

Robbinsville Advantage

APRIL 2016 FREE

MERCERSPACE.COM

Lofty goals

Eden's new loft in Town Center part of effort to integrate autistic people in the community

By SCOTT MORGAN

The hardest thing about autism is often the stigma.

"Some people think of the movie 'Rain Man,'" says Peter Bell, president and CEO of Eden Autism Services. "They ask autistic people, 'What is your savant skill?' The truth is, few autistic people have those kinds of savant skills."

Woven into this misperception that autistic people can recite the phone book from memory is the belief that all autistic people are the same. It doesn't help that it's only been a couple decades since non-autistic people started realizing that there are many points along the autism continuum. And it's an even more recent trend to see autistic people not so much as a group of people, but as individuals.

In March, Eden and Robbinsville Township helped usher in the next step toward weaving autistic individuals into the fabric of the community. At the Lofts in Town Center is a new pair of residents named Spike and Gregory, two longtime friends who met as children in Eden's school program and who now share a 2,113-square-foot residence amid the semi-urban-style vibe

See LOFT, Page 6

Feeling festive



Katherine Blando, Caroline Corriveau, Caite Corriveau, Charlotte Corriveau, Claire Corriveau, Quinn Finnegan, Sheannus Finnegan, Fiona Finnegan, Ava Blando, (back) John Finnegan, Collin Corriveau, Ken Blando, Jenny Finnegan, Jonathan Blando, Katina Blando and William Finnegan enjoy the Robbinsville St. Patrick's Parade March 19, 2016. For more photos, turn to Page 16. (Photo by Suzette J. Lucas.)

Performing's all in the family

RHS grad follows father, grandparents into the arts

By MEGAN DOUCHES

While most college seniors spend the weeks before graduation worrying about final exams and post-grad life, Alyssa McAnany was auditioning for a spot on Broadway.

In her final weeks at Elon University, McAnany went up

against hundreds of other talented performers at several rounds of auditions and callbacks in New York City. Just three days before graduation, she found out that she was selected for a part in the national tour of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

The 2011 Robbinsville High School alum was amazed and ecstatic. She says she was able to keep her composure during the process thanks in large part to her supportive family,

who encouraged her to focus on the present and enjoy the experience rather than worry about rejection.

"As exciting as it was," she said, "I just wanted to live each moment in the moment and not get ahead of myself. When the call came, I screamed on the phone. I was so grateful. I was like, 'This is what I'm supposed to do.'"

McAnany was chosen for a "swing" role in addition to See MCANANY, Page 8

Voice of Miracles

Announcer finds purpose working with special needs children

By RICH FISHER

For those who think New York Yankees' public address announcer Bob Sheppard was legendary, you ain't seen nothing yet.

Stop out to the Sawmill YMCA in Hamilton for a Miracle League baseball game and check out 20-year-old Andy Santoro behind the microphone. The phrase "Now batting, num-bah 2, Derek Jee-tah" is nothing compared to "And here he comes, Aidan 'The Hammer' Quinn!"

The Hammer is one of just hundreds of monikers Santoro has handed out over the past three years, making him a true legend in Crosswicks.

Santoro, a 2014 Robbinsville High School graduate, has absolutely captured the imagination of the Miracle League players, families and volunteers with his enthusiastic PA work. He announces every player by their full name and nickname, either given by himself or by their parents.

"Sometimes the parents will say 'Oh, last week we called him such-and-such a name and he loved it, can you say it?'" related Santoro. "When I say it, the kid goes nuts. The kid's like 'Oh my God, this is the best day ever!'" So I get requests. Before the game, I'll even announce See VOICE, Page 10

REWOMTUSUJ TATSDO

NJ NEWARK, NJ
PERMIT #1179
US POSTAGE PAID
C6RWSS
E3
PRST STD

Ask The Doctor
See our column on page 38
brought to you by
RWJ HAMILTON
ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON HEALTH SERVICES

Team85
FITNESS & WELLNESS
www.MyTeam85.com
609.298.8585
see our ad on page 43



Eden clients Spike and Gregory are some of Robbinsville's newest residents, after moving into a loft in Town Center last month.

LOFT continued from Page 1 of Robbinsville's downtown.

Officially named the "Loftren Loft" in tribute to Spike Loftren, its initial resident, the space is a two-bedroom, two-bath, two-floor condo with an office on the second floor and an open floor plan on the first level. Spike and Gregory (whose last name Eden withheld for privacy reasons) essentially live by themselves. Bell said a care provider is always with them.

The idea, he says, is to allow Spike and Gregory to live independently, but to also have someone around for them in case

they need it. While both men are high-functioning—each is in his 20s and works for Wawa, though not at the same store—and quite verbal, Bell says, they cannot be expected to live 100 percent on their own.

They can, however, be expected to live in a way in which they feel comfortable, and as individuals. Bell says the trend in autism care, particularly as far as living and housing goes, has steered far away from large group residences that functioned like asylums and hospitals towards what Bell calls "person-centered planning."

Not that these large group places don't

All Seasons

o Nature...

Perfection

