The Joy of Giving

Giving comes in many forms and has the power to transform lives. Whether it’s an act of kindness or a financial gift, giving has a way of making us better and our world a better place.

Inspired Parents Fund New Children’s Home In Their Son’s Honor

Sometimes the parents of a child with autism are inspired to give back in grand and inspiring ways. George and Dimitra Zervas decided to honor their son Mario by making a generous gift of $500,000 towards building the fourth home in Little City’s Duffey Family Children’s Village. It will be named “Mario’s Home.”

The most remarkable aspect of this gift is that Mario will never live in this home. “We wanted to be able to help other families and invest in the latest advancements for young children with autism,” said the Zervas family. “We are so pleased how well Mario has progressed at Little City that it was a natural next step for us to help spread that happiness to other Little City families.”

Mario Zervas is an exceptional young man with a unique story. Until the age of 4½, Mario was fluent in Greek and English, and highly social. One day Mario experienced a high fever for several days. When he recovered, he was a different Mario. There was no explanation for this sudden change. When Mario was diagnosed with autism, it was an overwhelming and challenging time for the Zervas family.

Mario’s life has been both joyous and challenging. He displayed extreme anxiety when his parents tried leaving the house. Instead of George and Dimitra continuing to take turns staying home, they visited various day programs. Both of them felt that many options felt too fenced in and institutional.

Losing hope, they shared their despair with cousin Eleni Bousis, a Little City board member. She told them about Little City and helped to arrange a tour with Executive Director Shawn Jeffers. As the Zervas family walked around, they quickly fell in love with the safe and open feeling of the campus.

“We were instantly comfortable. It felt like a village, a real community, featuring a medical and dental clinic, recreational complex and a horticulture center. We trusted Shawn right away and sensed that everyone at Little City was very dedicated to enriching participant’s lives,” said George.

Mario had found a new home. Staff initially worked with Mario's physician to identify the appropriate medication and dosage to help manage his behaviors. “At first he stayed home all day, every day,” said Lanisa Abrams, Mario’s first Home Manager. “The first few months Mario needed one-on-one time with a clinician. I learned to come into his world and he began communicating. Once you get to know him, you will love him,” added Lanisa.

Mario enjoys weekend visits with his parents and participating in Little City’s newest learner boxes, which include rotations of geography, music and literary skills. Mario also likes preparing pie-pans that are used by factories and stores for producing merchandise, as well as singing and painting with his friends in Little City’s Center for the Arts.

“You learn about him and what he likes by spending time with him”, said Uma Muppidi, Mario’s current Home Manager. “He only responds in one

Continued on page 3...
Executive Director’s Corner

“\textit{I’ve seen and met angels wearing the disguise of ordinary people living ordinary lives.}” — Tracy Chapman

Dear Friends,

As we look forward to an extraordinary and exciting 2016 for Little City, I warmly recount the outpouring of support over the past year. All of us are grateful for the giving spirit and huge hearts of our families, friends and supporters. We cannot thank you enough.

While government funding is a constantly challenging and diminishing resource, and with State leaders repeatedly failing to address our most critical human service needs, I am humbled by the multitude of inspired “Joy of Giving” stories we had in 2015. For me, each one illuminates the truth in Tracy Chapman’s quote, “I’ve seen and met angels wearing the disguise of ordinary people living ordinary lives.”

A breakthrough story that filled us all with pride and gratitude was matching The Coleman Grant of $500,000 to help build the third home in the Duffey Family Children’s Village. Construction is scheduled to begin in early Spring 2016.

Last year was filled with opportunities that will also help Little City broaden its scope and continue to lead the way with more enhanced and diverse programs and services. To that end, I am pleased to say that discussions with Countryside Association in Palatine, a non-profit dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, continue in an effort to bring our organizations together as one.

2015 was also a year of enterprise development with the launching of Empower Workforce Solutions, a unique mission-driven company specializing in hiring individuals with disabilities covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Empower serves the entire Chicagoland area and will create a new source of revenue for Little City.

