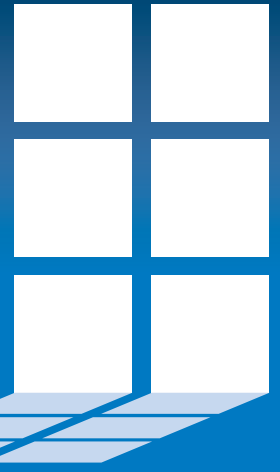




THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

# The WINDOW

SPRING 2011



## From Reluctant Student To Swimming Star

A year ago, Gale Clarke had to leave work an average of once a week to pick up her son Eric from his local school. According to his teachers, he would act out, cry or simply withdraw from everyone and everything around him.

"That was a challenging time," she recalls. "I'm a single parent, I need to work and I didn't know what to do. Eric was isolated with no friends and not aware of any other students who faced similar challenges. We didn't realize Eric was losing his eyesight. He was upset and frightened."

Eric had been born with Bardet-Biedl syndrome, a rare genetic disorder frequently resulting in developmental disabilities, obesity, immature behavior and, often, a progressive loss of vision.

After a series of tests at the GBMC's Richard E. Hoover Center, the Clarke family was referred to The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB). **"That's when everything started to click," affirms Clarke.**

"The teachers and administrators worked with me

constantly to find just the right program for Eric."

Today at age 15, Eric is doing well in the classroom at MSB, has made friends, and even stays on campus two days a week as an extended day student. He is also a member of the swim team, where he practices at MSB's Casper G. Sippel Pool and won several medals last fall competing with other schools in the Eastern Athletic Association for the Blind.

"Eric has really blossomed at MSB thanks to Sara Hines, his teacher, Pam Schirmer, his swim coach, and so many people there," stresses Clarke. **"He is thriving!"**

"Eric is a natural in the breast stroke," notes Schirmer. "It's amazing. With all the encouragement and support he gets at MSB and the positive experiences he has had this season, he has gone from being an 'I don't think I can do that' kind of person to someone who says 'Okay, I'll try.'"

Sara Hines agrees. A teacher of 5 years and wrestling coach of 3 at MSB, she has had Eric in her class since the first day he enrolled.

According to Hines, the primary reasons for Eric's turnaround were a strict schedule, consistent expectations, and the ongoing support of his mother, MSB teachers and staff.

*continued on page 3*



*Coach Schirmer and Eric Clarke*

## Message from the President



Maryland has the distinction of being first in our nation in education for the past three years. We are proud to be a part of this distinction. We have concentrated our efforts on improving our programs and the benefits are showing. Test results have dramatically improved and independence for our students have substantially increased. While keeping this focus, our energies have turned toward our facilities that are outdated and create barriers to implementing the creative, dynamic programs we have to offer.

Our current facilities designed 50 to 100 years ago for students whose only disability was blindness are not suitable for our students today, 95% of whom have multiple disabilities. Since 1975, MSB evolved its mission to serve these students in compliance with federal laws, requests from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and referrals from the Local School Systems who were unable to provide an appropriate education to these high-need-difficult-to-serve students.

MSB serves 73% of Maryland's 1800 blind students throughout the state through its outreach and on-campus programs. MSB is submitting capital funding requests to the state and federal government and to private foundations and individuals to construct a cost efficient "school of the future" that other states, and others within Maryland, will benchmark as they consider new facilities. These designs will incorporate innovative learning technology and high energy efficient "green" systems.

We are reliant upon the state and federal governments and private donors to provide the pillars of support necessary to create Maryland's "school of the future" for students with visual disabilities.

We thank you for your past financial assistance and ask you to increase financial support for Maryland children.

Join our Campaign for our Children's Future now!

Michael J. Bina, Ed.D.  
President

*Senator Barbara Mikulski and  
Dr. Michael Bina*



*Sen. Kathy Klausmeier,  
Gov. Martin O'Malley, and  
Dr. Michael Bina*



## Spotlight On Pamela Schirmer

Pamela Schirmer understands the value of sports and physical education in the lives of children and young adults who are blind, visually impaired or living with multiple disabilities. She should.



As the Aquatics and Gym Manager at The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB), she has been an instructor since 1984 and has coached the swim team for the past 8 seasons.

As a coach, Schirmer tries to find what techniques work best for each athlete. "I take the skills they have and try to fine tune those qualities so they can reach their full potential."

Schirmer believes that successes in the pool or gym have a positive, reinforcing affect on the student's performance in the classroom and vice versa. "This takes teamwork among the teachers, coaches and parents." Our many supporters in the community are part of the team, too. Swimming takes place in the Casper G. Sippel Pool. More recent donations from The Dresher Foundation and CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield have helped support our physical education program.

According to Schirmer, Eric Clarke is a perfect case in point. He had never participated in any organized sports before coming to MSB and was encouraged by his teachers to join the swim team.

