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Moraga Dad Gets Jefferson Award for Spearheading High School for Children with Learning Differences

By *Sophie Braccini*

Ken Dreyfuss is just a normal dad who wants the best for his children. His dedication led him to start a new school and for this achievement he received the Jefferson Award for Public Service in September of this year. The Jefferson Awards are administered by the American Institute for Public Service. The national foundation was founded by Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis in 1972 to encourage and honor people for their contributions through community service.

Dreyfuss's daughter was diagnosed with ADD at an early age and the family saw her struggling. "My daughter went to Rheem but was getting lost in the structure and her self esteem was really poor," said Dreyfuss.

The family decided to register her with a private school in Oakland, Raskob Day School, a very old institution that specializes in children that have language-based learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD auditory processing disorder, non-verbal learning disorders or Asperger's syndrome, and they were pleased with it. But when the Holy Name University, that was managing the high school, reclaimed that space there was nowhere for the kids to continue their education.

With a group of parents, Dreyfuss led the creation of a brand new school, Bayhill High School, a unique private institution in the East Bay that serves students in grades 9-12, providing very small class size and teaching that focuses on individual needs and students' potential for success.

"The difference for my son has been immense," says Lafayette resident Rick Eggerth, whose son was diagnosed with a variety of learning differences in 2nd grade, "He is now at the top of his class, loves school, and feels like things are working, none of which were true in middle school." Eggerth believes that the learning model Bayhill uses - small classes (10 or less), a high degree of teacher and teaching assistant involvement with each of the kids, and lots of multi-media and hands-on teaching modes - works very well for his son. "And being in a small school, where everyone has learning differences, means he doesn't feel isolated from the rest of the kids that don't have such issues, because everyone has similar issues," Eggerth adds.

This uniqueness is what motivated Dreyfuss to jump-start the project. "We were 10 to 12 people on the steering committee," he said, "the school opened in September 2007 after a year of work with parents and educators."

Dreyfuss believes the group was so successful because the old high school closed, so they had the students ready to enroll, and the trained staff was eager to start in the new structure. The fund raising effort was crucial to their success and the group managed to raise \$400,000 in that first year.

"Since we opened the school, (our) population has grown faster than we anticipated," Dreyfuss was pleased to acknowledge, "Our publicity, through our web site, works and as soon as the word got out, we received registrations." Children are coming from as far as Marin County and San Francisco, Bayhill being the only available option in the East Bay.

"I was not involved in the creation of Bayhill," says Eggerth, "but I did become a board member at the beginning of my son's sophomore year (he's a junior now). I'm very involved now, and it is very fulfilling and gratifying work, because the school is so needed and so important to the people involved with it."

Dreyfuss believes that there is a large demand out there in spite of the tuition

that's close to \$21,000 a year. "We hope to create a scholarship endowment," says Dreyfuss, who doesn't want the school to be just for rich kids. Bayhill is in the process of becoming a certified non-public school, so students with special needs who are referred by their public school district will be able to attend while the district pays the tuition.

Eggerth and his son are starting to research colleges. "We don't know where he'll be going, but it will be something with a good LD (learning differences) program," he says, "There are more schools that offer strong LD programs than there were in the past, and the awareness of LD needs is growing."

"In college they are much more accommodating of differences," says Dreyfuss, "the worst time is K-12."

For more information go to <http://www.jeffersonawards.org/> and <http://www.bayhillhs.org/>

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