As part of our commitment to find and cultivate the next generation of supporters of our mission, we are actively involving younger populations through innovative media channels and social engagement. This initiative includes a new monthly e-newsletter, blog, an Instagram account as well as a stunning new Website.

Adding another dimension to giving, Little City is at the forefront of advocating for giving people a choice in determining the best living arrangements for their loved ones. As we all know, family can take on many forms. Some families simply consist of blood relatives, while others are based on kinship and shared values. With the government trying to legislate out campus environments such as ours, we believe that everyone benefits when there is freedom of choice. It allows participants the option of choosing to live with like-minded individuals in an entire community dedicated to meeting their needs.

Yours in service,

Shawn E. Jeffers
Executive Director

Little City Spotlight

New IT Director: Creating a Virtual Dream in the Cloud

Debra Cronin, Little City’s new Director of Information Technology, brings 25 years of experience, with the last sixteen years primarily at the community college level. With a number of IT degrees, she relocated from California to Chicago to help with her two granddaughters while her daughter serves as a naval commander in Afghanistan.

Her big heart and wealth of experience in technology drew her to Little City.

“I enjoy the challenge of rolling out the latest technologies to help residents find ways to better engage with their environment,” said Debra.

The technology team is acquiring about 30 iPads for residents with training classes to take place in June. In addition, a number of mobile apps across administrative purposes will be acquired to help providers for more comprehensive reporting in participant’s homes.

Debra continues to strategize for efficient ways to best create a virtual environment in the cloud, which removes the need to invest in higher-grade equipment. Repurposing the technology already being used will enable a virtual and accessible environment for residents 24 hours a day.
The Joy of Giving

or two word sentences, but his intentions are clear.” Uma sees that Mario’s communication and life skills continue to improve, and believes he will be able to find new means of expression.

Everyone’s goal for Mario in 2016 is finding the right speech therapist. Although state funding is unavailable, the family is searching for a private therapist to help him continue on his journey of expression, better communication and the ability to form closer relationships.

George and Dimitra are filled with gratitude and excitement about Mario’s future. “Little City has been truly transformational for Mario,” they said, “it is our hope that Mario’s Home will create hope and additional successes for the youth who will live there and participate in so many of the activities that keep our son flourishing.”

Two Efforts Tied Together Equals One Big Success

Little City’s #GivingTuesday campaign, part of a global initiative to support charities, raised an estimated $33,000 in donations, including $13,160 in a pledged match from The Coleman Foundation. The campaign coincided with Little City’s annual holiday appeal “Tag You’re It!” which included complimentary gift tag stickers as a thank you to the organization’s stakeholders.

Recipients were encouraged to “Tag” their friends through word of mouth, in person or on social media to share Little City’s mission of enriching lives of individuals with disabilities. Little City’s #GivingTuesday campaign incorporated the “Tag You’re It” language and graphics to tie the two appeals together.

Words of praise came from Debbie Nelson, “Giving to Little City is so exciting and rewarding. It was THE BEST local Giving Tuesday campaign I’ve seen as a parent, donor and Certified Fund Raising Executive. Between the website, media coverage, social media, and a stand-out mail piece, Little City has done a fabulous job.

I know firsthand with my son Wyatt, it takes a lot of extra work for our children with disabilities to learn, and it’s often more messy than glamorous, the opportunity and the reward are that much greater. The staff at Little City know this with the caring work they do, day in and day out.

So…a big thank you for all you do – Wyatt style. Hats off to you and your team.”

Little City Soars Thanks to Flying4kids

Daniel Cordido and Collin Robb are indoor skydiving instructors for iFLY and travel around the world participating in world-class competitions under the name Flying4kids. As part of their giveback philosophy, they chose Little City as their charity of choice. Their recent victory at the Clash of Champions in Dubai benefited Little City with $2,000, and surely there will be more awards for these generous and talented skydivers in the future.

