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HE'S JUST REALLY *Special*

HOW ONE MOM HAS
NAVIGATED HER SON'S
AUTISM DIAGNOSIS

ETP SPOTLIGHT

MEET MIKE WING

ISLANDS OF BRILLIANCE:

BUILDING SKILLS
THROUGH PASSIONS

FLIPS 4 ALL GYMNASTICS CENTER

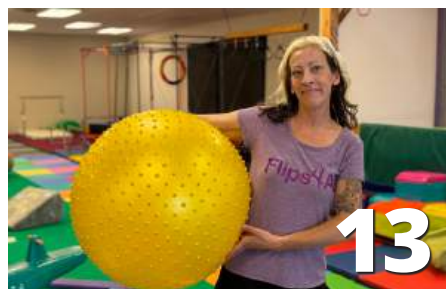
OPENS NEW LOCATION TO SERVE
PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR EVERYTHING

MAN RIDES IN BIKE4FRIENDSHIP
AFTER NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE



TABLE of CONTENTS



ETP Spotlight: Meet Mike Wing

by Joan Elovitz Kazan

4

Building Skills Through Passions

by Joan Elovitz Kazan

8

Flips 4 All Gymnastics Center opens new location to serve people of all abilities

by Brittany Lewis

13

He's just really special: How one mom has navigated her son's autism diagnosis

by Brittany Lewis

16

Expressing gratitude for everything: Man rides in Bike4Friendship after near-death experience

by Pavlina Osta

20

A LETTER *from the* EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Dear Friends,

We are thrilled to share with you the sixth issue of The Circle magazine! With every edition, we strive to bring stories that inspire, inform, and connect. We hope you will find this issue as meaningful as we have in creating it.

Issue number six provides a closer look at the meaning behind our mission through personal stories of triumph, Bike 4 Friendship 2024 and community connections. Discovering the unique stories that live in each of us is such a beautiful way to show support and share friendship. We are so thankful to everyone who takes part in or supports each of our programs, services, and events. Let's continue celebrating each other and the ways our community shows up.

Did you know you can support the Circle Magazine by becoming a sponsor in future issues? For additional information and

details on costs, visit fcwi.org/circle. If you have any editorial feedback or story ideas please email info@fcwi.org.

Did you know that 82% of adults with disabilities are unemployed? At Friendship Circle, our Employment Training Program is dedicated to bridging that gap and empowering individuals with the skills and confidence they need to enter the workforce. To learn more about the program, visit www.fcwi.org/job. If you know of a business interested in offering equal-opportunity employment to one of our program graduates, please visit www.fcwi.org/PIE. We are so grateful for your continued support in helping us create opportunities for this amazing community!

As always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions. This magazine is for everyone—whether you have a disability



or know someone with one, your voice matters. Together, we can make a difference.

With gratitude,

Levi & Leah Stein
& The Friendship Circle Family

The CIRCLE TEAM

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ETP BY JOAN ELOVITZ KAZAN Spotlight

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Meet **MIKE WING**

On the Friendship Circle website Mike Wing's title reads: "Cafe Assistant" but any interaction with Mike proves that title doesn't begin to describe what he brings to the workplace. From clean tables and floors to fresh, delicious salads, Mike tackles every item on his daily checklist, and most importantly, he brings positive energy and a smile to everyone he meets.

Mike was born in India and came to Milwaukee at the age of five. His parents, Sue and John Wing shared Mike's adoption story, which begins in the late 1970's. "We have an older son, Chris who's fifty-four; we knew we wanted to have more children, so we checked out different agencies and found Lutheran Social Services," Sue recalls.

After completing an extensive screening process, Sue and John were given a picture of little Mike. To paraphrase the line from Jerry Maguire: he had them BEFORE hello. "We had a picture of a toothless Mike and we were told he had a speech deficit," Sue said. "Between the time he was supposed to come and when he finally arrived, he had been quite ill. It didn't matter to us because we'd already fallen in love with him," she explains.



MIKE WING GRADUATES FROM THE FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

"Mike arrived on Mother's Day, May 13, in 1979," John says. Even forty-five years later some details remain clear in his parents' minds. "When we got home, he looked around the house; he saw a bunch of bananas and grabbed a banana right away," John says. "They probably didn't have a lot of food at the orphanage, so when he came here, food was just fascinating for him," Sue explains. "In lots of ways, he was an easy kid. If you even looked cross-eyed at him, he got very upset. But he was very well-mannered," she adds.

