



# Special Connections

## JPII Adults *Thrive Virtually*



In November, JPII's Adult Program moved to a completely virtual platform. The question was how to take in-person experiences and transition them to a Zoom platform. Staff quickly accepted the challenge and transformed many aspects of their in-person programming into online sessions.

"When COVID began, our focus was to stay in touch with our participants, process the changes in life, and to encourage masks, social distancing

and hand washing," shares Diane Rice, Adult Program Director. "We were all concerned with our individuals' safety, and inability to understand why life was upended and that's when we began weekly Zoom calls with our individuals."



When the change occurred, Judy Diffendal wasn't sure whether her daughter Julie would embrace the new way of interacting.

"At first it was very gradual with Julie doing five sessions a week," Judy says. "She is now up to 11 sessions a week and she looks forward to them. At first, she had to learn how to adapt to this *Continued on Page 2*

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# Thank you!

**Thank you** to the United Way of Berks County who approved a Berks County COVID-19 Response Fund Grant to John Paul II Center in December 2020. The funds were used to purchase and install additional wireless access points to support our virtual learning resulting from COVID-19.

**We are better able to serve our in-person and virtual students and adults thanks to the generosity of the United Way!**



## Adults Thrive *(continued from front page)*



professional trainer who understands accommodating and adapting moves while providing a fun atmosphere is a blessing!"

Developing the expanded programming was a group effort.

"Based on feedback from the individuals, family members and the staff members, we now have seven staff members running 23 groups a week," says Diane. "The last nine months have given us the opportunity to explore and organize interesting information, and to discover that smaller groups are incredibly effective both virtually and in person. We hope to carry these lessons through to program when we re-open." Both Vince and Julie now have full schedules each week.

"Vince knows his schedule, has learned to get himself on the sessions, and participates independently," Nancy shares. "I love hearing all the happy interactions he has with the staff and fellow participants. We are thrilled with these virtual offerings during the pandemic which keeps him safe but still engaged with his JPII program."

new environment for interacting with people. She was curious and very attentive, but not quite sure how to participate. The music and art therapy sessions sparked her interest and got her more involved. Now she really enjoys all the sessions."

Nancy Eckert whose son Vincent also participates in the virtual programming agrees. "Vince absolutely loves the virtual programs and has adapted wonderfully to the 'new normal' as it's been called. He thrives on routines and has been comfortable with our schedule from John Paul II."

When developing the new programs, the staff thought about activities that the participants enjoyed while they attended in-person programming and created ways for them to remain impactful using Zoom. Sessions now include art and music therapy, book group, social group, social skills and Liturgical music. There's even a Friday afternoon Dance Party session, which was always a favorite activity.

Vince loves art therapy and has even joined an extra acrylic painting class. "Vince loves those sessions and has made amazing paintings and crafts," Nancy says. "He follows Miss Tammy's directions well and receives so much encouragement and praise from the staff. He also participates in the All Abilities Fitness class, which is fabulous. Having that opportunity to exercise with a



Judy echoes Nancy's comments.

"It's been fun doing this together and getting Julie to the point where she is more independent," Judy says. "Except for art therapy, she really doesn't want us to help her. The sessions show us how much Julie and her friends care about one another. It's something that she's learned at JPII and has made a difference in her life."

# Letter From Mrs. Adams



*Dear Friends,*

*I'm thankful we can provide in-person instruction and services.*

*I'm thankful for our staff who have gone above and beyond for our students/adults.*

*I'm thankful for the opportunity to spend more time with my family.*

This school year has certainly been different. We were up for the challenge of continuing our mission to those we serve. It was a difficult

decision to decide to return in person but a decision we knew that would be best for our students. The staff was completely on board and we were full steam ahead. It's been wonderful *and* stressful to be in person. Even though many of our programs were put on hold it was so important to be present. We couldn't be more pleased!

Our Adult Program has been physically closed since Thanksgiving. It was another difficult decision as the number of COVID cases were rising but necessary for health and safety. We stay connected through Zoom sessions. It's not the same as in program but we are grateful for the connection.

I think one of the biggest things I miss is the relationship we share between the two programs. There is such a great camaraderie and things just move/happen fluidly. We know without a doubt both programs benefit from their special bond and make each other better. Anticipation of a reunion keeps us going.

Catholic Schools Week has even been a challenge this year because of weather. We moved all activities to the following week, made adjustments but the celebration of our Catholic identity continued and all prevailed.

