Countryside Center Celebrates New Location

...As told by those who helped build it

Shawn Jeffers, Little City Executive Director

“Once upon a time a group of parents had a good idea for their kids. That idea has carried through to this moment.”

That idea was Countryside Association in 1954. That moment came 63 years later in the form of Little City’s new Countryside Center – a dynamic space that brings the original idea of providing people with developmental disabilities opportunities for meaningful work and independent lifestyles in new and exciting ways.

Little City celebrated the ribbon cutting for the new location on Sept. 28 with the supporters, families and staff that made the dream a reality. The building was already buzzing with activity as roughly 250 people have been coming to the center on 2360 Palmer Drive in Schaumburg every day since it first opened on July 17.

Visitors will find a wide range of people using the center, whether it is prospective employees learning skills for a community job, seniors engaging in rewarding recreational, mental and social activities or some of Little City’s most dependent members finding a safe and supportive environment to enjoy.

The vocational skills program allows prospective community employees to do contracted work right on site but also learn the skills and etiquette needed to move into a community job. Golden Opportunities, the senior program, engages roughly 50 seniors in activities from chair exercise for physical fitness to volunteer opportunities such as making blankets for animal shelters. New Horizons allows those with the most profound developmental disabilities to engage in recreational activities at their pace in a safe, supportive and social setting.

With 30,000 square feet, there is room for all of this necessary and productive activity to take place. Little City’s newest life-changing facility was only possible because of the love and dedication of people committed to building a better world for people with developmental disabilities.

Jack Shum, Little City Board Member

“Our first inclination was to say no.”

Little City’s Countryside Center would never been possible without two key decisions by the leadership of Countryside Association: Sell the only home they had never known and merge with Little City. Both decisions did not come easy, but after Jack and all the Countryside board members from that time saw what they helped create at the new center, they know they made the right decision.

While the merger decision was under serious consideration from the beginning, Jack and the rest of the board never really wanted to sell the Palatine property to the developers looking to expand into Countryside’s area. So the board set the price at double the actual value of the property. And to everyone’s surprise, the offer was accepted.

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Tim Lahart Named Team USA Special Olympics Coach

Tim Lahart got his first taste of Special Olympics coaching when he was 12 years old.

Thirty years later, a childhood dream has come true as he has been named the head coach for the Illinois power lifting team at the Special Olympics USA Games in Seattle.

“It means a lot,” Tim said. “This is my 30th year being part of Special Olympics and to have this opportunity during the 50th anniversary of Special Olympics – that’s big for me.”

The process to be a candidate for a national coaching spot is competitive and exhaustive. It includes applications, letters of recommendations, resumes and interviews and it’s not easy to break through on the first try. But like he has done during his eight-year tenure at Little City, Tim got results right away and was accepted as coach in his first time submitting for the job.

His responsibilities will include coaching a team of the four best powerlifters in Illinois to get ready for the USA Games in Seattle during the first week of July in 2018. The work will include training camps, talking with the athletes’ local coaches and building relationships with the athletes and their parents. With one athlete as far away as Champaign, it may be a challenge, but one Tim is more than happy to accept.

“I just want to help them reach their goals and give them their time. This is what they’ve been working for,” Tim said. “I just hope they like me. That’s the key – the relationship.”

If Tim’s past work is any indication, he should have no problem establishing winning relationships right away. In his time at Little City, Tim has expanded the Special Olympics program to include more athletes, sports and coaches and has built it into one of the most successful and respected teams in the entire state.

In 2017, the Little City Special Olympics team was named the Kevin T. Kendrigan Outstanding Team of the Year and won 36 medals at the Illinois Summer Games, including 17 golds – 14 of which came courtesy of the powerlifting team.

Tim said he would continue to keep up all of his Little City programming and Special Olympics coaching during his lead up to the national competition.
Heart of the City

Countryside Center Celebrates New Location

...Continued from cover

Countryside was on the move and Little City would help in the process – just in case the merger went through. With more than 40 years in real estate development, Jack was the perfect person to lead the charge. After going through dozens of properties, the Palmer Drive location was found just as the deadline approached, thanks in no small part to fellow Countryside board member Bruce Blanck.

