

PILLAR SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO POWER THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



As the pandemic rapidly spread through the country and the world last year, the staff at Pillar Care Continuum worked hard to keep up with the flood of information from state officials, the CDC, funders and countless other sources. "Like everyone else we had to process a great deal of information and learn as we went," said Joe Schwartz, the agency's Vice President for Education and principal of Pillar High School. "Throughout the pandemic, our goal was to do everything possible to keep the schools open and to support our families in any way we could," said Pillar Elementary principal Hetty Kintiroglou.

The school leaders moved quickly to develop a detailed strategic plan, with the safety of students remaining the paramount concern in all decision-making. "The most pressing concern was preparing for virtual instruction for the brief period when the schools had to close and to support students who wanted to remain on virtual instruction," said Joe. Staff were quickly trained to do online video instruction and helped families with both software and tablets. "The families assumed a great deal of work in helping with online instruction and particularly with therapy."

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GERSZBERG EVENT RAISES \$1.3 MILLION



Honoree Efrem Gerszberg (second from left) with (from left to right) Gila Gerszberg, Michael Petillo, Bob Murray, Phil Monaco and Clark Machemer

Pillar Care honored real estate developer Efrem Gerszberg of 2020 Acquisitions at its annual Steps to Independence Celebration on November 3rd at The Grove in Cedar Grove. The event raised more than \$1.3 million to support the agency, including funds to support a second life skills room and an outdoor awning at Pillar High School.

"We are thankful to Efrem and to our amazing event committee for all of their hard work," said Clark Machemer, Chair of the Pillar Care board and parent of a student at Pillar Schools. "And we are thankful to all of those who contributed to support our important work."

The next issue of the Independent will feature in-depth coverage of the event.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRINCIPALS



Joseph Schwartz



Hetty Kintiroglou

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We are pleased to present you with the first issue of the Independent - Pillar Schools. We will publish the newsletter twice each year to highlight all of the exciting events at Pillar Care Continuum's Pillar Elementary School and Pillar High School. We want to ensure ongoing communication with everyone in our community, so we welcome your thoughts and feedback.

Our main story focuses on our efforts to adapt to the many challenges posed by the pandemic. We are thankful to all of our wonderful families as well as to our deeply dedicated staff members for your working in tandem to enable us to weather such a difficult period. There are also stories on major new improvements at the schools- a new multipurpose room at the elementary school and a new technology center at the high school.

You will also read about our recent walk fundraisers. Thank you to everyone who raised or donated funds for these events. We are planning to use these funds to make even more improvements in the schools and, as things open up, for opportunities for our students to get back out in the community whenever possible.

Thank you and we hope you enjoy our new newsletter!

Regards,

Joseph Schwartz

V.P. for Education
Principal, Pillar High School

Hetty Kintiroglou

Principal, Pillar Elementary
School

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL UNVEILS NEW MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

Pillar Elementary held a grand opening for their newly renovated multipurpose room on May 13th. More than 50 guests turned out to honor Bob Doerr and 3LLC for funding the project and name the new space the John and Mary Doerr Multipurpose Room in honor of Bob's parents.

The multipurpose room is the heart of the school and is regularly used for physical, occupational and speech therapy, adaptive physical education, schoolwide assemblies, student theater productions and as a cafeteria. "Our students and staff have been using every inch of this space for the last 20 years," said Pillar Elementary School principal Hetty Kintiroglou. "Thanks to Bob Doerr and 3LLC, as well as a lot of generous contractors, we have an incredible new space that will last us another 20 years. We are so grateful for their help."



The newly renovated
multipurpose room

**Thank you to the following supporters
for making the new multipurpose room
possible:**

Bob Doerr & 3LLC
Alston Construction
Bai Lar Interior Services
DCI Metro
Falgi Carting
Goldberg Glass
H2M Architects and Engineers
Huen Electric
McCombs Steel
Phillips Construction
Ramtown Flooring
Steel City Photography
Triad Coatings



Ryan, John, Bob, Mary and Randi Doerr came out to unveil
the new multipurpose room

WALKS RAISE FUNDS FOR NEW PROJECTS



Josias celebrates at the elementary school walk



Charlie and Kathy Morales raised over \$5,000 for their granddaughter Amanda and Pillar High

Pillar Schools had another successful Wheelin'-n'-Walkin' Challenge this spring. Pillar Elementary held their walk on May 28th and raised just over \$64,000. Pillar High followed with their walk on June 11th and raised just over \$60,000. At both sites, students were able to walk outside in their cohorts while volunteers and family members cheered them on or watched on Zoom. More than 80 volunteers sponsored Pillar students, with each raising at least \$200.

"We are thankful to all of the volunteers, family members and staff who invested so much effort in helping us to raise funds," said Joe Schwartz, principal of Pillar High School and V.P. for Education. "And we were so thrilled to have the kids outside walking in cohorts," added Pillar Elementary principal Hetty Kintiroglou. "It was a first step in our steady return to our normal way of life."



The Gittleman family raised over \$20,000 for Pillar High



Mateo is excited to start the elementary school walk

WALKS RAISE FUNDS FOR NEW PROJECTS

MAJOR SPONSORS

Thank you to our major sponsors/fundraisers who donated or raised more than \$2,500.

Bob Murray and Alston Construction

Florestal Family

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Marcus Family

McCombs Steel

Kathy and Charlie Morales

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Where will the money go?

Pillar Elementary School

Pillar Elementary will use funds from this year's walk as well as funds remaining from past walks to build a **new preschool playground** and to make needed **repairs to the existing playground**. Remaining funds will support hippotherapy (once the stable is open).



Location of the Incoming Preschool Playground

Pillar High School

In addition to the renovation of the Tom Litwin Technology Center, the high school will use their walk funds to create an **accessible outdoor garden** for students to grow food they can then cook in their life skills class.

