

Orinda Resident Making a Difference: Unique Program Opens Doors for Developmentally Disabled Adults

By Jennifer Wake



RES SUCCESS founder Ian Bremner stands next to student's artwork displayed along the walls of the Pleasant Hill facility
Photo Jennifer Wake

Most parents breathe a sigh of relief when their child turns 18. But for parents of children with a developmental disability or mental retardation, the 18-year-old milestone can mean a turbulent transition from the safe haven of a school district's special education program to the uncertainty of adult services offered by the state.

And finding placement can be difficult, especially if your child has severe behavioral problems.

These issues were clear to Orinda resident Ian Bremner, who set out to make a difference. In

1994, he founded RES SUCCESS – a non-profit day-treatment program serving behaviorally-challenged adults with a dual diagnosis of mental illness and developmental disabilities – thanks to two grants he received from the Regional Center of the East Bay.

"We work with mild, moderate severe and profoundly disabled individuals: some who need help with grooming and hygiene, toileting and eating; others who might break things or hurt themselves," Bremner said, who has worked with the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC), the Opportunity for Independence (OFI) and Behavioral Counseling and Research Center (BCRC), and is a member of the Contra Costa County Developmental Disabilities Council. "Our population would not be able to survive without these types of services."

Unfortunately, due to their behavioral problems, Bremner says many of RES SUCCESS' students have been demitted from other programs. Through his program's unique approach, Bremner and his staff have seen once dependent and depressed individuals become engaging, even joyful.

When Mike – one of the Pleasant Hill facility's students – came to RES SUCCESS, he was suffering from severe depression after being disciplined at other in-

stitutions for his behavioral problems. The staff suggested he use exercise as an outlet to express his frustrations.

"He loves to lift weights now. It has really built his confidence," Bremer said. Mike now does his weight lifting poses with the staff and will come up to visitors to proudly share his latest accomplishments. "What's unique about our behavior modification programs is we view behavior as a form of language. We believe a lot of these individuals know what they are doing. Every behavior is a request for help – they're lashing out because they're scared, hungry or frustrated."

The program utilizes art to pull people out of difficult situations, giving them a new focus as they work through their problems toward a resolution.

"Art is so expressive – you can't do it wrong," Bremner said. "You can get to people's emotional state and pull them out of a behavior."

Pleasant Hill facility manager Sandie Shields has seen how the use of art can help diffuse a situation. "Art can be very soothing; the rhythm calming. And when they're engaged in the art room, there is no need to establish eye contact and there are no negative consequences. We can remove them from the situation without

seeming hostile."

In addition to expressive arts, RES SUCCESS also offers individual and group therapy, vocational training, an education curriculum, communication skills support, and daily living activities.

Assistant Program Manager Megan Finley develops individual education plans for each of the 47 students at the Pleasant Hill facility, ensuring that the student's work is not too difficult, but not too easy either. "I have to make sure I keep the students happy; I can't overwhelm them," she said.

"We believe we can reduce maladaptive behaviors to help these individuals to live as independently as possible and find goals specific to match their dreams, such as having a job or living independently with friends," Bremner said.

Now with five locations (two day-treatment facilities, two residential programs in Martinez, and a new day-treatment facility in Pleasant Hill), the organization serves nearly 95 individuals between the ages of 18 and 59 from areas throughout the East Bay, including Lafayette and Moraga. Bremner hopes to open a new facility next year, and plans to expand to Danville and Pleasanton with a goal of serving 250 students within the next five years.

Most importantly, Bremner



Students paint sculptures in the art room at the Pleasant Hill RES SUCCESS Photo Jennifer Wake

doesn't want to lose sight of those most in need – the ones he says fall through the cracks.

"Our clients are incredible teachers – they teach kindness, compassion, and how to live in the moment," Bremner said. "When

you see the people we serve express themselves, it changes everything. Serving these individuals is a dream come true."

For information about RES SUCCESS, you can visit its Web site at: www.resuccess.org.

You Say You Want a Resolution

By Dr. Theresa Tsingis

Research shows that half of the people who make New Year's resolutions have given up on them by the end of June. If you're tired of declaring to lose weight at the beginning of every year and then breaking that vow, try gaining freedom from the endless cycle this year. There is a way to eat that can result in a healthier, more energetic version of yourself. There are workable, long-term ways to make good eating stick and knowing more about your unique metabolism has a lot to do with success.

