



# Connecting the Pieces

serving families along the gulf coast

## Model Classrooms for Children with Autism

Autism Pensacola has been working in partnership with the Escambia County School District (ECSD) for the past five years on our renowned 'Kids for Camp Summer Learning Lab'. Now this partnership is moving to a new level. This fall, three pre-K classrooms in Escambia County Schools have been designated as 'model classrooms' for autism. These 'communication, behavior, social' classes are led by three teachers who have worked at Kids for Camp and have extensive training in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). To expand the impact of camp beyond the summer, ECSD has pledged to provide these classrooms with support from Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and additional materials to ensure



Riley enjoys the swing.

that these students are receiving an outstanding start in school. So, what makes the model classrooms different from other classrooms? What kind of training has the staff received? And what kind of progress are the students making? These are just a few of the questions we asked Nicole Kinnard and Josy Licudine-Fuller, two of the teachers working in this program.

Both of these teachers report that a major difference in these classrooms is the type of instruction the students receive. The curriculum is driven by the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP) and is based on the results of each child's VB-

Classrooms, continued on page 3

## "Steps for Autism" a Success

Our very first "Steps for Autism" awareness walk was held on October 1st and was a great success! Over 300 people came out to enjoy the beautiful day, raise autism awareness, and raise funds to improve safety programs in our area for those living with autism. Community volunteers from a variety of organizations came out to lend a hand and help make this event extra-special for all of our participants.

It was very exciting to see everyone out enjoying themselves for this great cause! One of our goals was to create an event that our families could enjoy. Many families came out with their children with autism to join in the fun. Walk committee member, Amy Lorton, summed it up when she said, "It was great to see our families at an event where they could go and 'just be'." It truly was a gathering of people who understand and accept those with autism.

Plans for moving forward with our safety initiative are already underway. We have been in contact with Officer Jimmy Donohoe of the Pensacola Police Department and several other national speakers about organizing a regional conference for first responders. We hope to schedule this event sometime in 2012.



Steps for Autism Planning Committee

We are also working with Officer Donohoe to expand the Take Me Home program outside the city of Pensacola to Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Possible upgrades to the software may make it easier for families to register their special needs family members in the future.

And we are thrilled to announce that we now have five Project Lifesaver tracking bracelets available for families who have loved ones on the autism spectrum who wander. These bracelets have been provided by The Pilot Club of Pensacola in conjunction with Escambia County Search and Rescue as part of our "pay it forward" program.

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## From the director's desk



### Happy Fall!

I hope this newsletter finds you enjoying the cooler weather and anticipating a joyful holiday season as we wrap up 2011! This has been another incredible year for Autism Pensacola. We continue to be blessed by our generous community. I am amazed when I realize that this time 10 years ago, Jacqui O'Connell, Marilyn Irby, and I were just beginning to form what has

become API. I am so proud of all we have done during this first decade. I'm confident that with the continuing support of the greater Pensacola area, the next 10 years will be even more amazing!

I want to take a moment to thank two of our board members who are ending their terms with us - Jim Shirley and Dr. Kevin Welch. We are so grateful for all you have done for API. Dr Welch will still be in contact with us as a member of our newly formed Associate Board. We are grateful for his continued dedication to those with autism.

And as these board members leave, we welcome Dr. Leasha Barry, Julian Irby and John Peacock onto the board. A huge thanks also to Cecilia Nanni, Joe Webb, Bentina Terry, Sue Straughn and Rebecca Sterzing for agreeing to continue serving API in the Class of 2014 - each of you all bring many gifts to our organization and we are grateful you will be with us 3 more years! Dr. Barry is beginning a new term after completing an unexpired term for Dr. Joe Story, Julian Irby is returning to the board for a second term after a few years away, and we welcome John Peacock for his first term.

A major highlight this fall was certainly the incredible success of our inaugural 'Steps for Autism' awareness walk. This event could not have been more perfect! We had a glorious day to celebrate 35 teams raising over \$26,000 to train first responders and help

provide tracking bracelets for those who wander. So much credit goes to Tammy Mendiola and Jacqui O'Connell for this successful event that will improve the lives of so many! Tammy & Jacqui headed up a dedicated team that pulled off a great event! Thank you all!