Because of the pandemic there have been many moments of gratitude and positive outcomes. It has given us the opportunity to do things differently and some things better. Our teachers and students are better equipped and knowledgeable in the use of technology. Our tech use in the classroom was very good pre-COVID and now we've taken it to the next level to go beyond our walls. Our fundraising efforts have expanded to new levels. We are excited to put a new swing into our Legacy Gala. Hope you can join us for this spectacular event.

We are forever grateful to you for your prayers and support as we navigate this new world.

Yours in Christ,

*Mary A. Adams*

- Michael A. Duff** – Chairman, Senior VP, Government Relations & Chief Compliance Officer, Penske Transportation Solutions
- Anthony DeMarco** – Vice-Chair, Vice President of College Advancement, Reading Area Community College
- Joe Albright** – Retired, Project Director Industrial Development
- Dr. Patti Brown** – Encompass Health and Penn State Health/St. Josephs
- Theodore Bassano** – Retired, Vice President Emeritus, RACC
- Virginia Frederick Dodge** – Executive Producer, VA Productions, Inc.
- Rev. Edward J. Essig, M. Div.** – Pastor, St. Francis de Sales
- Nicole Goss** – Director of Global Talent Management, EnerSys
- Michael Herr** – Managing Director, Tompkins Insurance
- Carla Leibold** – CFO, Customers Bank
- Daniel Langdon** – Retired, CEO, East Penn Manufacturing Co, Inc.
- Joe McCaffrey** – Marketing Systems, Boscov's
- Gretchen Naso** – Principal, Reinsel Kuntz Leshner LLP
- Kathleen O'Brien Ellis, PhD** – Secondary Special Education Teacher, Twin Valley School District
- Randy Raifsnider** – Partner, Herbein + Company CPAS Consultants
- Dr. Rudy Ruth** – Executive Director for Holleran Center, Alvernia
- Rebecca Shemanski** – Custom Processing Services
- Turie Sotzin** – Vice President Community Relations Officer, Mid Penn Bank
- W. Bradford White, Jr.** – Senior VP Wealth Management, Morgan Stanley
- Chester Winters** – Director of Information Technology, RACC

- Mary Adams** – Principal
- Melissah Jablonski** – Director of Advancement

## Board of Directors



Welcome to incoming 2021 Board Members: **Nicole Goss, Joe McCaffrey, Randy Raifsnider, Dr. Rudy Ruth and Turie Sotzin.** And our sincere thanks to **Ginny Close** for her 7 years of service and dedication to JPIL as a board member.

- Brooke Cortese Tesche, EdD.** – Chancellor of Catholic Education, Diocese of Allentown
- Michael Mizak** – Business Manager

# Today's Gift Creates Lasting Legacy: Teacher Excellence Endowment Fund



Planned gifts are very personal. They come from the heart and provide donors with the opportunity to create their lasting legacy. While these gifts are often made as bequests, it is possible to provide a planned gift today so you can see its immediate impact.

At the end of 2020, one couple - who wishes to remain anonymous - did just that by creating the John Paul II Center (JP II) Teacher Excellence Endowment Fund through the Catholic Foundation of Eastern Pennsylvania. This fund provides annual honorariums that recognize the outstanding work and tireless effort performed by all Diocesan classroom teachers and teacher aides in JP II's school-age program.

"The teachers and aides at JP II give so much of themselves to help students grow and succeed in achieving their goals at all learning levels. We want this fund to recognize and thank the teachers and aides at JP II for their care and

commitment to their students," they said.

The decision to create the endowment now instead of after they pass is one that came from their heart.

"It has been in my heart for many years to do something to show my appreciation to the staff for their dedication to helping each individual student find success. My husband and I discussed it and realized there was no reason for us to wait until after we pass to set up this endowment. If God puts something in your heart and you can do it now, there really is no reason to wait," she says.

This fund is the second endowment fund benefitting JP II. Established by Jack and the late Peggy Horrigan in March 2011, the John Paul II Center for Special Learning Endowment Fund provides unrestricted funds for any purpose or project in the education of JP II students with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The

endowment ensures that critical educational and therapeutic programs, special projects, and resources are available annually to all students.

While the couple's decision to establish the fund was a personal one, they hope that their decision to do so will inspire others to follow their hearts when supporting an organization.

"Creating the fund now provides us the opportunity to see the impact of our gift during our lifetime," she says. "My heart is filled with joy knowing that through this fund the JP II teaching staff will always know how much they are appreciated for their dedication to their students."