We all share similarities in metabolism, yet there are ways in which we are metabolically unique. For example, we share the fundamentals of digestion and absorption. What differs between us is how well those processes work. Factors such as age, genetic inheritance, enzyme production and lifestyle influence digestion, absorption, and blood

sugar levels, sometimes in profound ways.

For example, after about age 30 or with certain gastrointestinal conditions, the digestive system produces less digestive juices, resulting in less nutrient absorption. An important example involves protein. When less protein is digested and absorbed, less will be incorporated into the body. Without protein, muscles cannot enlarge or maintain themselves. The immune system won't work optimally, and many metabolic processes can be affected. This has consequences if you are trying to become more fit.

It is imperative that you lose fat, not lean muscle, during a weight loss program. Muscle mass keeps metabolism going at a healthy rate, while fat has a slower metabolism. Two people weighing the same but with different body compositions have two different metabolisms and

also different levels of health.

One way your diet resolution can be more effective is by understanding your metabolic uniqueness. There are several ways to learn more about your metabolism. A quick way is through Bio-electrical Impedance Analysis (BIA), a type of body composition test which is very accurate, convenient and reliable.

This test provides your personal basal metabolic rate (how many calories you actually burn daily), and the accurate densities of body tissues such as fat and lean mass. BIA can be used to calculate your daily protein requirements and give clues to cell membrane health and water distribution. This test is relatively inexpensive and gauges weight loss effectively.

Another metabolic pitfall to rule out would be thyroid insufficiency. This can usually be done by your medical doctor. Nutri-

tionists with a functional nutrition perspective may also be able to uncover underlying hormonal imbalances that contribute to metabolic problems.

It's wise to design your eating for maximum health, energy and fitness based on your metabolism. This year, your diet resolution can make sense once and for all. As the Beatles sang, "Ya know, it's gonna be alright..." Have a Happy and Healthy New Year.

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Linda Watson Pays Tribute to Rotary

By Sophie Braccini



Linda Watson addresses the crowd of Rotarians, standing to her right David Englehart and to her left Paul Fillingner
Photo Sophie Braccini

It's not every Friday morning that Lamorinda Sunrise Rotarians receive such a treat: this month Linda Watson, an international diva and one of the most powerful Wagnerian sopranos of our time, came to the group's breakfast meeting at Postino to talk about her career.

In the audience, her twin brother Dave beamed with pride. Dave is the owner of Professional Automotive Services in Lafayette. They were raised in Orinda with three other brothers and sisters; on that early morning, three generations of Watsons came to hear Linda speak.

Watson started singing in a church choir at age four and studied the piano. She is blessed with a dramatic voice that carries deep emotion and a lot of power; this type of voice is not suited for Mozart or the "bel canto," but rather for roles that demand maturity as well as strength. In fact, Watson started singing opera at age thirty-six.

"I stopped singing many times in my twenties," explains Watson, "and then I was granted a scholarship from the California Rotary Foundation to go study in Vienna." All the Rotarians in the

audience felt the pride of having contributed, themselves or their predecessors, to the blossoming of this unique artist.

Watson's debut was in 1998. She has sung numerous times at Bayreuth, the Wagner International Festival, which has been sold out since its creation in 1876 and for which tickets must be bought up to ten years in advance. She is primarily a Wagner interpreter. Brünnhilde is one of her favorite roles. The character is present three times in Wagner's Ring Cycle, which is comprised of different operas, and Watson may be on stage for five hours in a row. She has sung in Bonn, Munich, Hamburg, Florence, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Washington, Seattle and Tokyo.

Watson plans to sing for at least another ten years. Then she will settle down and teach full time. "I have started giving master classes in major cities around the world," she says, "but I travel too much to be able to do more than that right now." The traveling that's part of the management of her career keeps her away from her Californian roots most of the time. "I miss my country, my

family," she says, "I love when I come back here and retrieve the smell of the trees here in Lamorinda."

Talking with such openness to the audience, it is obvious that Watson is not a capricious and inapproachable diva. "It's insecurity that drives some singers to overprotect themselves," she explains, "our world is very difficult, on stage you are naked; off stage, you need to protect yourself. Some fans are great but you can encounter some pretty disturbed personalities as well."

Watson attributes her simplicity to her inner strength. "I owe it to my family," she says, "the way I was raised, my faith in God." She remembers a phrase her father used to tell the kids when they were going out on dates in high school: "Remember who you are and what you represent." Watson still does.

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