



# WINDOW THE

## WHEN A BUILDING IS MORE THAN JUST BRICKS AND MORTAR

To those who know her, MSB student Abigail Sulerzyski is an independent young lady with a winning smile, who truly enjoys the company of others. And with the help of her loving family and a supportive school community, she is leveraging those qualities to power through more than a few serious challenges, from visual and hearing impairments, to autism and medical fragility.

Her mother, Victoria, remembers a time when Abby's future seemed pretty bleak. "She spent the first couple of years in a wheelchair, going back and forth to the hospital. On top of that, she wasn't at all interactive. Then we found the PACT program [for children with special needs], where she received intensive outreach services from The Maryland School for the Blind. That's when things started to turn around."

Using a variety of individualized therapies and learning strategies, the MSB staff helped Abby move out into the world, and within a few years she had, as her mother says, "learned to love her life. She began walking, signing, laughing, and giving hugs. My husband, David, and I were beyond happy with her progress then and are amazed at the ground she's still gaining at 16, especially since moving into the new facility for students with multiple disabilities on the campus of MSB."

This ranch-style complex includes four, self-contained cottages that are connected under one roof and incorporate a wealth of accessibility features, from adjustable height counters and user-friendly appliances, to overhead lift systems and, if necessary, customized bedding. These cottages are attached to an equally accessible classroom building through a fully enclosed walkway, which has been a big boon for students during inclement weather.

"They've thought of everything in this facility, and it's been a real blessing for my daughter," says Victoria. "In just six months, Abby has blossomed in so many ways. She is much happier for one thing. She's also more engaged and adventuresome. Before the move, all she wanted to do at home was sit on the couch and watch TV. Now she's helping us unload the dishwasher and sort the laundry, two things she had never attempted before the move."

Her MSB youth care specialist, Sarah Morgan, reports that Abby has made a fairly seamless transition into the new complex, where she is reaping

the benefits of both the increased social interaction and the enhanced accessibility.

"This facility is designed to function more like a real home, which is a much better setup for Abby, who loves to be out and around people, watching them and interacting with them. And for someone who hasn't always adjusted well to change, she has made herself at home there pretty quickly, sharing chores and taking part in leisure activities with her peers."

*continues on page 3*

**It's laundry day for Abby at her cottage living residence.**



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

With our new state-of-the-art residential cottages and learning activity center for students with multiple disabilities now up and running, The Maryland School for the Blind is moving full steam ahead on two additional projects, as part of a multi-year campus improvement initiative we began four years ago.

Thanks to a joint effort between our school and the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation, Lewis Contractors has begun construction on a new athletic field that will be completed in May 2015. The complex will include a new running track, and “beep” baseball and soccer fields. It will also feature an artificial turf infield, along with a Kentucky bluegrass outfield that can be watered with an irrigation system.

We are also working on designing a \$40 million, state-of-the-art facility for our students in the Autism-Blind and Functional Academic programs. Scheduled for completion by the beginning of the 2016 school year, it will incorporate a two-story, 35,000 square foot classroom building and three adjacent, residential cottages, all of which will be adapted for the students’ learning needs.

We couldn’t have done it without you, our dedicated community of donors and the Maryland General Assembly. With your support, MSB continues to make a difference in the lives of the students we serve throughout all 24 jurisdictions in the state, through our on-campus and community outreach programs. Students like Abby Sulerzyski, who by having the benefit of a highly individualized education, are learning to live as independently as possible.

Please know that we value your support and appreciate your contributions.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Bina, Ed.D.  
President

**Dr. Bina and Jaison  
celebrate the opening of  
the new Learning Activity  
Center and Cottages.**



## SPOTLIGHT ON MAUREEN BISESI



For the past 33 years, Maureen Bisesi has made it her mission to help MSB students “live the learning.”

As the school’s Director of Residential and Related Services, it’s her job to extend the learning environment beyond the classroom, with a residential curriculum that teaches essential social and life management skills. “The idea is to prepare our students to live as independently as they can in the 60 or 70 years after they leave MSB. That’s why facilities like the new cottages for students with multiple disabilities are so important to our success.”

According to Bisesi, this innovative facility has already exceeded everyone’s expectations. “The students love their new space because it has given them a license to move around more freely in their environment; to really engage in daily routines like cooking and housekeeping. One student has even learned to pour his own formula into his gastric tube feeding bag. And the connected cottage layout has also made it easier for them to interact with each other; to build a real sense of community.”

To further enhance the learning experience, Bisesi and her residential staff have put a variety of household management systems in place, all of which she says are readily adaptable to any setting, a critical factor in promoting independence.

“Our ultimate goal as staff members is to remove ourselves from the routine, which means teaching our students how to make any physical environment more responsive to their needs. In fact, one of the things I love most about my job is helping my staff tap into their own learning and creativity to come up with new ways to make life better for our students and their families. It’s an awesome responsibility and one we all take very seriously.”

