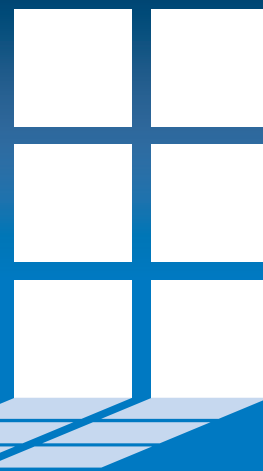




THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

# The WINDOW

SUMMER 2011



## Enjoying his life...reaching his potential

A student at The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) since 1994, Carlos Elmo Reyes has reached many milestones. Few compare to the breakthrough in communication that he has experienced during the last two years in the school's L.I.F.E. (Learning in Functional Environments) program.

Frequently withdrawn and prone to disruptive outbursts in past years, Carlos now actively participates in classroom activities and enjoys the company of friends. He even

played a part in this year's school musical, "The Music Man."

"In an important way, he's very much a different person now," says his teacher, Eileen Siple. "We thought that the L.I.F.E. program's focus on teaching skills to promote greater independence and fuller participation at school, home and the community would help bring him out of his shell. It did that and more."

Siple notes that communication was Carlos' main challenge. "He had limited skills in that area, and we struggled to find a way to talk and understand each other's thoughts and

feelings," she affirms. "His disruptive behavior was really his only way of letting us know what he was thinking and feeling."

A breakthrough in this area began when his speech therapist, Jill Eidelman, discovered that if Carlos moved the middle finger in his right hand, he could actually signal a "yes" or "no" response. "I would put my finger under his wrist to indicate that I had questions," Eidelman explains. "Later, using augmentative technology, he learned to crawl his fingers across a keyboard, pushing buttons to choose from three or eventually four alternatives."

Eidelman describes how Carlos now communicates constantly about school, his love of horseback riding and his activities during MSB's extended day program. (He remains on campus two days a week until 8 pm.)

Carlos' expanded communications skills have also been evident in music class, according to music therapist Lacy Kidwell. "Music really is a lifeline for so many of our students in class, in their interaction with peers and simply for enjoyment," she explains. "Carlos has been a student of mine for five years. In



*Carlos learns about Maryland history from a Ft. McHenry park ranger.*

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# Message from the President

Greetings!

Dr. Maria Elmo, whose son, Carlos Elmo Reyes, is featured in this issue of *The Window*, recently noted, "If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes many villages to raise a child who is blind or visually impaired and has multiple disabilities." I understand that and couldn't agree more.

Here at The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB), our goal has always been to help each student reach her or his fullest potential. This requires exceptional teachers, therapists, specialists and support staff. More importantly, it also requires that they work together as a team to provide the highly integrated, personalized instruction so critical to fulfilling our mission.

This team also extends far beyond the classroom, a fact that has been particularly evident in our recent efforts to obtain state funding for our critically needed new MSB L.I.F.E (Learning in Functional Environments) program building.

That's why we are grateful to the Maryland Legislature and others for their statewide support, including MSB Chairman of the Board Edward Veilleux and board members Senator Katherine Klausmeier and Delegate Cheryl Glenn. Special thanks also go to Delegate Norman Conway, Delegate James Proctor and our parents and volunteers who served as advocates. Dr. Maria Elmo has been a key advocate for our efforts in Annapolis year after year to share her firsthand experience of the needs of the students at MSB.

As we build for tomorrow on the strong foundation of our past, the story of MSB will continue to be one of many people working together to give every young person we serve the opportunity to have the brightest and most rewarding future possible.

Join our Campaign for our Children's Future now!

Michael J. Bina, Ed.D.  
President



*Dr. Michael Bina  
with Prom King  
Kelvin Atkinson*

## Spotlight On Senator Katherine Klausmeier

*A long time friend provides critically needed support in Annapolis.*



It's not surprising that Maryland State Senator Katherine Klausmeier (8th District Baltimore County) was a leading force in securing state funding for The Maryland School for the Blind's new Learning in Functional Environments (L.I.F.E.) program. She has spent most of her professional life working with children who are ill or have disabilities.