As you prepare for the holidays and the New Year to come, I hope you will resolve to continue and increase your involvement with API. Whether you are a family member or a community supporter, your involvement with Autism Pensacola will help us in our mission to improve the lives of those living with autism.

We have come so far these first 10 years, but as anyone living with a loved one with autism will tell you, we have a long way to go to make Pensacola a center of excellence for those with autism. I remain confident that together, we can and will make a difference and see the fulfillment of this goal very soon!

Happy Holidays, and Happy 2012 to us all!

*Susan Byram*



## Steps, continued from page 1

Families who are interested in acquiring bracelets for their loved ones will be asked to complete financial paperwork and will pay a fee as determined by our sliding fee scale. These fees will in turn be used to purchase more bracelets for more families in need.

We are now finalizing our paperwork and plan to have Project Lifesaver in full swing in early 2012. Please contact us if you know someone who would be interested in having a bracelet and being a part of this project. Applicants of all ages are welcome from across the autism spectrum as well as related developmental disabilities.

### API Council

Susan Byram, Executive Director  
 Jessica Lapen, Council Chairperson  
 Amy Lorton, Recording Secretary  
 Tammy Mendiola, Newsletter Editor  
 Jenny Doyle, Dinner Committee  
 Jacqui O'Connell, Webmaster  
 Rebecca Sterzing, Programs  
 Luci Faucher, Chats  
 Shawnon Babb, Membership  
 Sharon Fink, Chats

Everyone is welcome to attend council meetings and find their own place to serve. We have a variety of committees where you can make a difference.

Email [info@autismpensacola.org](mailto:info@autismpensacola.org) for information on council needs.

### 2011 API Board of Directors

Dr. Leasha Barry	Jim Shirley
Judy Burns	Rebecca Sterzing
Shirley Cronley	Sue Straughn
Gerald Hoewing	Dr. Dave Suhrbier
Cate Merrill	Bentina Terry
Cecilia Nanni	Joe Webb
Mark Proctor	Dr. Kevin Welch
Debbie Ritchie	
Susan Byram - Executive Director	

### 2011 API Executive Committee

Ted Kirchharr, President	Logan Fink
Kevin Doyle, Vice President	Fred Donovan
Sandra Cesaretti Ray, Secretary	Peg Nickelsen
Mort O'Sullivan, Treasurer	Bonnie Sferes
Quint Studer, Past President	

# Meet Our Board of Directors

As the result of our recent election, we would like to welcome three new members to the API Board of Directors! Each of these people will bring new skills and strengths to our board, and we look forward to working with them in the future. Let us introduce you to these members of our Class of 2014!



**Dr. Leasha Barry**

Dr. Leasha Barry is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of West Florida and Director of the Office of Applied Behavior Analysis at UWF. She moved to Pensacola over 10 years ago to join the faculty of UWF and work in special education. Dr. Barry has worked with API on several projects over the years, and shares our interest in helping people in our community with autism. She agreed to join our board last spring when one of our members needed to step down. She is now beginning her first full term as a board member. She looks forward to continuing to work with such a devoted group in our community.

**Julian Irby** is the president and majority owner of Irby Engineering. He is married to Marilyn Irby, one of the three co-founders of Autism Pensacola. Mr. & Mrs. Irby have four children, one of whom has



**Julian Irby**

severe autism. They are native Pensacolians who left our area for military service, but returned in 1999. Mr. Irby has long been a supporter of Autism Pensacola. He has served on our board in the past, and after taking a break for a few years, he is energized and ready to serve again. He hopes to continue the great work of Autism Pensacola, while embracing new ideas for improvement. He also hopes to ensure Autism Pensacola remains, at its core, committed to "the kids."

