

Life in LAMORINDA



Special day classes like this serve pre-school students with autism
Photo by Jennifer Wake

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Autistic students are entering school districts beginning at age 3 at an annual cost of \$18,000 per student (three times that of typical students), according to the Special Education Expenditure Project (SEEP). Districts are strained by these added costs and are scrambling to find qualified teachers that meet federal guidelines while staying within their budgets.

"We've shot ourselves in the foot as a state by making hoops that are impossible for people," said Stewart, who received her master's in special education and taught special education at the high school level before starting Orion. "You have good people who look at [the credentialing process] and think 'Why would I go to all this trouble to make \$40,000 a year?' They're not going to do it, so that becomes another problem. There's no easy solution."

David Krapf, Saint Mary's College director of teacher credentialing, recently joined 25 education professionals, service providers, and par-

ents of special needs children in a state-wide special education credentialing workgroup. The workgroup is coordinated by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and is examining the structure and content of the current credentialing program.

Under the current structure at public schools, special education credentials are categorized as mild/moderate and moderate/severe and only those with moderate/severe credentials are authorized to work with autistic children. If someone has a mild/moderate credential and is considering being placed with students on the autistic spectrum, Krapf says they would first need to come back to get their moderate/severe credential to be compliant. This would encompass nearly 300 hours of course work as well as one lengthy seminar.

"More people are going into the mild/moderate area than moderate/severe, and that's a significant problem," Krapf said. "But nevermind autism - we don't have an adequate supply of special education teachers, period."

The solution?

Some education experts suggest four main changes: More support for research on treatment effectiveness; more targeted assistance for professional development offering grants for colleges and universities to create specialties in autism; school district willingness to set up state-of-the-art programs to serve children with autism; and getting parents involved in early intervention.

Until then, Stewart suggests changing the goal: "Our goal as educators should be to create the very best adults we can create."

In addition, districts are coming to Krapf asking the college to add a preschool component to their special education curriculum. "Our students are licensed K through 12, so they would need to have a preschool certificate, or we would need to either create a credential or a certificate," he said.

But even with institutions like Saint Mary's offering moderate/severe credentials, it does not change the fact that the current system is broken and needs to be fixed, said Stewart.

"One of the problems in our high schools is we've lost track; we've gone for what's cost effective," Stewart said. "And in the public high school, you have public high school teachers who have no idea how to manage autistic or Asperger's kids in the classroom. It's not a money issue with Lamorinda schools. At the administrative level, these districts' people get it, but training is still an issue."

Special education classrooms in California used to be divided by each student's needs - communication disorders, specific learning disabilities - but Stewart says that doesn't happen anymore. "It's an unfortunate shift because you have special day classes now in public high schools where this whole group of kids is lumped together."

Stewart suggests creating small learning communities where kids of like learning would be together. "There are a lot of people out there who have very different views than I have. I am absolutely against the concept of mainstreaming," she said. "It doesn't work."

Overaa Construction ... continued from page 2

"In the next hundred years we'd like to continue to build upon our reputation within the industry. Build upon our integrity as a family run business. We want to be the commercial contractor of choice, and the employer of choice. We have a very long term horizon." Not surpris-

ingly, Jerry has no plans for retirement.

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its 200 employees. The full service firm specializes in the following: parking structures, water and waste-water treatment facilities, religious facilities, seismic retrofitting, educational, recreational and healthcare facilities, and finally science and technology projects.

Local Musician Takes a Hike

By Sarah Henningsen



Paul Caccamo



Photos provided

We all have that wild dream of simply packing our bags and taking off for a break from reality. Lamorinda resident Paul Caccamo is doing something along those lines.

The only catch is that he's been preparing throughout the past several years for the trip of a lifetime—a five month backpacking endeavor across the 2,650 mile Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from the Mexican border up to the state of Washington. Since departing at the end of April, Caccamo has hiked a significant number of miles and enjoyed the rewarding, though physically demanding, journey.

Paul Caccamo was at one time a student at Campolindo High School; now, a teacher and accompanist at his alma mater. A longtime citizen of Lamorinda, Caccamo is extremely involved in the music scene in the community both at school and through his plethora of piano gigs in the area. For the past nine years, he has worked at Saint Monica's Catholic Church in Moraga as a pianist for the weekend masses, and most recently, as a leader for the Church of Rock youth band and choir. Considering his love of

music, Caccamo's decision to spend many weeks away from the piano and in total wilderness may seem implausible. Before embarking on his journey, he explained his reasoning in wanting to complete the Pacific Crest Trail: "For quite some time I've been feeling the desire to check out of our mechanized and digitalized existence. Cell phones. Car stereos. The neighbor's Harley at 7 AM on Monday. I could use a break from all this noise. That's one reason I'm going. Five months of quiet. I want to at least figure out what to do with the rest of my life, but I won't even think about it until August."

Hiking the entire Pacific Crest Trail is no small feat—it is estimated that only 300 people attempt the "thru-hike" each year, with only 75-100 finishing the entire trek. However, with extensive backpacking and camping experience under his belt, Caccamo is more than prepared for the undertaking. Since his first solo hike in 2001, he has completed various hikes in the Bay Area, the Sierra Nevada, and even Wyoming. Fortunately, he will be joined by two of his closest friends for this particular journey. As Caccamo

commented, "We have already traveled many miles together and with any luck it will soon be many more."

The Pacific Crest Trail itself features many scenic locations of interest for hikers and nature aficionados, passing through famous national parks like Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Yosemite, Mount Lassen, Crater Lake, and the North Cascades. Caccamo mapped out his journey: "The Pacific Crest Trail will be my main route, but there are several side routes, particularly in Oregon, which I will take. The important thing is to walk the whole way, not to be on the exact official trail the whole time. Outside of the parks we'll visit multiple wilderness areas. We'll be in the desert and in the high alpine regions and everything in between."

Until October 1st, when he expects to complete the hike and return to Lamorinda, Caccamo will be sorely missed by his numerous friends and students. He has agreed to drop the Lamorinda Weekly a quick note every now and then, as he will have internet access roughly twice a month. Look forward to reading updates about this incredible journey.

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