Senator Klausmeier served as PTA president at her daughters' school, Gunpowder Elementary. During her 27 year tenure at St. Joseph's Medical Center, she developed the Child Life Department which specialized in meeting the emotional, developmental and recreational needs of young patients.

"I have been on the Board of The Maryland School for the Blind for over 15 years, since I was a member of the House of Delegates. A colleague, (former State Senator) PJ Hogan from Montgomery County, asked if I would go with him on a tour of the school. We went and saw all the good work that was going on."

Appointed to the Board later by former Governor Parris Glendening, she immediately saw the need to review how the state's share of MSB's overall funding was determined.

"It was in the same general pool of funds as the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore," she remembers. "It seemed that a lot of people in Annapolis didn't know about the school's history, importance or statewide mission and programs."

Even today, Senator Klausmeier believes that the school needs greater visibility in Annapolis and outside of the greater Baltimore area. Applauding the efforts of the parents who serve as advocates during each Maryland General Assembly session, she stresses the need for even more friends of the school to contact their state delegates and senators.

"I met with Dr. Bina one day recently and took my mother, who is on a walker," she noted. "We got around using ramps and an elevator, but clearly, the school needs more modern and accessible facilities like the new L.I.F.E. building will provide. It is serving far more students who are not just blind or visually impaired but have multiple and often severe disabilities. They have a great plan for the future and we need to help them get there."

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the past, it was so hard for him to stay in any group for long. He would have verbal outbursts. Now he can participate in class for the full 45 minutes," says Kidwell, who notes Carlos' interest in songwriting.

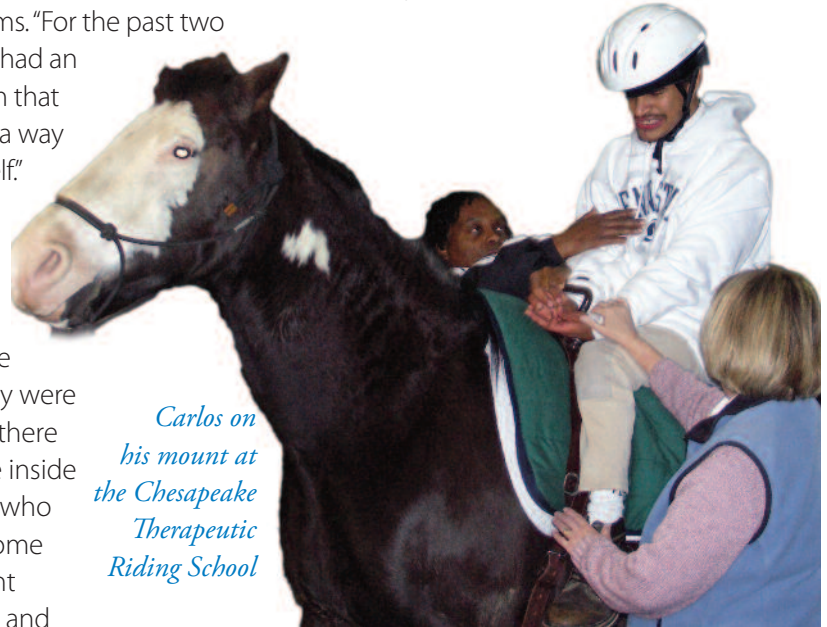
The change in Carlos has been most apparent to his mother, Dr Maria Elmo, who says that multi-disabled children like Carlos present a special challenge to parents and educators alike. "We were fortunate to have a place like MSB back when we first enrolled Carlos," she states. "It's so difficult to raise a child like my son without the kind of specialized teaching and guidance you get at the school."

Elmo attributes her son's new enthusiasm in and out of the classroom to

the integrated approach of teaching at the core of the L.I.F.E. program. "There have always been exceptional people at MSB," she affirms. "For the past two years, Carlos has had an exceptional team that helped him find a way to express himself."

"Speaking for myself and my parents, who helped raise Carlos when they were alive," she adds, "there really are people inside kids like my son who are waiting to come out with the right encouragement and

support. Carlos truly is proof of that and more. At MSB, he definitely has been at the right place."



