



Sunflower Hill families recently gathered at Taylor Family Foundation's Camp Arroyo for a quarterly 'family fun day' and a chance to swim."

## Organization Plans to Build Community For Adults with Special Needs

By Carol Graham

The name, Sunflower Hill, is no accident.

"The symbolism of the sunflower is really important," said Susan Houghton, whose 21 year old son is autistic. "The sunflower is the strongest flower and the most vibrant. It puts its face toward the sun. When you think about our kids, they need to be vibrant and they need to be nourished. When they're placed in the sun, just think how they can grow."

Sunflower Hill is a Tri-Valley based non-profit organization dedicated to building a diverse, life-long residential community for adults with special needs. The organization was founded last year by a dozen local families who envisioned a sustainable, special needs community based on a senior-living model.

"Once we started talking, we came to the realization that if we don't create this place, who will? And if not now, when?" said Houghton, Sunflower Hill's President. "We're using the phrase: intentional community not unlike senior living. When we use that analogy, people get it because they love senior living. They understand that residents can do arts and crafts one day, go on a field trip to the bowling alley another day, or if they just want to stay in their apartment, they can do that, too."

Although autism spectrum disorders are the fastest growing developmental disabilities, with a staggering growth rate of 1,148% according to the Autism Society, Sunflower Hill will be open to adults aged 18 and up with special needs stemming from many genetic disorders and syndromes, such as Down Syndrome.

"There are so many kids in the pipeline who have nowhere to go," said Dr. Lynn Mielke, the mother of a 15 year old son with autism. "This residential community would offer activities, a sense of family, fun things to do, and different levels of care. We want a wonderful place where they can live their lives, with a quality of life that we all would want for our loved ones."

While area schools do an outstanding job of integrating children with special needs into mainstream activities as well as promoting life skills, district programs end when a student turns 22.

"My son Jacob, 18, has a genetic abnormality," said Jon Elfin. "Although Jake has acquaintances at school and in the Special Olympics, he can't build a life of his own. I hang out with Jake for the most part. The fear that drives us all is that we're not going to be here forever."

Nationwide there are around 80 communities comparable to Sunflower

Hill, twelve of which are located in California. Those closest to the Tri-Valley are Sweetwater Spectrum in Sonoma and Friends of Children with Special Needs in Fremont.

"We are currently searching for a site," said Houghton. "We're open to all locations but are working aggressively with Livermore, Pleasanton and Dublin. It's our number one goal."

Houghton asked the Pleasanton City Council last week to consider such a community for the eastside of the city.

In the meantime, the group is continuing its fundraising efforts. On November 2nd, they will host the Sunflower Hill Wine & Painting Fundraiser at Crooked Vine Winery, featuring the talents of Brushstrokes and Wine Notes' Sharon Costello, who will instruct a painting class of the featured artwork, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. Participants take their masterpieces home.

"You don't have to be a great painter to come," said Houghton. "There's wonderful wine, food by Checkers Catering, and a great raffle. Tickets are \$95 for painters, \$80 for non-painters. We need everyone's help in order to realize our vision. We've got a great group of families working incredibly hard to make this happen, but we can't do it alone."

Next February, a fundraising seminar is scheduled at Las Positas College. An attorney will provide legal information on a variety of issues relating to individuals with special needs, including information about Social Security, Medi-Cal, maintaining benefits, and setting up conservatorships.

"There's a lot of confusion around these things," said Elfin. "The seminar will give people the first steps on how to tackle them. We'll be raising money, but we're going to provide a really good service, too."

Each step brings the organization closer to realizing its goal of establishing a community that allows for the uniqueness of special needs individuals to flourish while ensuring vocational and social integration.

"It's a little bit cliché but these people are individuals with individual personalities and individual abilities," said Elfin. "It's easy to label them special needs or mentally retarded or autistic. But they are people who want to be wanted, who want to have friends, and to be successful. They don't always articulate that, but they have a lot of the same desires we have."

"To sit in a room or to be isolated is just as bad for them as it would be for any of us. We want them to be able to grow, to have a life and to be happy."

To learn more, visit [www.sunflowerhill.org](http://www.sunflowerhill.org).

## INITIATIVE

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Livermore High School Principal. Previously only traditionally college bound students, primarily juniors, registered for the annual Saturday administration of the test.

Darrel Avilla, Del Valle High School Principal, thanked the Pedrozzi Foundation for funding the PSAT test for all sophomores. "This test gave our students the opportunity to experience a college level assessment, which they would not have experienced due to the cost of the test or their understanding of the importance associated with this assessment", expresses Avilla.

Parent Roxanne Kusske also understands how money and lack of awareness can be limiting. "My daughter's friends, who would not normally have taken the PSAT, had the privilege of taking the test during a regular school day. They were reminded to look at college as a choice," says Kusske. "For some of her friends, money would have been a deterrent to signing up for the test. For others, their parents would not have thought to sign them up. The grant was a blessing for our community with its diverse population in terms of family understanding of the route for their child to attend college."

Sophomore Sam Walter appreciated taking the test on a Wednesday. "I liked it a lot more that it was on a school day, and we didn't have to come in on a Saturday. Probably a lot of people wouldn't have taken it if it were on a Saturday. The practice test was helpful because it gave me an idea of what the SAT is going to be like," explained Walter.

Test takers receive free information from colleges, universities and scholarship programs and a customized SAT study plan. On average students who take the PSAT score higher on the SAT than those who do not.