“Seeing the kids’ faces glow up when they enter the wind tunnel is priceless, said Collin Robb, it is such a gratifying feeling to be able to make a dream come true for them.”

In addition to making contributions to Little City, Flying4kids will be helping our residents experience the adventure of flying.

Hot Chocolate Walk

On Sunday, November 8, 2015, family, friends and supporters gathered together in Grant Park to support children and adults with disabilities at Ram Racing’s Hot Chocolate Walk for Little City. Nearly 2,000 walkers were greeted by an amazing sunrise over Lake Michigan and challenged by a 3K Walk along the beautiful lakefront and fantastic view of the Chicago skyline. After triumphantly crossing the finish line, walkers then headed to the celebration party with live music, kids zone, family Meet-n-Greet and, of course, the finisher’s mug complete with signature hot chocolate and chocolate fondue! Through the dedication of the walkers, $20,000 was raised to support Little City.
example, with bubbles and balloons if the situation calls for slowing down. Other sensory outlets range from therapeutic sand, beads, musical toys, and various scents. Particular lessons involve communication and emotion check-in sheets, which aid in providing a positive outlet for excess energy.

“It’s not always realistic that planned activities are beneficial at a given time. Sometimes a participant needs an activity that calls for more space. These boxes are quick to go, fun, and interactive. When there’s down time or someone is struggling, it’s helpful to have,” said Mary Grimm, Little City’s Clinical Mental Health Coordinator.

The coping box is in the pilot stages, and if funding is provided, Little City will allocate boxes for the additional five residential homes.

“You could see the students taking pride in giving back. We gave them Little City headbands, and they loved it,” said Catrina Johnson, Little City’s Manager of Volunteer Services. “They also make cards for each bag, so the families will enjoy individualized artwork made by the students.”

In November, students collected the donated food and brought a coffee cart to Hoffman Estates High School for teachers to help with the collection process. Then transition center staff helped participants bring local food and supplies to Little City. Jewel gift cards were allocated for various meats at the Palatine campus. Other generous donors included: Gunjan Mehra and Duane Fau, Aldi, and staff from the Hoffman Estates Adult Transition Program part of District 211. Students also brought donations from home.

“Each year, the goal is 35 bags for 35 families, and each year we meet that goal and there’s always extra,” said Pete Capra, a lead teacher with the Adult Transition Program. An added perk, said Capra, is “brining items for a free cup of coffee. It creates a certain festive feeling,” he said.

The students eagerly anticipate the holiday project with Little City every year. Since they age out of special education programs by 22, they look to Little City for a sense of community and engaging adult programs.

Little City extends its appreciation to the following groups and countless individuals for their recent volunteer work with us:

- 100% Foundation
- Adult Transition Program South-Higgins Educational Center
- Assurance
- Boy Scouts Troop 37
- Conant High School
- Dist. 211 Academy South
- Fed Ex
- Gleaner Life
- Harper College
- HIP Salon
- Holy Family Parish
- Hot Chocolate Chicago Walk for Little City Volunteers
- Keller Williams
- KoenigRubloff Berkshire Hathaway
- LifePath Halloween Volunteers
- Little City’s Parent, Family and Guardian Group
- Northridge Preparatory School
- Pleasant Hill Elementary School
- St. Edna’s Parish

For detailed descriptions of these recent projects or to learn more about getting involved, visit www.littlecity.org/volunteer or contact (847) 221-7804.
It’s Never Too Late to Plan

When is the best time to start your estate planning? While it may feel like there is never really a “right time” to do estate planning, the best time to start is right now.

While only two out of five Americans have a will, everyone needs a will. The primary purpose of a will is to ensure that your assets are distributed to whomever you choose in the amount and manner that you choose. Other uses include assigning guardianship to minors and appointing an executor to manage the process. With a will you can provide for your family, friends and the causes that mean the most to you. Establishing a will can also make the probate process easier for your loved ones and allows you to write your legacy and story by which you want to be remembered.