*Carlos on his mount at the Chesapeake Therapeutic Riding School*



*The multi-talented Blue Duffs Jazz Ensemble*

## MSB and the Arts

Art and music programs can be the key to opening a world of possibilities for children with visual impairments and multiple disabilities and can be a life changing experience for many. MSB students have many opportunities to participate in the arts, both during the school day and as part of extra-curricular activities. Programs include music education, music therapy, and art and recreational programs that expose the students to the arts and provide

opportunities for personal involvement. All students, even the most medically fragile, participate in these activities and programs and are encouraged to reach their fullest potential.

Students can join the chorus or a variety of instrumental bands including hand bell, recorder and percussion or try out for "The Blue Duffs", MSB's premiere jazz ensemble. This group not only performs at MSB events and concerts, but throughout the state as well. Students also have the opportunity to participate in the annual musical theatre production. The school recently presented "The Music Man," which showcased the many talents of MSB students.

The Jen C. Russo Arts Center houses the main stage for MSB's performing artists, including The Magical Experiences Art Company (MEAC).

MEAC is a unique program offered to MSB students with multiple disabilities. This ground-breaking theatrical company provides individuals with disabilities an opportunity to help develop communication and self-expression skills and decrease self-injury and negative behaviors for students like Carlos and his L.I.F.E. program classmates.

If you would like to see our students perform or would like to support the music and arts program at MSB with a donation, please visit our website for more information.



*L.I.F.E. students perform in the Annual Spring Concert.*

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT

## THANK YOU TO:

### Assistive Technology Grants:

Thanks to the generosity of The David and Barbara B. Hirschhorn Foundation, the Herbert Bearman Foundation, and The Thomas Wilson Sanitarium for Children, \$70,000 has been granted to MSB to fund the assistive technology needs of the students for the upcoming year. This will give the students greater access to information, provide the tools for improved communication and help the staff achieve the school mission of maximum independence for all students at MSB.

### Thanks to all of our supporters!

We really appreciate the generosity of each and every one of you. Our students are aware of the impact of donations on their programs and we have asked several MSB students to call donors to let them know what a difference their donations are making in their lives. The Career Education Program is providing the support for these calls to train the students for future job opportunities in the telemarketing field.



### Lions Clubs of Maryland



The Lions Clubs of District 22 have been a key community partner and supporter of MSB for over 50 years. This year 29 individual Lions Clubs have supported MSB through cash contributions. Thank you Lions!



The Maryland School for the Blind

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[www.MarylandSchoolForTheBlind.org](http://www.MarylandSchoolForTheBlind.org)

## Project AIM

On June 3, MSB's Music Therapy Program presented Project AIM (Ability in Music), a non-traditional music recital. Students in the L.I.F.E. (Learning in Functional Environments) program presented original compositions using specialized computer equipment and Soundbeam® technology.

Proving that music is the universal language and that people of all abilities can express themselves through this medium, these students were able to create unique and inspiring musical compositions through the use of Soundbeam®, switches and their own body movements. The sounds were then



*Max Gretschel composes his original music using Soundbeam® technology.*

electronically mixed with instruments chosen by the students to create their own unique compositions. The pieces were given original names by their composers and included "Overture for the Birds", "Keri's Groove" and "Jazzy Friday Morning."

Many students in this program have limited communication skills but through music therapy and Project Aim, they are able to communicate their emotions and feelings through original music. MSB is grateful for the support of the Recording Academy of Washington, D.C. Music Education Grant, Mr. Greg Lukens (donor) and Mr. Joe Fialko from Soundbeam U.S.A.® for helping to make this program possible.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

*The Maryland School for the Blind is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that depends on your support and donations to help students like Carlos become successful, independent adults. Please consider making a contribution to make a difference in a child's life.*

Donate at [www.marylandschoolfortheblind.org](http://www.marylandschoolfortheblind.org) or by check, payable to:

**MSB, 3501 Taylor Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21236.**

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The Maryland School for the Blind