For information about supporting JP II's endowment funds or on planned giving, please contact Melissah Jablonski at [mjablonski@johnpauliicenter.org](mailto:mjablonski@johnpauliicenter.org).



# JPII is Thankful For:

Our JPII family shared what they are thankful for and it's so meaningful to see what everyone lists as being important to them. It ranges from family and friends to pizza and pets. Take a moment to read what we are thankful for, especially this school year. We all need a little more gratitude in our lives.

## Mrs. Maher - Classroom 5:

- Keeping in touch with my JPII children via Zoom and seeing some in person
- Camaraderie
- Help from teacher and Mr. Pete
- Music with Ms. Long and Mrs. K
- Using my proximity switch attached to the computer for learning
- Zooming in for story time and P.T.
- Using iPad at home for Seesaw activities and worksheets
- Using favorite learning manipulatives, light up toys with switch, puzzles, computer, & iPad

## Mrs. Long - Classroom 4:

- Teaching Live
- Wonderful Students
- Religion - Jesus and God
- My Friends
- Chrome Books
- My Teachers
- iPads
- Occupational Therapy



## Mrs. Berkhammer - Classroom 3:

- 100 days with my children and students
- Family, home and work
- Family and friends
- Family and grandparents
- 100 slices of pizza
- Family, friends and school
- Family and pets
- Food to eat
- Home
- Fast food
- Mrs. B and school



## Mrs. Giannotti - Classroom 6:

- Thankful to be able to watch every student reach their goals, big and small
- Working with the students
- Working with children and helping them grow
- The kid's smiling faces
- Everyone here is unique and has their own different style
- My best friends Mireya and Maria
- Playdough
- My best friend Elina
- Recess
- The leaves
- Coloring and rocket math
- Watching videos
- Chalk
- My friends



## Mrs. Cosgrove - Classroom 2:

- My amazing students and spiritual environment
- The students
- Being with the kids
- Co-workers (new friends)
- Technology (iPad and Chrome Book)
- Yoga
- Art/coloring
- Speech with Miss Emily
- Mrs. K (Liturgical Music)
- Playground (swings and playing catch)
- Swing Set

## Mrs. Kreska - Classroom 1:

- My Family
- Gym Days with All Abilities
- Hot dog lunches
- Swinging in the playground
- Early dismissal

- Taking walks at the convent
- Social swing
- Christmas show
- Catholic Schools Week
- Tone Chimes
- Sleepover



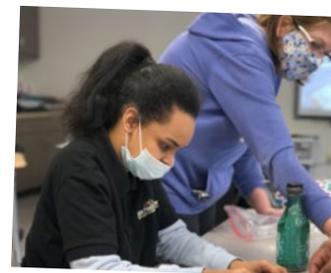
## Staff:

- JPII is a safe place where everyone is accepted for who they are.
- For the statues of Jesus and the Blessed Mary outside of our beautiful, little chapel.
- Hope
- JPII stands out as an oasis of family, caring, kindness, compassion, and teamwork... ..and our precious children and adults are the beneficiaries.
- To be part of JPII's staff - the compassion and fellowship within of JPII's staff is amazing! Proud to be part of the JPII family!
- For a workplace that provides so much hope and joy
- That there is so much joy within these walls!! Everyone is so happy all the time and you can't help to keep a smile on your face!!

## Specialists:

- Thankful to have the opportunity to have fun and teach exercise everyday!
- That staff, students and families work together as a team and value our JPii family.
- Thankful for the students and staff who welcomed me with open arms this school year! Although this school year isn't 'normal' I have felt so included and grateful to be apart of the family.

# Catholic Schools Week: *Acknowledging our Catholic Identity*



**Catholic Schools  
Week  
2021**

**Catholic Schools  
Week  
2021**

**Catholic School  
Week  
2021**

**Catholic Schools  
Week  
2021**

Mother Nature and a pandemic could not derail our Catholic Schools Week activities, even though they tried their best! Our faith and commitment to our school and God persevered and we provided our students and staff with a week full of colorful outfits, tasty treats, music, activities, and fun. We were able to come together virtually (in each classroom) for school-wide events such as Mass with LaSalle, music programs from Ms. Long and Mrs. K and bingo. Our therapists provided individual activities to engage each classroom. Miss Tara from All Abilities Fitness Center helped our students get their bodies moving with virtual fitness sessions. Our students enjoyed donuts from Mid Penn Bank and chicken nuggets from Bell & Evans. Our staff pulled out all the stops to give our students the experiences they deserved after such an unusual school year. To end the week, we all enjoyed movies and togetherness and are already looking forward to Catholic Schools Week next year!