Need help getting started? Little City can help by:

• Sending you our Free Wills Guide that includes helpful information for planning, bequest language and provides a simple way to gather and organize all of your important information and documents for you and your attorney.

• Providing you with a referral to an estate attorney.

• Sending you additional information on specific types of planned gifts.

• Scheduling a private, confidential meeting with you and your financial advisor to discuss your specific desires and interests.

• All or any of the above.

Over the years, many donors have expressed the peace of mind that comes from having their will in place and knowing that their loved ones will have a clear plan as to their wishes. By including Little City, you are exemplifying that the legacy you leave is not just about material and financial assets, but also about helping to improve the lives of others in the world that they leave behind.

If you have already included Little City through a bequest in your will, please let us know so we can properly thank and acknowledge you.

“We established our will (and a special needs trust) decades ago and have periodically updated it to reflect our current interests. We have included a bequest to Little City in our will because we want to assist in supporting the long term sustainability of their much needed services, not only for our son, but also for others with similar needs.”

― CAROL & ULFER THORS
Center for the Arts Chosen for Avant-Garde Exhibition

In an exciting turn of events, veteran movie industry insider, Bobbi Thompson, handpicked four Little City artists to be featured in the “Brain States” exhibition on Dec. 5 and 6 at EarthWE Gallery, in Santa Monica, California. Tarik Echols, Joe Flasch, Harold Jeffries, and Luke Tauber’s outsider art was chosen for the gallery show. Little City’s studio and artists were presented several times in Raw Vision magazine, and our recent exhibition at Intuit also caught the eye of the art connoisseur.

“Our artists will be reaching a brand new audience in Los Angeles where we’ve had limited exposure in the past. We’re honored to be targeting art lovers who are unfamiliar with outsider art,” said Frank Tumino, Little City’s Center of the Art’s Administrator, who serves artists with autism and intellectual disabilities. “Touring our work with this unique community of artists is very exciting.”

Although art being created in disability studios is often cutting edge work, it is seldom seen. With a media blitz and YouTube video created for the event, Tumino believes a few thousand viewers attended the exhibit. The “Brain States” exposed the population to outsider art, a particular art form created to satisfy an inner need rather than for the art market. Outsider art is prized for its freshness, vitality and authenticity.

The Joy Factory Gallery/Cinema, a new organization dedicated to the promotion of fine art and independent cinema, organized the show with a mission to bring together the work of artists without formal training to highlight uniquely moving and experimental art outside commercial venues. Other artists involved in the show came from ECF’s Downtown Art Center in LA, Project Onward of Chicago, and a screening “Jason and Shirley,” a controversial film recently acquired by the MOMA.


Golfing with the Pros

Board member Jim Stone and Little City staff spearheaded a new indoor golf center in March of 2015. To expand the program, we offered free golf lessons during Open House Specials up until Dec. 17 at Little City. We are currently enrolling new participants for small group instruction of up to four participants with intellectual disabilities with a PGA certified golf instructor on Thursday afternoons.

Mary Dwyer, a former 20-year member of the Ladies Professional Golf Tour and a PGA certified teacher, is providing instruction to individuals with disabilities age 16 and older. No prior golf experience is required. Dwyer, who also has taught as a teaching professional at Northmoor Country Club in Highland Park and Tamarisk Country Club near Palm Springs, California, has many years experience teaching golf to children with disabilities and has provided golf instruction at Little City since 2014. She has been instrumental in the success of our Special Olympics golf team.

Tim LaHart, Director of Recreation and Fitness at Little City, has observed that the program is slowly gaining momentum. “We want it to be a well-used facility that exposes as many people to Mary Dwyer as we can. She teaches with a process that they easily pick up, listen, and become quickly engaged. It’s amazing to have a golf pro to teach our athletes concentration and patience with a sport that’s usually less accessible,” said Tim.