**John Peacock** is a Financial Advisor and Certified Financial Planner with Edward Jones. He and his wife, Jerre, have been married for 12 year, and they have five grown children. Mr. Peacock has lived in Pensacola for 16 years. While he has no personal connection to autism, he sees his service on our board as a way of giving back to a wonderful community. He is amazed at the number of people affected by autism and hopes to make a positive impact while on the API Board of Directors.



**John Peacock**

## Classrooms ■ ■ ■ Continued from Page 1



Colin and Riley make pumpkin pie with Ms. Licudine-Fuller.

MAPP assessment. The activities in these classrooms are planned around the students and their targeted language needs. Other differences include more parent involvement, more natural environment teaching, and the use of discrete trial training in the classroom.

The teachers and paraprofessionals in these classrooms are receiving ongoing training from the Escambia County BCBAs.

In addition, the BCBAs have assisted the classroom staff with room arrangement, picture schedules, and data collection notebooks. These professionals consult with the classroom staff regularly to provide coaching and discuss progress and concerns. Ms. Licudine-Fuller reports that her aides are eager to learn and feel empowered by their new skills. She says, "My aides are excited to see that ABA really works!"

The best part is – the students are making progress! Ms. Kinnard reports, "I have seen huge growth in my students over the past nine weeks." She has a student in her class who did not vocalize at all during the last school year, and this year he spoke his first word! Other students are making great gains in spontaneous verbal requests, toileting, and self help skills. Alison Kropp has reported that she is pleased with the small class size and the additional training the staff is receiving and credits

these two factors with the gains she is seeing in her son, Riley. Nicole Nolan says that she is happy that her son, Colin, can work on the same goals throughout the year in both camp and school.

All of these factors put together mean that young children with autism are receiving the educational foundation they need to move forward successfully. These classrooms will serve as models for area teachers to visit in the future to observe best practice teaching techniques in action. Autism Pensacola and the Escambia County School District are committed to expanding this program in the coming years to serve more children with autism. In the near future, Autism Pensacola will use our Autism Education Fund to support these programs as determined by our board of directors.

## Congratulations, Victor

Victor Nall, one of our Kids for Camp campers was presented with the Student of the Month Award at Booker T. Washington High School for October 2011. He received this award for doing such a great job with his OJT and helping the other students who work with him. His teacher, Carol Wheeler, says he has become quite a manager!

Congratulations, Victor, on a job well done!



# Thank you to our generous Steps for Autism sponsors!



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 Close By. Far Better.

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 USA  
 Pensacola Beach Lodge 497

- Shark Tooth Automotive Specialists
- Sharon's Creations, LLC
- Workman's Service Center



## API Membership Perks

Beginning in January 2012, with your paid membership in Autism Pensacola, you will receive a membership card that will entitle you to benefits around our community. We are currently contacting local restaurants, businesses, etc. about offering discounts to our members. Once the membership card program begins, a list of local businesses participating in this program will be available on our website. If you have a business and would like to be a part of our membership benefits program, please contact Amy Lorton at 434-7171 or [office@autismpensacola.org](mailto:office@autismpensacola.org).

## Special Olympics

Participating in Special Olympics is great for your child in a myriad of ways. Not only is it great for physical fitness, it is great for social skills, too! Learning to participate in sports activities fosters teamwork and good sportsmanship, as well as lasting friendships. Different sports are practiced at different times of year, and there's lots of variety to choose from! Basketball is currently in session, tennis will begin in January, and bocce ball and soccer will begin in February. For more information please visit [www.specialolympicsescambia.org](http://www.specialolympicsescambia.org).

## API Christmas Ornaments!

Autism Pensacola has 2011 limited edition Christmas ornaments available now for \$10 each.



These ornaments are non-breakable and will look lovely hanging on your tree! They will also make wonderful Christmas gifts for friends, family, teachers, therapists and anyone else on your list! Contact Amy Lorton at [office@autismpensacola.org](mailto:office@autismpensacola.org) or 434-7171 to purchase your ornaments.