Now the challenge was converting an old office space into the perfect setting for people with developmental disabilities to thrive ... and it had to be done in about six months.

J.P. Sanavaitis, Owner of NW Construction

“I told my guys even if this project was going to cost us money, we were going to do it.”

J.P. Sanavaitis would not stop until Little City accepted his bid, even if it meant he would lose money. For he too loved someone with a developmental disability and he knew now was his time to make a difference...

To continue J.P.’s story, along with the extraordinary contributions of Jim Wells, Bill Brennan and Wendy Mayfield, go to www.littlecity.org/countrysidestory

Little City Invitational Raises More Than $300,000

“In an event meant to honor them, they once again displayed their incredible selflessness, unending generosity and genuine love for all those at Little City we are honored to serve.”

Attendees also had the opportunity to hear first-hand how Little City residents are succeeding in all avenues. Little City’s self-advocacy group, the Icebreakers, was on-hand to talk about the work they are doing at home and in Springfield to help people with developmental disabilities. Little City Special Olympian Ciara Craig addressed the audience to encourage their support for the life-changing skills learned in the Special Olympics and recreation programs. Attendees responded by collectively contributing $40,000 to the programs.

Little City wants to thank the dozens of volunteers and sponsors that made the event possible including, Joe Adams and RSMUS; Double Eagle Sponsor: Barbara Bradford and Bob Sherman; Par Sponsors: Abt Electronics, Dentons US, LLP., Timothy Desmond, Gianaras Family Foundation, Golub & Company, Hockfield/Rose Families, McHugh Construction, Mesirow Financial, NW Construction LLC., The Private Bank, Ethel & Joel Sharenow, Wintrust Commercial Banking, Wipfli LLP., The Hal Wolken Family & Sonic Drive-Ins, William Blair & Company; Golf Ball Sponsor: Wipfli LLP.; Golf Cap Sponsor: The Private Bank.

From left to right: Marcus Montanye, LCI Co-Chair; Shawn Jeffers, Little City Executive Director; Honorees Bob Sherman and Barbara Bradford; Kenneth Kolmin, LCI Co-Chair; and John Stevens, LCI Co-Chair.
Making a Difference

Discover and Chicago Cares Volunteers Create Field of Dreams

“Making a Difference

Discover and Chicago Cares Volunteers Create Field of Dreams

It was amazing to see all these individuals come together and complete a project that is going have such a positive impact for our athletes and residents.”

The massive softball field project was just the beginning for Discover and Chicago Cares volunteers who were determined to do even more for Little City.

The volunteers also helped beautify the mile-long campus walking trail, create canvas murals, re-paint picnic tables and offer other much-needed assistance. Additional Discover volunteers operated in Little City’s gymnasium, creating fleece blankets, pillows and sensory boxes for other community charities.

“It’s one of those events that everyone actually wants to participate in. Volunteerism is one of Discover’s core values and we want to encourage our employees to give back to their community,” said Cathy Davis, Volunteer Lead and Procurement Manager for Discover.

“No one ever feels forced to participate, rather, our employees sincerely look forward to this day every year.”

This event was part of Discover Cares program that aims to provide support to the community through volunteerism of their time and skills to make a more caring and compassionate society.

Volunteers apply sand and dirt to the Little City softball field. The project required 72 tons of sand and dirt to complete.

Little City has its own field of dreams thanks to a team of hard working volunteers from Discover.

After years of deterioration, Little City’s softball field received the restoration it needed thanks to more than 200 Discover employees that arrived with enthusiasm to volunteer valuable time at Little City on Sept. 26. The project required a whopping 72 tons of sand and dirt to be moved and applied to the field, requiring three dump trucks to deliver the load. Because of the vital work, Little City’s award-winning Special Olympics team will now be able to host games at home instead of needing to travel for every game.

