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FOR A PERFECT
CLAMBAKE

OUR
SUMMER
PREVIEW
ISSUE

HOT
OFF THE
GRILL

OUTDOOR
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OPTIONS





Luella Hennessey Donovan (center) at her retirement party with Joan Kennedy (left) and Eunice Shriver.

Photo courtesy of Kennedy-Donovan Center

A MAY GALA

For An Important Cause

by Kathy Anderson

Her eyes glance at the computer screen with a mischievous glint. With a blink, 12-year-old Alexandra Hegg switches the screen's programming to a Justin Bieber video. Her girlfriends smile and bob their heads to their favorite tune.

This is no ordinary computer and no ordinary young lady. Alexandra communicates through the Tobii Gaze Evaluator, a software application designed for individuals with disabilities. The Tobii uses an eye control unit that is stimulated by the gaze performance of the individual and sends the messages to a computer screen to communicate.



Gala table.

Photo courtesy of Kennedy-Donovan Center

"Alexandra was born with severe cerebral palsy," said her mother, Kelly DiPersio-Hegg of Kingston, Mass. "Half of the first year of her life she spent in Children's Hospital in Boston." DiPersio-Hegg was referred to the Early Intervention program at the Kennedy-Donovan Center for Alexandra's care.

"While we were trying to keep her alive, the therapists from Kennedy-Donovan were working with her development, showing her colors, working with her social interaction," she said.

The therapists came to their home and provided physical therapy and occupational therapy and met Alexandra's developmental needs. Today, Alexandra cannot walk, talk, or eat without help, said her mother. "She is completely

immobile except for her voice and her smile. But she can assimilate words, say 'Hi mom,' and be socially engaged. She loves horses and animals. She is very much a young teenager," she said, laughing.

The Kennedy-Donovan Center is a community-based, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that provides human services to over 5,000 individuals and families with developmental delays and disabilities throughout Eastern and South Central Massachusetts. It offers services for infants through adults.

"Eighty-five percent of the people we serve are under the age of 21," said Ann Buono, vice president of development and public relations at the center in Foxboro, Mass.

Services for children and families include an Early Intervention program for infants to age 3 who are at risk for developmental delays. "These services are team-based in their homes," said Buono. "Our therapists catch these children up to their developmental milestones." After EI, 10 percent no longer need additional services, which is a significant savings to the state, Buono added.

Other child and family services include Chapter 766 Approved Day School for ages 3-21, providing care for individuals with developmental and physical disabilities; some students need one-on-one nursing care and some have behavioral issues. Foster Care serves disabled and non-disabled children, as well as transitioning foster care to independence. Healthy Families is a statewide, home-visiting program available for first-time parents aged 20 and under.

"We offer home visiting for young mothers. We help them with goal setting and to stay in high school," said Buono.

"Our focus for the family is to keep their child at home," said Buono. "Our staff has 10-20 years' experience with multiple disabilities and is very committed."

Adult services include Day Habilitation, Residential, and Transitional Job Support. By offering individuals with special needs 24/7 care in one of the 10 group homes in the Commonwealth or individuals on their own in supported-living arrangements, "we've moved beyond institutions," said Buono. Social and recreational activities include making dinner with friends and going dancing. "We value individuals gaining self-sufficiency, enjoying the same things others enjoy. It's part of living a full life."

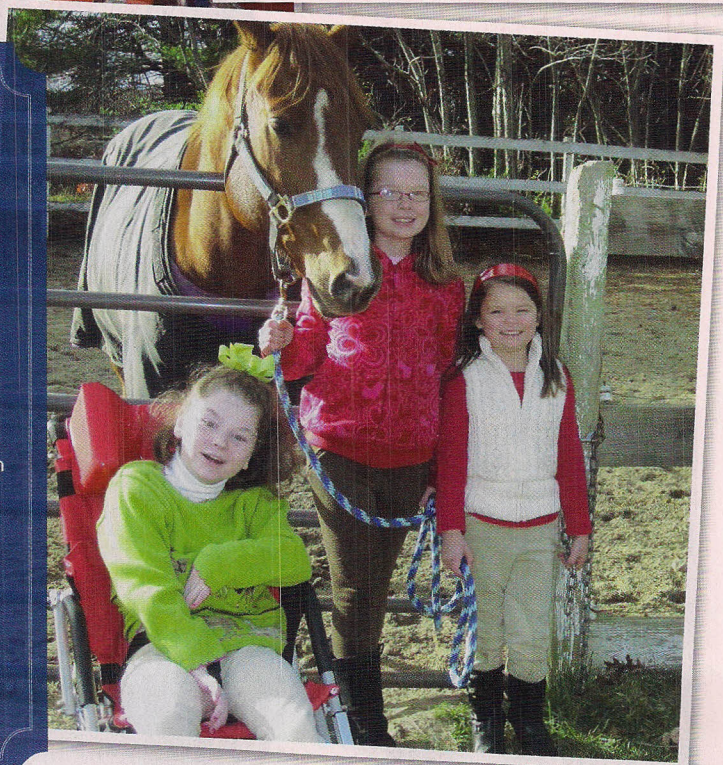
The seed for the Kennedy-Donovan Center grew from the relationship between Luella Hennessey Donovan and the Kennedy

"At 18 months old, our son James was diagnosed on the high end of the autism spectrum. James was completely nonverbal, no personality. He just stared at spinning objects. The KDC team of occupational, developmental, and speech therapists came to our home, got in tune with him, his needs, and function deficit, and gave him and us the skills needed."

family. Luella Hennessey became a private-duty nurse for Joseph and Rose Kennedy in 1936. When Joseph Kennedy was appointed ambassador to Great Britain in 1937, she traveled with them. Hennessey cared for the needs of the Kennedy children, including their eldest daughter, Rosemary, who had developmental disabilities and was institutionalized in 1941. Rose Kennedy confided to Hennessey that she wished Rosemary was not in an institution but could have taken part in parties, family activities, and dinners.

