Tasting Menu” and the $10 donation to Blythedale.

The money raised by the promotion is being used to purchase televisions and DVD players for patient rooms as well as a Parent Lounge. Blythedale is creating a temporary Parent Lounge to serve as a rest area for parents whose children are patients at the Hospital. The Parent Lounge will be replaced by a new Family Resource Center that is being built as part of Blythedale’s $65.3 million building program. The new Family Resource Center is scheduled to open in the fall of 2011.

“We are so grateful to Anthony and everyone at 42 for making Blythedale the beneficiary of this exciting promotion,” said Chief Development Officer Betsy Bowman. “Thanks to these donations, hospital stays at Blythedale – which average 50 days – will be more comfortable for our patients and their families.”

To make reservations, please call (914) 761-4242.
Blythedale Patient Carries Olympic Torch

While an Olympic spirit embraced our world this February, Blythedale patients and staff cheered the monumental accomplishments of one of the Hospital’s patients.

Yanni was severely injured in a motor-vehicle accident seven years ago in Greece. Only 11-years-old at the time, Yanni was admitted to Blythedale for extensive rehabilitation for severe traumatic brain injury. With the help of his dedicated multi-disciplinary team, Yanni made extraordinary advances and left Blythedale walking on his own, to return home to Greece. Yanni has travelled to Blythedale annually for follow-up care, and last year elected to spend the summer in the U.S. in order to participate in the Hospital’s cutting-edge robotic therapy program done in collaboration with MIT. This remarkable young man has made significant progress with the function of his affected arm, and just a few months ago served as an Olympic torch bearer in Olympia, Greece.

All at Blythedale shared his pride as he confidently carried the torch high in the air and passed the flame to begin the Games.

Blythedale School Students Win Chase Award for Bronx River Project

A group of talented and hard working teens from the Mt. Pleasant-Blythedale UFSD were recently presented with a 2010 Chase Multimedia in the Classroom Award and $1,000. The forward-thinking teens developed a website to highlight their research on the Bronx River: Past, Present, Future. The contest challenged the students to transform their learning environment through technology.

For Blythedale’s team, the victory was especially sweet. Up against 450 competitors, the team was the only winner from Westchester County.

“This is simply an extraordinary achievement for our students and teachers,” said Mt. Pleasant-Blythedale UFSD Superintendent Ellen Bergman. “Our school strives to provide equity and equal access to all students, and this award exemplifies our belief that when students are given opportunities and access to learning, a disability is not a barrier to achievement. Our students, who face such monumental challenges, were able to compete on a level playing field and rise above to win.”

Their project can be viewed at bronxriver.info

SAFE KIDS

Buckle Up!

Parents always want to do what’s best to protect their kids. And that is especially true when it comes to using car seats for infants and toddlers. What many parents don’t know is that once a child outgrows a car seat, the next step for safety isn’t the adult seat belt. It’s a booster seat.

Children who need a booster seat but are only using an adult safety belt are at a much higher risk for serious injury in the event of a crash. Using a seat belt alone is always better than nothing, but a booster seat helps the adult seat belt fit a child’s frame and offer the best protection.

If your child is under 4’9” in height and weighs 80 to 100 pounds, it’s likely that he or she needs to be sitting on a booster in a back seat. Most kids reach this height and weight between the ages of 8 and 12.

Kids in the tween years are becoming more independent so it’s important to talk to them about making the right safety decisions—even when you’re not around. Make sure friends, family and neighbors know the rules when transporting your kids—that your child must always ride on a booster seat until he or she passes the Safety Belt Fit Test. No exceptions. Also, no child 13 and under should ever ride in the front seat of a vehicle. Kids are always safest in the back.

Safety Belt Fit Test

Test all children under age 13 to be sure they are big enough to safely wear the adult safety belt without a booster seat:

- Have the child sit all the way back on the vehicle seat. Check to see if the knees bend at the seat edge. If they bend naturally, move on to the next step. If they do not, return to the booster seat.
- Buckle the lap and shoulder belts. Be sure the lap belt lies on the upper legs or hips. If it stays on the upper legs or thighs, move on to the next step. If it does not, return to the booster seat.
- Be sure the shoulder belt lies on the shoulder or collarbone. If it lies on the shoulder, move on to the next step. If it is on the face or neck, return to the booster seat. DO NOT place the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the child’s back!
- Be sure your child can maintain that correct seating position for as long as you are in the car. If your child begins to slouch or shift positions so the safety belt contacts the face, neck or stomach, return your child to the booster seat until all the test steps can be met.
- Require your child to use a safety belt in every vehicle, whether or not you are there to remind him or her.

Blythedale Children’s Hospital is the local coalition leader for the National SAFE KIDS Campaign.
today

Today is designed to inform our friends in the community about the services of Blythedale. If you know someone who would like to be on our mailing list, or if you have ideas for future issues, please let us know.

Call Connie Cornell at (914) 592-7138, ext. 461 or email conniec@blythedale.org

Visit us at our website www.blythedale.org

save the date

SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2010
Walk With Us!

Come one, come all to our annual walk-a-thon at the Hackley School in Tarrytown. This is a great way to get the whole family together and raise money for an important cause.

9:00 a.m. Registration 10:00 a.m. Walk

Please see enclosed response envelope for further details.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2010
2010 Golf and Tennis Classic to Benefit Blythedale

Join us at the incomparable Sunningdale Country Club in Scarsdale for a day of golf or tennis, and an evening highlighted by dinner and auction.

For more information about these events, please contact Director of Annual Giving and Special Events Carey Dalton at (914) 592-7138, ext. 303 or email at careyd@blythedale.org

NYC Firefighter Warms Patients’ Hearts

Sean Lyons charms Blythedale’s preschoolers when he shares his off-duty time as a New York City firefighter. Volunteering since December, Sean has already logged more than 60 hours sharing his expertise and cheerful demeanor at the Hospital.

For more information about volunteer opportunities, please contact Director of Volunteer Services Ann Woodcock at (914) 592-7138, ext. 428 or email to annw@blythedale.org