“As a Special Olympics coach at Little City, this really is a field of dreams for our athletes,” said Stephanie Darnell, Volunteer Services Supervisor at Little City.

Paul Fortunato, Chicago Cares Manager of Corporate Volunteer Programs, thanks all the volunteers for a successful day at Little City.

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

• Altria Group
• Assurance Agency
• Comcast
• Discover
• District 15
• District 54
• Friends of Countryside
• Greater Chicago Club Managers Association Volunteers

For detailed descriptions of these recent projects or to learn more about getting involved, visit www.littlecity.org/volunteer or contact (847) 221-7804.
Earth Paint Can Help Your Walls Tell a Story

Every gallon of Earth Paint has a story. And each story has a bit of Little City mixed in.

Earth Paint founder Chris McCarthy, a Little City Junior Board member, has started one of the only businesses of its kind in the country – a paint recycling business that takes unwanted paint, re-engineers it and repackages it to be sold to a good home. His workforce operates with tremendous efficiency, processing hundreds of cans in a matter of hours to the point Earth Paint has roughly 7,000 gallons ready to be sold.

And that workforce is almost entirely comprised of people from Little City.

“They're great workers,” Chris said. “They can rotate between 9 different stations and once they find one they like doing, they just keep going.”

The Little City workers, who come from both the Countryside Center and the Palatine location, do everything from unloading gallons of paint when deliveries arrive, to sorting the paint and dispersing the color to crushing the old cans to be recycled.

Business has gone so well that Earth Paint has moved from a 300 square-foot facility, to a 900 square-foot location and now to a 3,000-square-foot warehouse in Wood Dale, just a few blocks away from the original store location. The larger facility means Chris can employ even more people from Little City and will operate for more hours and on the weekends.

“Our new facility will allow us to give tours to people interested in seeing how seriously we take special needs employment as well as recycling,” Chris said. “We produce less than two percent waste and turn the non-recyclable plastic paint cans into colorful planters.”

Earth Paint also helps those in need, donating 1,000 gallons of paint to Texas to help in the Hurricane Harvey relief effort. Starting in October, Earth Paint products will be sold at Habitat for Humanity ReStores.

The future is bright for Earth Paint and Chris knows workers from Little City will play a big part in it.

“I want to employ as many people from Little City as I can,” he said. “We're producing a superior paint in top selling colors and can do custom colors. It’s a chance to buy a product that gives back and you can let your walls tell a great story.”

Earth Paint is expected to open its new location at 365 Irving Park Road in Wood Dale in mid-October. For more information on Earth Paint or to schedule a time to drop off unused paint, visit www.earthpaint.org.

13-year-old Raises $7,000 for Foster Care & Adoption Program

Laib Zemel only wanted one thing more than others for his Bar Mitzvah: he wanted children who don’t have families, to get one.

So to help make his wish come true, the 13-year-old passed on receiving his own gifts and instead set out to raise money for Little City’s Foster Care & Adoption program. He ended up raising more than $7,000, which will be used for parent recruitment — a program Little City often struggles to fund.

“I was adopted when I was born and I know how lucky I am,” Laib said. “Everyone deserves a loving family.”

From the moment he was born, Laib was connected to Little City. He was born into the Little City Foster Care & Adoption program, but unlike many children he didn’t need to spend a minute in care of the program. His adoptive mother, Ellen, was ready.

Ellen had waited almost four years to find a match. She wanted to adopt siblings but was running into problem after problem. Right as she was about to give up, Little City called her to let her know there was a baby about to be born and they thought he was her match. She felt as if it was divine intervention.

“Little City always returned my phone calls and never discriminated against me as a single parent. Their arms were always wide open,” Ellen said. “People always ask me, why did it take four years to adopt. I tell them that I didn’t realize I was waiting for Laib, and he just wasn’t born yet.”

There are not enough words to describe the generous and selfless spirit of Laib, who has embraced the deep roots of the Jewish faith that Ellen taught him since he was an infant. He has already expressed a desire to become a leader on many fronts and has a deep passion for fighting all injustices.