*continued from cover*

Abby's two older sisters, who don't see her as often now that they've moved out on their own, have been especially surprised by how much progress she's making in the interim between their visits.

As Victoria says, "Abby has taught us life lessons we wouldn't have otherwise learned, and we are all exceedingly proud and protective of her. So every new skill she learns is a



**TOP: Abby enjoys a visit from mom and dad. RIGHT: Abby helps with the chores in the kitchen at school and home.**

cause for celebration in our family, and these days we have a lot to celebrate, thanks to all the good work at MSB."



## SUCCESS IS THE NAME OF THE GAME FOR MSB ATHLETICS PROGRAM

In almost every educational institution across the country, the sports program is an integral part of the overall identity of the school. That is no different here at The Maryland School for the Blind, home of the Bees. Like other schools for the blind on the east coast, MSB is a member of the Eastern Athletic Association of the Blind (EAAB) and competes against other member schools in sports including swimming, wrestling, cheerleading, goalball and track and field.

This school year has been an exceptional one for our student athletes and coaches. The wrestling and cheerleading teams traveled to North Carolina for the championships and ultimately brought home a 2nd place team trophy, with several first place individual trophies. The cheerleaders entertained the crowd with their electrifying performances and also earned 2nd place overall. Cheerleading co-captain, Jermaya Taylor impressed the audience and judges with her individual routine and was named the 2015 EAAB Outstanding Cheerleader. The MSB men won the team sportsmanship award.

It is now goalball season and MSB played host to the EAAB

championships in March and to the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) tournament in April. MSB physical education instructor and athletic coach, Matthew Mescall was chosen as one of only four coaches in the United States to travel to Russia in May to help teach and coach this popular sport.

Goalball is a team sport designed specifically for blind athletes, originally devised in 1946 by Austrian Hans Lorenzen and German Sepp Reindle as a means of assisting the rehabilitation of visually impaired World War II veterans. Teams consist of three players on both offense and defense and the object of the game is to score goals against the opposing team by rolling a ball embedded with bells into the opponents' goal. Eyeshades are worn by all participants to allow

partially sighted players to compete on an equal footing with blind players. Teams alternate rolling the ball from one end of the playing area to the other and players remain in the area of their own goal for both defense and offense. Players must use the sound of the bells to judge the position and movement of the ball. It is the most popular sport for blind athletes.

MSB is also assuming the administration of Camp Abilities Maryland this summer. The weeklong, overnight recreational camp, which the school hosted last year, was so successful that it has become a permanent addition to our summer program. By that time our new athletic complex, which includes a new track and beep baseball field, will be completed and ready for use thanks to support from the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation and the MSB endowment.

### MSB cheerleading squad.



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Mr. & Mrs. Munson at the dedication ceremony.

### The Blanton Health Center Dedication

On November 17, 2014, MSB dedicated the Blanton Health Center in memory of Harvey Benjamin Blanton, Sr. and Rebecca Elizabeth Hall Blanton who worked and resided on the MSB campus from 1929-1946. Mr. Blanton served as Assistant Superintendent and Mrs. Blanton as secretary to then Superintendent John Bledsoe. The health center is located within the new multiple disabilities blind program learning activity center and cottages. MSB is grateful to William Leslie and Marian Lee Blanton Munson and family for their generous support of The Maryland School for the Blind.



**SAVE THE DATE: MAY 2, 2015**

*The Carman Lay Foundation Presents the 5<sup>th</sup> and Final  
"SWIRL FOR A GIRL" GALA AND SILENT AUCTION  
to benefit the students of MSB.*

....

Join us for "AN EVENING IN PARIS"  
on May 2, 2015 from 7 p.m. to midnight in the  
Knefely Activity Center on the campus of MSB.

Spend the evening strolling along the Champs-Élysées  
by lamplight, taking in the view of the Eiffel Tower and  
dancing the night away with the Sound Storm Band.

**- TICKETS ARE ON SALE NOW -**

visit [www.thecarmanlayfoundation.org](http://www.thecarmanlayfoundation.org)

## SPRING 2015 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### APRIL

Spring Concert, **April 23** @ 1 p.m. & 7 p.m.  
Jen C. Russo Arts Center

### MAY

5th Annual Swirl for a Girl Gala, **May 2** @ 7 p.m. - midnight  
Knefely Activity Center

Musical Play Production - "Oliver", **May 5, 6, 7th** @ 7 p.m.  
Jen C. Russo Arts Center

Senior Class Awards and Pre-Prom, **May 14** @ 4:30 p.m.  
Jen C. Russo Arts Center

### JUNE

Class of 2015 Graduation, **June 1** @ 6 p.m. Knefely Gym

### Thank you to the following foundations, businesses, clubs and organizations for their generous support:

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