"You could see the changes in Eric after he won a few events. Today he is much more outgoing and self confident."

To donate specifically to the MSB Athletic Program, please send a check or on-line donation at [www.mdschblind.org](http://www.mdschblind.org) and indicate "Athletic Program."

*continued from cover*



"He is wonderful to have in class," adds Hines. "He gets

along well with the other students and is doing well in his school work, even getting 100's in math."

Eric is making great progress outside of the classroom and pool as well. "He's really a great guy," proclaims Sallie LaBarr, a Youth Care Specialist who works

with him in the extended day program. "When he first got here, I think he wanted to make friends but didn't know how. Now he's right with his classmates, having fun and laughing."

"Our expectations of Eric continue to increase at a progressive rate, and he is meeting them," says LaBarr. "He has so much potential. The sky's the limit with Eric."

*Eric reads with Ms. Hines*



*Cody and Allie participate in Braille Challenge*

## The Maryland Regional Braille Challenge

The second annual Maryland Regional Braille Challenge was held on Saturday, February 12, 2011 at The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) with almost one hundred attendees. The event was sponsored by MSB and The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and is a preliminary event of a national Braille reading and writing contest sponsored by the Braille Institute of America in Los Angeles, California.

The top twelve students will qualify to compete in the finals.

## Athletics at MSB

What do track and field, wrestling, swimming, cheerleading and goalball all have in common? They are all sports for which our students train and compete against their peers from states as far away as Florida. As is true with neighborhood

schools, we find competitive sports with other schools results in improved self-esteem, self-image, improved grades, new friends and a whole lot of fun!

Competing at the high school level in a variety of sports is a wonderful opportunity for our students, many of whom have multiple disabilities. Dedicated students work hard to train and compete in the Eastern Athletic Association for the Blind's sports throughout the school

year. MSB's Knefely Gym, Karen Schroeder Memorial Track and Casper G. Sippel Pool Building are very busy centers for all of these activities. Of all the sports offered, Goalball is the only sport that is specific to the blind and visually impaired, The object being to roll a three-pound Goalball (similar to a heavy basketball with sound), past the opposing team without them stopping it. It is their job to block that ball.

If you would like to see our students compete or would like to support the sports programs at MSB, please visit our website to find the next meet or to make a donation.



*MSB students competing in goalball*

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT

## THANK YOU TO:

### Merriken Gift

Through the generous support of a \$10,000 donation from Dr. Harry Merriken, MSB was able to fund a portion of the "Technology Plan for the New Millennium." The gift, in honor of MSB teacher and 42 year veteran, Margaret Reitz, will be used to install wireless capabilities in Newcomer and Case Halls, enabling students to learn and use the latest technology.

### Verizon

With a \$23,400 grant from the Verizon Foundation, MSB will purchase new equipment that will allow print, Braille and online information to be more readily accessible. The advanced technology will enable more effective communication between teachers and students.



### LH Cranston, Inc.



Thanks to a two year \$100,000 gift from LH Cranston, Inc. MSB will break ground this spring, 2011 to build a second independent living home for students in their transition from a school environment into community living. LH Cranston

has partnered with MSB for many years and we appreciate their continued support.

### Home Depot

Thank you Home Depot for your generous donation of materials and manpower for the renovation of the current MSB student independent living home basement. Twenty-four Home Depot Associates, representing 8 area stores, which included White Marsh, Towson, Bel Air, Aberdeen, Timonium, Edgewood, Parkville and Golden Ring volunteered their time and talents in December to renovate the basement.



## Swirl for a Girl

Join us for "Swirl for a Girl" to benefit The Maryland School for the Blind and honor the memory of Carman JoAnn Lay.

Saturday, April 30, 2011  
7:30 – 11:00 p.m.

Ross R. Winans Mansion  
1217 St. Paul Street in Baltimore



Jazz music, wines donated by The Wine Source of Hampden, catered light fare, silent auction and more!

For more information and to purchase tickets go to [www.TheCarmenLayFoundation.org](http://www.TheCarmenLayFoundation.org)

## Join our Legacy Circle

Please consider naming MSB in your will. You will be recognized in special ways. Bequests will help us fulfill our mission. Contact the Development Office at 410-444-5000 ext. 207 for more information.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

*The Maryland School for the Blind is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that depends on your support and donations to help students like Eric become successful, independent adults. Please consider making a contribution to make a difference in a child's life.*

*Donate at [www.marylandschoolfortheblind.org](http://www.marylandschoolfortheblind.org) or by check, payable to:*

*MSB, 3501 Taylor Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21236.*

Become a Fan on Facebook!



The Maryland School for the Blind

## Vehicle Donation Program

Thank you Steve Rouse for donating your voice to our most recent vehicle donation program television ads on WBAL Channel 11. Mr. Rouse is a long time friend of MSB.



**Donate a vehicle today! It's easy.  
Call 1-866-MSB-MYCAR**