HIGH SCHOOL OPENS TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Pillar High unveiled the newly renovated Tom Litwin Technology Center on December 16th. The room features 12 fully accessible computer workstations and a wide range of educational and therapeutic software. The room was re-dedicated to longtime Pillar Board member Tom Litwin, who spearheaded the fundraising campaign to build the school in 2005. Brian Kloza, a member of the Board for more than 30 years, spoke to guests about Tom and his lasting impact on the agency.

The renovation involved replacing all of the 12 computers with swivel-mounted monitors and accessible desks and seating as well as new flooring and furniture.



Cutting the ribbon on the new technology center (from left to right): Nancy Marx, Daniel Marx, Kelly Marx, Dottie Litwin, Clark Machemer, Kathy Kronick, Stuart Litwin, Brian Kronick and Brian Kloza



Students love the newly renovated Tom Litwin Technology Center

New additions include a smart board and 3-D printer. “The technology center has been critical to our educational-therapeutic curriculum since it was first established in 2010,” said Joe Schwartz, Pillar Care’s V.P. for Education and principal of Pillar High. “After more than a decade, we needed to revamp the room to ensure we can provide the most up-to-date hardware and software for our students.”

“We were so happy that members of the Litwin family could be here to help us celebrate,” said Board Chair Clark Machemer. “Tom was one of the founders of this agency and his leadership was central to our success. We will always remember what he did for those we serve.”

Thank you to the following for making the Tom Litwin Technology Center possible:

Litwin & Kronick Families
Bob Murray & Alston Construction
Gittleman Family

Halkyard Family
Charlie & Kathy Morales
Supporters of the Wheelin’-n’-Walkin’ Challenge

SCHOOLS USE LATEST THERAPEUTIC TECHNOLOGY



Physical therapist Steve Pasterick works with Aiden on the REST at Pillar Elementary School

The field of physical therapy is constantly evolving. As new methods of care are established, Pillar Schools' staff remain up to date on all the latest technology available to assist their students. The schools recently added two pieces of therapeutic equipment to their arsenal: the Responsive Equine Simulator Therapy (REST) device and the NeuroNode.

Equine therapy uses the movements of a horse to provide motor and sensory input. The REST device allows therapists to bring equine therapy indoors. "The REST device mimics the gait of a horse," said Pillar Elementary Physical Therapist Steve Pasterick. "This provides stimulation to the torso and hips to strengthen core muscles used for balance."

The REST device is often used in conjunction with a full body vibration board. The vibration board allows students "to become functional ambulators," said Steve. "To be a functional ambulator, you need to be able to balance in any situation." By sending vibrating signals throughout the body, the student is unable to "lock out" their muscular movements and must learn how to stay balanced in dynamic situations.

The NeuroNode is an EMG-based communication device that opens a new world of communicative possibilities for users. The device acts as a "switch", or a method of movement detection. When a muscle group is activated, the NeuroNode detects the EMG signals released and interprets the desired movement. "The device also detects minor planal movements," says Patricia O'Connor, an Occupational Therapist at Pillar Elementary. "By being able to detect limited movement, the device allows students to interact with the world around them more easily."

The REST and NeuroNode are used at both Pillar Elementary and Pillar High. "Pillar Schools are always looking to give our students the most comprehensive support possible," said Joseph Schwartz, Pillar's V.P. for Education and principal of Pillar High. "These two amazing new technologies significantly strengthen our therapeutic program."

REST devices for both schools were made possible by a donation from the Marcus Family Foundation. NeuroNodes were purchased with funds raised by the Wheelin'-n'-Walkin' Challenge.



Faith uses the NeuroNode at Pillar Elementary

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While transitioning to online instruction, the schools worked simultaneously to prepare for students to return. "Our students struggle more than traditional students with online instruction," said Hetty. "So we wanted to be ready to open as soon as we had the approval from the State and that meant rethinking our existing space to allow for social distancing." The schools built and installed protective barriers, took over every available bit of free space to space out students and staff, developed detailed safety protocols (including keeping all students in separate cohorts to limit exposure), and raced to acquire masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment. "It was a hectic time for all of us," said Hetty, "but we were soon back open and offering a hybrid program serving students both in-person and virtually. And now our schools are prepared to adapt to changes presented by the pandemic as we move forward."

"Our schools did a remarkable job of reinventing their services during a crisis and never stopped serving their students," said Pillar Care President and CEO Purna Rodman Conare. "Their ability to adjust to the developments of the pandemic has left them prepared to take on any future challenges presented to them."

VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES THURSDAYS ON THE PLAYGROUND

Pillar Care's Volunteer Department recently launched a new weekly program called Thursdays on the Playground. The program features an array of themes designed to bring new experiences to students. For Apple Picking Day, apples were hung in the school playground for students to "pick," giving many their first opportunity to participate in the classic autumn pastime. For Pillar Olympics Day, students used adapted equipment to enjoy the thrill of Olympic sports.



The series has allowed volunteers to once again get involved with the students in a safe, outdoors space. Since the start of the pandemic, volunteers had been limited to Zoom interactions. "It's amazing to watch each student complete the tasks in their own ways," said Avital Shtapura, who started volunteering for Pillar last spring. "It's like a personality test that provides insight into who each student is." Each volunteer runs their own activity station and promotes engagement from the students.

"On a sunny day, the playground has an amazing atmosphere. It's the perfect space for this program," said Corry DeMarco, Director of Volunteering. "Being able to bring the students out into the warm weather is a great change of pace from indoor events."

Thursdays on the Playground is planned to return in the spring. To volunteer, contact Corry DeMarco, Director of Volunteering, at cdemarco@pillarnj.org.