With a warm, jovial personality, Dwyer gives advice in an approachable manner, telling participants to line their bodies up to the ball with their belly buttons even with the tee. She is quick to praise their efforts, telling a recent participant, “I’m very impressed with you.” “It’s been wonderful. Participants really want to learn,” she said.

Dwyer, who has been playing golf since age 11, was a member of championship golf teams at the University of Miami in Florida before joining the LPGA.

“Mary’s energy creates a buzz of excitement around participants,” added Kyle Standridge, a recreational therapist at Little City with a background in sports management who is assisting with getting the golf program off the ground.

The indoor facility was created from an unused vehicle storage barn. Hitting bays, a putting green and other items were purchased from Golf Nation when they closed their doors. Golf clinics are open to Little City participants as well as to individuals with disabilities in the local community on Thursday afternoons at the rate of $120 for four lessons.
Little City aims to provide the highest possible quality of life for the people it serves, including offering a variety of educational and recreational opportunities, wellness initiatives, options to explore creativity and more. Recent updates from around our “City” include:

**Horticulture Renovation Blooms**

The Dorothy H. Rose Horticulture Center recently underwent an extensive three month renovation, which was generously funded by the Rose/Hockfield family trust. The Center reopened this past September for social gardening and plant education. The newly enhanced therapeutic environment features a lush greenhouse, new roof, lighting, flooring, commercial sink, seed starting equipment and digital environmental controls for the glass green houses. Participants engage in hands-on learning about edible and ornamental plants, as well as green industry training.

**Adult Holiday Party Rocks On**

About 200 adult participants enjoyed a four course holiday dinner at the Cotillion Banquet in Palatine. The 10 members of the new Little City choir jammed out to “Jingle Bell Rock” and other holiday favorites. The adults were decked out in fancy suits, gowns, and festive attire while they danced the night away as the DJ continued to spin holiday tunes and pop songs.

**GCCMA Foundation Heats up Kitchen Renovation**

The Greater Chicago Club Managers Association Foundation (GCCMA) donated their first installment to create a commercial training kitchen to help interested participants prepare for entry-level jobs in the food and beverage industry.

The training kitchen concept offers vocational skills at our Center for Employment day program. The training kitchen will allow individuals to simulate bussing tables, prepping food, dishwashing, and food preparation just like in an actual restaurant setting.

Omron is also one of the generous donors of the new kitchen and contributed towards the hospitality suite, computer lab, and assessment room. Together, these two great donors are bringing the dream of enhanced skills training and job creation to a boil.

The project will be completed in February of 2016 and individuals will follow a curriculum and training manual created by the GCCMA.

*Left to Right: Edward Hockfield, Little City Chief Philanthropy Officer; Gavin Speirs, GCCMA Foundation Board of Directors; Alan Slatin, President, GCCMA Foundation; Jeff Belting, Vice-President, GCCMA Foundation*
City Guide: Upcoming Events

7th Annual Food Frenzy
Friday, May 6, 2016 | Loft 644 | Chicago, IL
Feast on exclusive delicacies from Chicago’s hottest restaurants while networking with other young Chicago professionals at the 7th Annual Food Frenzy hosted by Little City’s Junior Board.

PFG Golf Outing
Summer 2016 | Highland Woods Golf Course | Hoffman Estates, IL
A golf outing designed exclusively for Little City’s Parent/Family/Guardian Group. The event promises to be a wonderful day of golf and exciting contests.

53rd Annual LCI Golf Classic
Monday, August 1, 2016 | Twin Orchard Country Club | Long Grove, IL
Enjoy 18 holes of golf at one of the top golf courses in the country. The day is capped off by a fabulous dinner and a silent auction that is guaranteed to impress.

Little City's Seeing Hope Together
Poker Tournament Night 2016
Friday, March 11, 2016
The Montgomery Club
500 West Superior St.
Chicago, Illinois
Enjoy a wonderful evening of casino games and Texas Hold ‘Em where the grand prize is a $10,000 entry into the World Series of Poker!
Register today at www.littlecity.org/poker

Presented by Spex