And to Laib, there is nothing as unjust as a child without a loving family. And because of Laib, more children will be able to find the home they deserve.
In Memoriam

In Loving Memory of George Alexandrou (1926-2017)

Little City is sad to say goodbye to longtime supporter, board member and leader George Alexandrou, who passed away at 91 years old on Sept. 28.

When George first came to Little City, the campus was still just a few homes on what eventually turned out to be the 56-acre community that now features educational, residential and recreational opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. His guidance and passion for Little City played a big part in making that future a reality.

His son, Peter, has been a part of Little City for more than 40 years and the drive George had to create the best future for his son extended to all Little City families, Gil Fergus, current president of the Parent/Family/Guardian Group, said George was one of the first people he met when coming to Little City more than 20 years ago and George played a big part in making his family feel welcomed.

“He was always a warm, compassionate person and had good will for everybody,” Gil said. “He was a great promoter of Little City’s mission and was one of the best friends Little City could ever have.”

George’s incredible legacy of generosity and support continues at Little City through his son Alex, who has served as president of the PFG group and is still a Little City board member today. Longtime board member Jack George said the same qualities that made George such a special person can be clearly seen in Alex.

“George was an example to all of us on how to support an organization,” Jack said. “He was a wonderful man and Alex is really following those footsteps.”

In addition to his incredible work at Little City, the Spetses, Greece native lived a full and accomplished life. George was a World War II veteran of the Royal Greek Navy, owner of multiple Chicago establishments including the 904 Club, Psistaria Grecian Taverna and Nonebetter Ice Cream and very active at St. Haralambos Church in Niles, Greek American Nursing Home in Wheeling and Hellenic Lodge 1084.

George truly built a better world for so many people, especially those with developmental disabilities, and left a legacy that will live on for years to come.
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:

4th Annual PFG Social Event
Little City’s Parent/Family/Guardian Group hosted their 4th Annual Social Event on Sept. 24th to show their appreciation to all parents & families who have supported Little City throughout the years. Over 40 parents & family members came out to enjoy a delicious buffet and many raffle prizes were awarded to the guests. From left to right: Rit Faisal, Social Committee Co-Chair, Matt Schubert, Little City Board President, Sandra Loebe-Stoken, Social Committee Co-Chair, and Gil Fergus, PFG Board President.

GCCMA Funds CEBO Renovation
The Greater Chicago Club Managers Foundation donated $135,000 to Little City for expansive renovations to the Center for Employment and Business Opportunities. GCCMA has been a vital supporter of Little City and an employer of people with developmental disabilities.

“In Search Of A Cure” Donates Bus
The In Search of a Cure Foundation donated the Bryan D. Hancock School Bus to Little City to provide essential transportation services for Little City programs. In Search of a Cure was established in 2001 after Bryan D. Hancock, son of the Foundation founders, was diagnosed with autism in 1999. The Foundation has raised more than $4.2 million since it started.

Congratulations to Tim Haberstroh!
Congratulations to Tim Haberstroh on celebrating 40 years of dedicated service as a valued employee at Little City’s Countryside Center! Throughout those years, we’ve all come to appreciate the focus he places on helping others. Tim currently is the Lead Quality Assurance Technician, and we don’t expect him to slow down anytime soon.
You are invited to Little City’s Annual Dinner Gala as we celebrate 59 memorable years of stories that began with our Founding Families and continue today.

We honor their legacy of supporting children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and invite you to become a part of this continuing story.

www.littlecity.org/gala

Giving Tuesday is a global day of giving that benefits thousands of organizations around the world.

Last year, hundreds of thousands of people donated $168 million for great causes. We invite you to participate in this year’s event by donating online at www.littlecity.org on Tuesday, Nov. 28. You can follow us throughout the day on our social media accounts to see how your donations will help! Every cent you give will go even further as The Coleman Foundation is once again partnering with Little City for the event.

Be sure to visit www.littlecity.org/givingtuesday to learn about ways you can help Little City reach its #GivingTuesday goals this year!