## Membership Updates

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Jean & Bill Brown     | Richard Hyman           |
| Cindy Byrne           | Ted Kaufman             |
| Cherie Chesser        | Ted Kirchharr           |
| Melinda Cochran       | Sarah Smith             |
| Tina Conner           | William & Susan Telford |
| Joyce Esneul          | Keith & Seletta Teston  |
| Erin Gleason          | Maria West              |
| Wray & Holly Hoskamer |                         |

## Celebrate the holidays with API



## The Jolly Old Elf Himself!

Autism Pensacola is excited to announce a special treat this holiday season! For those of you who have always struggled to attend a visit with Santa, we have a few times available for in-home visits with the Jolly Old Elf! If your child (or young teen) has never been able to visit Santa and would appreciate a short visit at your home on a Saturday in December, please contact API, and we will do our best to make it happen!

Please contact API by email at [reservations@autismpensacola.org](mailto:reservations@autismpensacola.org) and use the subject line 'Santa visit'. We will need the names and ages of all your children and which one(s) have autism.

Also, include your address so we can group our visits. You may also call the API office at 434-7171 and leave a message with this info, plus your best phone number for a return call. Deadline for reservations is November 29th.

We are so grateful to GAP (our grandparents) for making this opportunity available this holiday season.

## Holiday Road Trip!

Who's up for a Road Trip? Several of our members have reported success with visiting Wales West Train Ride in Silverhill, AL. This is only about an hour drive and lots of fun! There's a train ride to the North Pole with a visit to Santa (if you want) and each child receives a toy to decorate, cookies, and hot chocolate! Lots of fun activities - plan on a 2 hour visit. API will road trip on Mon. Dec 19th! Arrive at 5:20 in the parking lot of Wales West (13670 Smiley Street, Silverhill, AL 36576) so we can pay together. The cost is \$10 per person for a minimum of 15 people. Reservations are appreciated so we can give them a head count to better prepare for us. Email [reservations@autismpensacola.org](mailto:reservations@autismpensacola.org) with 'train ride' as your subject line. If you can't make the trip with the group, you can still try this out on your own. More information can be found at [www.waleswest.com](http://www.waleswest.com).

## Back by Popular Demand!

The Autism Pensacola cookbook "Let's Get Cookin'!" is in its second printing! Cookbooks are now available in the API office and are still only \$10 each!



This collection of 200 recipes will make a great gift this holiday season for anyone on your list - spreading autism awareness at the same time! To purchase your cookbooks or to sign some out to sell to your friends and relatives, please contact Amy Lorton at [office@autismpensacola.org](mailto:office@autismpensacola.org) or 434-7171.

# Calendar of Events

## Check our website often for additional events and details!

**Friday, Nov. 18 – 10:00 a.m.** – Grandparents of Autism Pensacola (GAP) meeting in the API office (3916 N 10th Ave.).

• • • • •

**Thursday, Dec. 1 – 10:00 a.m.** – API Council meeting in the API office.

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**Saturday, Dec. 3 – 10:45 a.m.** – Sensory Sensitive Cinema presents “The Muppets” at the Rave Theater on W Street in Pensacola. Admission is \$6.50 per person.

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**Saturday & Sunday, Dec. 3 & 4** – “Christmas in the Country” at Leaning Post Ranch (www.theleaningpostranch.org).

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**Monday, Dec. 5 – 11:00 a.m.** – Pensacola Chat at TGI Fridays on Airport Blvd.

• • • • •

**Thursday, Dec. 8 – 10:00 a.m.** – Hands-on workshop presented by Debi Gunter of CARD - “Writing Social Stories”. Workshop will be held in the API office. Participants MUST pre-register so there will be enough supplies for everyone. Contact Dianna Sorensen at dianna.sorensen@med.fsu.edu or 494-7324 to register.

• • • • •

**Thursday, Dec. 8 – 6:00 p.m.** – Hands-on workshop presented by Debi Gunter of CARD - “Writing Social Stories”. Workshop will be held at Arc Gateway. Participants MUST pre-register so there will be enough supplies for everyone. Contact Dianna Sorensen at dianna.sorensen@med.fsu.edu or 494-7324 to register.