The impact of Rose Kennedy's wish and her work with Rosemary Kennedy inspired Hennessey, and she began a new career at the age of 59. In 1969, after earning her nursing degree from Boston College, she opened one

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Clockwise from top:
 James Dwyer.
Photo by Jillian Dwyer

Luella Hennessey Donovan.
Photo courtesy of Kennedy-Donovan Center

Alexandra Hegg with her sisters Ella and Nina and their thoroughbred Toby.
Photo by Kelly DiPersio-Hegg

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of the first community-based educational and therapeutic programs for young children, using a three-year grant from the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. She named the agency the Kennedy Center for Handicapped Children and served as a nurse and physical therapist.

In 1972 she married George Donovan but was widowed 10 years later. In 1987, to recognize Hennessey Donovan's contributions, the agency was renamed the Kennedy-Donovan Center.

"At 18 months old, our son James was diagnosed on the high end of the autism spectrum," said Jillian Dwyer of Plymouth. "James was completely nonverbal, no personality. He just stared at spinning objects," said Dwyer. "The KDC team of occupational, developmental, and speech therapists came to our home, got in tune with him, his needs, and function deficit, and gave him and us the skills needed."

Now 5 years old, James still has social challenges, according to Dwyer, but is highly functioning and in the local public school. James wants to be a paleontologist when he grows up, said Dwyer. "He has a thirst for knowledge and loves nature and science," she said, adding that James will correct her if she mispronounces a dinosaur's name.

Through her experience with KDC, Dwyer has gained invaluable knowledge and volunteers her time with the center. "I want to give back because I feel so blessed. I want to empower parents with autistic children."

In 2001, Hennessey Donovan died at 95 years of age, after building the center from the ground up. What began with four children in a church basement in Walpole has grown to become an integrated community of supportive living. "It's all about individuals reaching their maximum potential," reiterated Buono.

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of Hennessey Donovan's retirement, the Kennedy-Donovan Center is holding a semiformal gala, The Black and White Celebration benefit and silent auction, on May 5 at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

The event promises to be glittering with glamour and lively entertainment. It is open to the public for \$125 per ticket. Tickets can be purchased by contacting Jill Bopf at 508-543-2542 ext. 112. A live jazz trio featuring Mickey Julian will perform; hors d'oeuvres and dinner will be provided by Russell Morin Catering. The evening will feature raffles and silent and live auctions.

Auction items include four tickets to the Red Sox vs. Yankees game on July 8, compliments of Milford National Bank and Trust; a Tuscan villa stay near the village of Manciano, Italy, compliments of Leone Hinzman; an Epson high-resolution scanner donated by W.B. Mason; one-of-a-kind, original artwork by a Kennedy-Donovan Center client donated by Kennedy-Donovan Center Day Habilitation Program; white, stainless steel bangle bracelet twisted with round diamonds by Herez & Sons Jewelers; and many more.

"We'd like to celebrate our founder Luella and let the public learn more about what we do," said Buono.

What the Kennedy-Donovan Center does is allow children such as Alexandra and James and many other individuals to live their lives to the fullest and spend them with their families and not in an institution.

"They helped us to learn we were not alone and our daughter did not need to be isolated, as difficult as her medical needs were," said DiPersio-Hegg. "And they helped her to find a voice."

For more information visit kdc.org. ★

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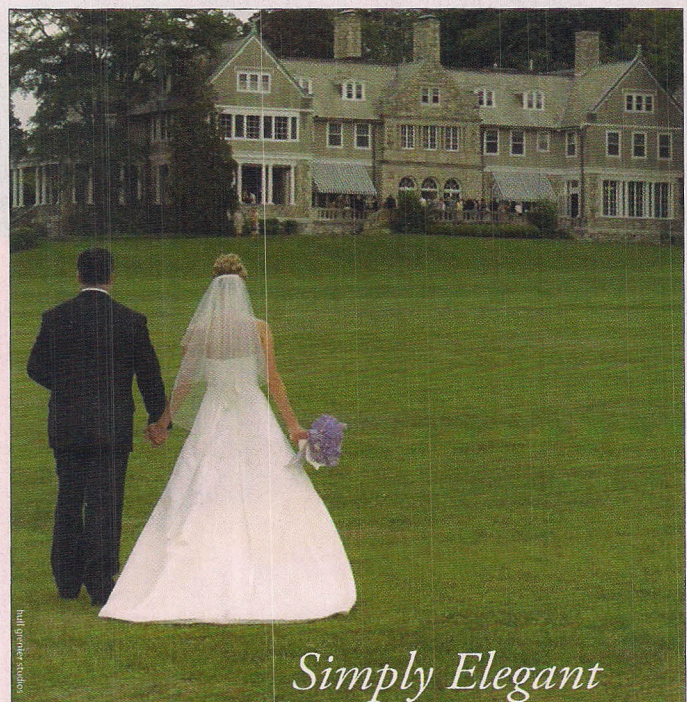


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