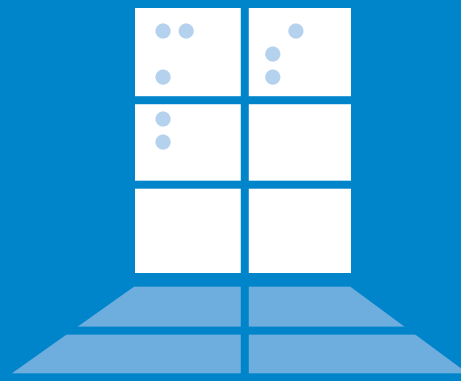




WINDOW



A Warm Welcome to Learning

The warm and welcoming spirit at The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) isn't reserved for holidays. Dominique Gilliam, whose daughter, Riley, is part of MSB's Early Learning Program experiences it on a daily basis.

"It's such a great feeling to walk into the school and have teachers I've never met call out a greeting to my daughter. For these teachers, who have so many students of their own, to know my child by name — I just think that's awesome. I couldn't ask for a better school than this."

It was hard for Riley's parents to come to terms with their daughter's visual impairment at first. "It took some time for us to grasp reality, but once we did, we dealt with it firmly. When we first started this journey, we were still learning about her disability," Ms. Gilliam said. "She had a little hearing loss at birth, but that got better. As she got a little older, she would hold things very close to her face to see more clearly."

When Riley was one year old, her parents enrolled her in MSB's Infant and Toddler Program. The home visits offered training, resources, and support to both parents and child.

Riley began wearing glasses at the age of two. "When she was little, she didn't have an issue with wearing them. But when she turned three, she started having lots of opinions," Ms. Gilliam said. "Sometimes I let her choose whether she wants to wear them or not. I want her to be independent and be able to identify when she needs to let her eyes rest. Right now, she doesn't know. She'll push and push: 'I can see it! I can do it!' I want her to be able to

know when to say: 'I need to use braille' or 'I want to use a magnifying glass.' Her teachers are helping her with that."

It's also important for children, especially those with disabilities, to develop good social skills, and Ms. Gilliam gives MSB high marks emphasizing this. Karen Frank is the principal of the Early Learning Program at MSB. She credits Riley's parents for giving Riley the support she needs to develop confidence and self-esteem. "We've had the honor and privilege to work with Riley and her family since she was an infant, and it's been such a pleasure to see her bloom. She's spunky, bright, energetic, curious, and absorbing everything around her like a sponge."

"It is an attitude that we want to instill in all of our students," she continued. "We want them to fully experience the joy of discovery. We want them to become life-long learners, and know they can be successful no matter what path they take in life."

By the time Riley enters kindergarten next year, the renovation of the Early Learning Building will be complete. "It will be very different from a regular classroom," Ms. Frank explains. "We know that early in life, children learn through what they pick up in their natural environment." A child with vision will learn a lot from watching a parent at a grocery store, for example. But a child who is blind or

(continued on page 3)



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It has been an exciting and productive start to the new school year at The Maryland School for the Blind. We have welcomed new staff and students and have bid farewell to a few long time employees who have been key contributors to the long history of the school.

We just celebrated the opening of our new Autism Blind Learning Activity Center and Cottages with a ribbon cutting event and simultaneously broke ground on the renovation of an existing building which will house our Preschool Early Learning and Outreach Services programs. These projects are part of our 2020 School of the Future Campus Plan that began in 2010 and will continue through 2020. Creating an appropriate learning environment for our students is critical for our students to gain independence, which is at the heart of our mission.

Helen Keller said "One cannot consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar." Over the past two years we have adopted this as our school theme. Our students are indeed "Soaring." Our focus is to demonstrate "Yes, they can. Yes, they will. Yes they must."

This was inspired by my experience this past summer as a representative of the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) at the 2016 Paralympic games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I had the privilege of meeting world class athletes from across the globe and watching them compete on the world's largest stage, many of them breaking records. Much like our students, they proved that there are no limits to the human spirit to achieve.

These athletes are changing the world by demonstrating that disability doesn't mean inability. Our students demonstrate that for us every day here as they continue to soar. On behalf of our students and staff, I thank you for your continued support.

Wishing you and yours a happy holiday season!



Michael J. Bina, Ed.D.
President



Dr. Bina congratulates Dave Ashley on his retirement after 41 years of service to MSB.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT on Rob Hair, Superintendent of Student Services



The start of a new school year is always an exciting time for students and staff alike. It's a time to see old friends and familiar faces and to meet some new ones. MSB welcomed several new students and staff this September, including Rob Hair who joined the MSB staff as the new Superintendent of Student Services. Mr. Hair is responsible for the leadership of the school's on-campus programs and outreach services.