However, the benefits of taking the PSAT reach far beyond improved SAT scores. "Students taking the PSAT are taking the first step toward a college education. With this test, they begin to connect with

the College Board website, to explore their interests and possible areas of study, and to be identified as potential Advanced Placement students. Taking the test as a sophomore allows the students two full years of high school to fulfill requirements for college," explains Philomena Rambo, Granada High School Principal. "I predict more students meeting college admission requirements upon graduation because of taking this test as a sophomore."

Roxann Engel, Counselor at Granada, agrees and adds, "Early participation also has the potential of being that spark to get students to consider a college path that might otherwise have been closed off as an option."

Kusske views the PSAT as a stepping stone for her daughter and other sophomores. "Being able to take the PSAT and understanding how well her prior education in Livermore prepared her for the math portion of the test made my daughter realize that she has a strong foundation to pursue her dreams. This opportunity renewed her energy to push ahead in her educational goals," shared Kusske.

Sheryl Howser, Principal, Alternative School Principal, was grateful to the Pedrozzi Foundation for supporting Vineyard students with scholarships for higher education and now enabling all 10th graders in the district to take the PSAT. "This opportunity will help all students explore the college and career possibilities available to them after high school," explains Howser.

Paula Orrell, Board President of the Pedrozzi Scholarship Foundation, stated, "Partnering with the school district to fund PSAT testing for all sophomores is only the first of many initiatives to support more local students."

By providing other resources in addition to awarding scholarships, the Foundation is encouraging and assisting local students in their pursuit of higher education and advanced training.

"This initiative addresses equity across the district. Now all students have equal access to the PSAT, which provides benefits to students, families and the district," expounds Superintendent Bowers.

## SPENDING

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lot, Smarter Balanced Assessments, in the spring. The proposal is to spend \$1.8 million on technology, including the purchase of Chrome books.

There will not be enough to provide all students with a Chrome book. About 2400 will be purchased and moved to where they are needed.

Trustee Kate Runyon noted, "It's a kick start, but not sufficient for the long term."

Board president Bill Dunlop said he is concerned that not having hands-on use of the technology on a daily basis could impact a student's ability to take the test. "Half the battle is learning to use a new thing."

Superintendent Kelly Bowers commented that the district is well positioned with wireless access. Students are more tech savvy than adults.

The rest of the common core money will be spent on

professional development at \$500,000 and to purchase supplementary instructional material at an estimated cost of \$335,000.

Staff noted that more money will be needed over the long term to provide instructional materials.

Runyon suggested that as part of the report to the state on how the current funds will be spent, the state should be informed as to the amount of money needed to meet the requirements of the Common Core program.

## International Collaboration to Detect Virus in Bladder Cancers

A Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL)-developed biological detection technology has been employed as part of an international collaboration that has detected a virus in bladder cancers.

The research effort, performed in conjunction with scientists from the University of Split in Croatia; LLNL; and the University of Jordan in Amman, is believed to be the first study to demonstrate an association between Kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus (KSHV), also known as human herpesvirus 8, and bladder cancers.

The team's paper was published in the journal *Tumor Biology*, a publication of the International Society of Oncology and BioMarkers. Janos Terzic of the University of Split was the paper's lead author. The team included two researchers from LLNL -- Crystal Jaing, a biologist in LLNL's Biosciences and Biotechnology Division, and Kevin McLoughlin, a computational biologist in LLNL's Computation Directorate.

Biopsy specimens were collected from a total of 55

Croatian patients -- 44 men and 11 women -- who had been diagnosed with different stages of bladder cancer.

An initial screening of DNA extracts from three randomly selected biopsy specimens for the presence of viruses, using the Lawrence Livermore Microbial Detection Array (LLMDA), revealed that the KSHV pathogen was present in all three.

The Livermore results for the three tested samples were confirmed through KSHV-specific polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing. Then PCR tests were performed on the remaining 52 biopsy specimens from the study group. Those tests showed that KSHV DNA was detected in 30 of the 55 patients, or 55 percent of the group.

"We're pleased that the LLMDA performed well in the testing of the bladder cancer samples," Jaing said. "For us, it is the first publication showing the technology used as the primary detector of a virus associated with a specific disease, which was then confirmed using other techniques."

In their paper, the authors noted that with the high prevalence of KSHV infection demonstrated in their study, the pathogen may play a role in the formation of bladder cancer, and warrants further studies.

Bladder cancer is the seventh most common human malignancy and represents a global health problem. In addition to recognized risk factors, such as smoking and exposure to chemicals, various infectious agents also have been viewed as factors in the causes of the disease.

Developed between October 2007 and February 2008, the LLMDA detects viruses and bacteria with the use of 388,000 probes that fit in a checkerboard pattern in the middle of a one-inch-wide, three-inch-long glass slide. Analysis of samples with the LLMDA can be completed within 24 hours.

In 2010, the LLMDA was used in a research study by scientists from five institutions who evaluated the DNA content of eight vaccines. Seven of the vac-

cines' contents turned out as expected, but one -- a vaccine used to prevent diarrhea in babies -- contained a pig virus, porcine circovirus-1 (PCV-1). There have been no signs of safety problems with the vaccine. The virus is not known to cause any kind of illness in people or animals.

Livermore's LLMDA is used to test vaccine safety, cell substrates, wound samples, food safety and to detect pathogens in cancer, among other tasks, in more than two dozen collaborations with institutions such as the Mayo Clinic, the Moffitt Cancer Center, the Naval Medical Research Center, the California State Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the University of Texas Medical Branch and the Blood Systems Research Institute. International collaborators include McMaster and McGill universities of Canada, the Statens Serum Institut of Denmark, and the Centers for Disease Control of Taiwan.

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