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**Tuesday, Dec. 13 – 9:30 a.m.** – Pace Chat at the Village Inn on Hwy 90.

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**Monday, Dec. 19 – 5:20 p.m.** – Christmas fun at the Wales West Train Ride in Silverhill, AL. \$10 per person, payable at the door.

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**Monday, Jan. 2 – 11:00 a.m.** – Pensacola Chat at TGI Fridays on Airport Blvd.

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**Tuesday, Jan. 10 – 9:30 a.m.** – Pace Chat at the Village Inn on Hwy 90.

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**Tuesday, Jan. 17 – 6:00 p.m.** – Kids for Camp 2012 application period kicks off with an informational meeting at Arc Gateway. Don’t miss this opportunity to learn all you need to know about this year’s program! Activities for children of all ages available with reservations (reservations@autismpensacola.org).

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**Wednesday, Jan. 18** – Kids for Camp 2012 applications available on our website www.autismpensacola.org.

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**Friday, Jan. 20 – 10:00 a.m.** – Grandparents of Autism Pensacola (GAP) meeting in the API office (3916 N 10th Ave.).

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**Thursday, Jan. 26 – 10:00 a.m.** – API Council meeting in the API office.

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**Thursday, Feb. 2** – “The Incredible 5-point Scale” presented by Kari Dunn Buron. For details, contact FSU-CARD at 494-7324 or 800-769-7926.

• • • • •

**Monday, Feb. 6 – 11:00 a.m.** – Pensacola Chat at TGI Fridays on Airport Blvd.

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**Tuesday, Feb. 14 – 9:30 a.m.** – Pace Chat at the Village Inn on Hwy 90.

• • • • •

**Friday, Feb. 17 – 10:00 a.m.** – Grandparents of Autism Pensacola (GAP) meeting in the API office at 3916 N 10th Ave.

• • • • •

**Friday, Feb. 17** – Postmark Deadline for Kids for Camp 2012 applications.

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**Tuesday, Feb. 21** – Hand-delivery Deadline for Kids for Camp 2012 applications. ALL Kids for Camp applications must be turned in by this deadline.

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**Tuesday, Feb. 21 – 6:00 p.m.** – “Food Aversions” presented by Chrissy Perry, SLP. Activities for children of all ages available with reservations: (reservations@autismpensacola.org).

• • • • •

**Thursday, Feb. 23 – 10:00 a.m.** – API Council meeting in the API office.

## API Contact Information

To donate, pay dues, obtain membership forms or for other correspondence  
**mail to address below or visit [www.autismpensacola.org](http://www.autismpensacola.org)**

Email: [info@autismpensacola.org](mailto:info@autismpensacola.org)

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P. O. Box 30213  
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## Kids for Camp 2012 Kick Off!

**Tuesday, January 17**

**6:00 - 7:30 p.m.**

**ARC Gateway  
Corner of 10th Ave. and Fairfield Dr.  
1000 E. Fairfield, Pensacola**

**Social activities for kids of all ages  
available with reservations!  
[reservations@autismpensacola.org](mailto:reservations@autismpensacola.org)**

Be one the first to learn about Kids for Camp 2012 and how to get your child involved! Jessica Lapen and Tammy Mendiola will present information on this year's program and answer all of your questions. This meeting kicks off our one month application period. Applications will be accepted through February 21, 2012.



## **Wales West Light Railway Arctic Express!**

**Monday, Dec 19 - 5:20 p.m.**

**Wales West RV Resort/Railways  
13670 Smiley Street • Silverhill, AL 36576**

Join us for this fun-filled holiday adventure! The fun includes a train ride to the North Pole, a toy to decorate any way you like, a visit with Santa Claus, cookies, and cocoa.

Kids and teens of all ages are welcome to participate.

To receive the group rate of \$10 each, meet us in the parking lot of Wales West at 5:20 p.m. We will pay at the door.

Reservations are needed for the group rate; please email  
**[reservations@autismpensacola.org](mailto:reservations@autismpensacola.org)**  
with "train ride" as your subject line.