# Join us:

## For our 2021 Legacy Gala!



This year marks our 11th anniversary of our Legacy Gala. While we could not have an in-person Gala in 2020, we were still blessed with support from our community and were able to achieve our fundraising goal. This year we are excited to welcome you to a new Legacy Gala experience.

We are dusting off our gloves, putting on our jerseys and opening day for us will be June 18 at FirstEnergy Stadium.

This new, re-imagined Gala will allow us to gather safely, in a fun, but more relaxed and casual location with all that the ballpark has to offer. There will be plenty of room to spread out and enjoy the company of your friends, family and fellow attendees. We will still have our students and adults in attendance as part of our program, delectable food and fabulous silent and live auction items. Please join us as we hit a home run and move our Legacy Gala into 2021. *We're looking forward to seeing you!*

### Honorees

During the event JPII will present its Halo Award to Brad and Sharon White of Wyomissing for their tireless support and commitment to the individuals and programs at JPII. "We support JPII because we believe. We believe in the mission and we believe in each student and adult reaching his or her potential."

In addition, the center will recognize Priscilla Plucinsky of Sinking Spring with its Peggy's Legacy of Faith Award for her volunteerism and dedication to our gardens.



Brad and Sharon White

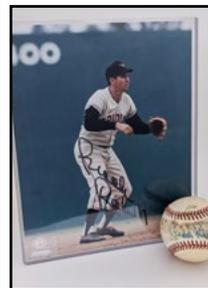


Priscilla Plucinsky

### Sponsorship Opportunities Available:

- Diamond Sponsor | Sold to Customers Bank
- Platinum Sponsor | \$7,000 - 16 tickets
- Gold Sponsor | \$5,000 - 10 tickets
- Silver Sponsor | \$3,000 - 8 tickets
- Bronze Sponsor | \$1,000 - 4 tickets
- Patron | \$500 - 2 tickets
- Student Sponsor | \$150 - Sponsor a student or adult to attend
- Individual Guest Ticket | \$100

### Sneak Preview of Auction Items:



Baseball Memorabilia



Pampered Chef Gadgets



Liquor Cart

**Celebrate 11 years of Gala with us on Friday, June 18, 2021**

# Pendants with a Purpose

Pendants with Purpose by John Paul II Center for Special Learning has opened an online store! Because you can't come to us right now, we are coming to you! Items are being added frequently to our inventory, especially around holidays, so please check back to see what is new and exciting.

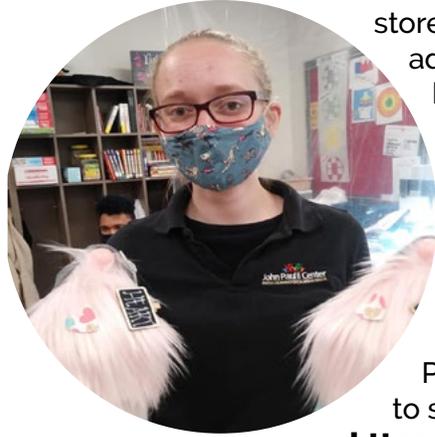
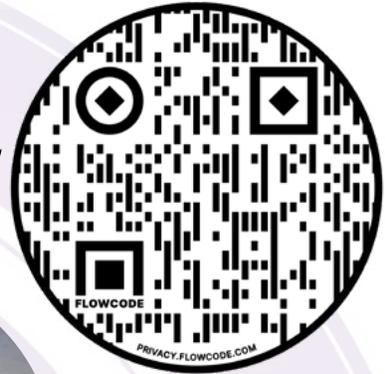
Pendants with Purpose is a program developed by the students of classroom 3 under the guidance of Mrs. Berkhammer. The program was developed to enable the students in the Secondary Classroom to use life skills to start a business. They craft, sell, market and package the products as they learn the intricacies of running a business and seeing it's challenges and successes. Like everyone else they are learning to adapt to the world as it is. Pendants with Purpose was excited to roll out its new store website in December. We invite you to shop and share the site with family and friends:

<https://pwpbyjpii.maxgiving.bid/itemsales>

*All items are available for pick up at the school after school hours or items can be shipped for an additional cost.*

*Scan QR Code with your phone's camera and shop!*

1. Open your camera app
2. Focus camera on QR code by tapping on screen
3. Follow instructions to open webpage



**See our products  
at the She Shed  
Country Decor,  
Gifts and More at  
3605 Main Street in  
Morgantown!**