Mr. Hair has held leadership positions at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA, where he served as Education Director for both the Deafblind program and the Lower School. Previous to this he was also Principal for the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind (SCSDB).

He began his career as a music teacher at SCSDB in 1993, shortly after receiving his Bachelor of Arts in Education from Converse College in South Carolina. According to Mr. Hair, "I didn't plan to work with students who are blind, but I knew from the moment I walked into the school that this was going to be my career path. I felt very much at ease and I fell in love with these wonderful students and their families." Perhaps it was his experience with his grandfather early on in his life that paved the way. "My grandfather went blind late

in life and I recall spending time with him as a young child, listening to his recordings for the blind from the National Library Service and even providing sighted guide for him at church.”

In addition to teaching voice and piano, he also taught technology, computer keyboarding, and daily living skills. He also directed the annual school musical productions, often composing the music and lyrics with the students.

Mr. Hair first visited the campus of The Maryland School for the Blind in the 1990s when his students participated in the “Music is Our Vision” music festival which still takes place at a different East Coast school for the blind biannually. He actually was part of the original group of music teachers who revived this music festival tradition over 20 years ago which had not been held since the 1960s. “The MSB campus has changed so much since my first visit. It felt outdated back then, but the first thing I noticed when I returned was how beautiful the campus is and how much the facilities have improved. The students and families must be so happy with all of the improvements.”

Mr. Hair is excited to join the staff at MSB in his new role. “MSB has always had a good reputation with quality programs and a solid curriculum. I am impressed with the level of professionalism and the caring spirit among the staff. Dr. Bina is a leader in our field and has been a mentor to me through the years. I feel very fortunate to be here and look forward to working with the staff. MSB has wonderful staff and parents. It is my hope that together we can take our students, programs and school to higher levels of independence and success.”

A WARM WELCOME TO LEARNING

(continued from page 1)

visually impaired may not have the opportunity to understand the underlying concepts.

The new center will have learning areas that resemble real life. There will be a bank, grocery store, library, art gallery, living room, kitchen, restaurant, science center, and garden, among other things. Architects are designing the areas to look real, and the layout will assist students in building their spatial and orientation skills. “The students will learn about money at the bank. They’ll learn colors and weights of items in our grocery area. They’ll make food in the kitchen, and check out books in the library. The dining area will have tables, chairs, booths, and counters — just as one would encounter in real life,” Ms. Frank said. Learning will transfer to real-world experiences. “The next time a family member takes them to the post office to mail a package, they’ll have an understanding of what’s going on. They’ll know what questions to ask to advocate for their needs. It will help them participate more fully.”

Research has shown that the first five years of a child’s life can determine their future success. It is a critical window of opportunity that parents and teachers can use for the greatest impact. “We wanted our daughter to have a solid foundation, and MSB was the best choice for us,” Ms. Gilliam said. “I couldn’t be happier.”



Riley and her teacher, Miss Dani, work on a math lesson.

MSB Celebrates the Combined Ribbon Cutting and Ground Breaking of New Facilities

On October 20, 2016, MSB cut the ribbon on the newly constructed Learning Activity Center and Residential Cottages for students in the Autism Blind program and simultaneously broke ground on the Early Learning and Outreach program facilities. The event, which was attended by students, staff and invited guests, included formal



ceremonies highlighting both projects, followed by an open house and building tours.

The construction of the new facilities is part of a multi-year campus improvement project that began in 2011 with the demolition

(continued on page 4)

MSB CELEBRATES... (continued from page 3)

of outdated buildings on the school's 100-acre campus. The first phase of the plan included the building of the \$24M Multiple Disabilities Blind facilities which opened in November 2014.

Phase II involved the two-year construction of the Autism Blind Learning Activity Center and Cottages, which includes two 16,000-square-foot student residence buildings and a two-story, 35,000-square-foot classroom building featuring classroom and office spaces, multiple physical therapy rooms, a greenhouse learning laboratory, and an expansive courtyard area. Considerations were given that address the vision needs of the students, such as contrast, decreased visual clutter, organization of space and specialized and adjustable lighting, and also provide optimal learning environments that support the best practices in teaching students with autism.

Construction of the redesigned Early Learning and Outreach Services Center has commenced and is expected to be completed in time for the 2017-18 school year. This educational facility will simulate a "small town community" complete with a bank, grocery store, library, art gallery, living room, restaurant, science center, and garden.

There are funding opportunities available for donors interested in sponsoring one of these areas or contributing to the success of this project. Please call the Development Office at 410-444-5000 ext. 1207 for more information.



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