Mike instantly took to his new home. "Other than his disabilities, Mike was raring to go. He enjoyed lots of stuff. He particularly loved riding things. He's the only kid I know who wore out two sets of big wheels," Sue recalls.

Since Mike arrived in his new home as the academic year was ending, he had a few months with no school. "I took him over to the nearest school to register him so that he could go to school in the fall," Sue recalls. That summer was a series of Take Your Son To Work Days for Sue. "I had put together a preschool with my sister because we both

had little ones. We ended up owning three preschools. “I ran a nursery school at that time, so for several weeks Mike just went to the nursery school with me,” Sue says.

When fall arrived, Mike was ready for school but the Wings discovered, other students weren’t used to seeing a child from India. “It was pretty funny that the kids at school, just a couple blocks from our house, couldn’t quite figure Michael out because he was dark brown, but he didn’t look black,” Sue recalls.

When Mike was growing up, educational services and programs weren’t as readily available as they are now. “The schools were not at all helpful and a lot of it was a struggle,” Sue admits. “They have one way of labeling people and that’s it. And whether you fit their definition of that label or not, it doesn’t matter,” she says. “I had fights with social workers who basically accused me of lying about what Mike could and couldn’t do,” Sue admits. “But we just kept going,” she adds.

“And whether you fit their definition of that label or not, it doesn’t matter”

Mike’s educational experience improved slightly as he got older. “He spent his middle school years at a school just across the street from Alverno College. He did the morning at school, then went over to Alverno College for individual tutoring,” Sue explained. “That was helpful in a lot of ways,” she adds.

Mike’s natural warmth and friendliness means people take to him quickly, but Mike took to one family member in a big way. “He fell in love with his Aunt Judy,” John recalls. “One of the things he enjoyed about her is that she gave him energy and love, regardless of what he looked like, much more than anybody else,” he explains.

Decades later, Mike would instantly connect with another family member. “The other woman he fell in love with was his sister-in-law, Jin Sook. Our son, Chris and his wife live in South Korea and the first time we went over to visit them, Mike and Jin Sook were just wonderful together,” John recalls. “Besides Sue, those (Aunt Judy and Jin Sook) are the two most important people in Michael’s life,” he adds.

Mike heard about Friendship Circle from a former co-worker. “I called and talked with Terry Miller and made an appointment,” John says. “Terry and Michael and I sat down



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and talked about the training program and everything else. Then Sue and I discussed it and decided this program would be ideal for Michael...and obviously it has been,” John says.

“Friendship Circle has been so good. It’s so welcoming, not just to Michael, but I’ve noticed, also to others, and to us,” Sue says.

Friendship Circle’s employment training program has a proven track record of success. Graduates work in a variety of businesses throughout the community, including Friendship Cafe and Bakery. When the cafe staff noticed Mike’s talent and attitude, they knew he would be an asset to the team. “We recognized right away that Mike has some unique skills and so we fast tracked him through the program and graduated him six months early,” his trainer, Betsy Kimmel said.

One specific talent truly impressed his supervisor and coworkers. “Mike came to work with these gorgeous salads every day. Then we realized Mike is prepping all of this by himself at home and that’s a skill that’s very unique,” Kimmel adds.

What’s the secret to those sensational salads? “I put in lettuce, clementine oranges, cashews, cucumbers, tomatoes, red pepper flakes and

black pepper. And Balsamic vinaigrette,” Mike explains. “I bring lunch everyday. It’s stews, rice, sometimes pasta,” Mike says. Friendship Cafe-goers can start the week with a fresh salad prepared with love, thanks to Mike. “He makes salads every Monday with me. We make an Asian Cabbage Crunch salad and people love it,” Kimmel says. “Mike currently needs a job coach for this, but our goal is to make him independent with salad-making,” Kimmel explains.

“Friendship Circle’s employment training program has a proven track record of success.”

When he’s not working at Friendship Cafe, Mike plays kickball and attends programs at the JCC. He also loves to travel and makes regular trips to visit Aunt Judy in North Carolina. The Wings recently traveled to South Korea to visit Chris and Jin Sook. “He’s also been to China and Great Britain with us and when he was twenty-one, we went to India,” Sue said. “We saw the hospital where he was supposedly born and when we were at the orphanage, he took us on a tour because none of the nuns or priests were there, so he did it on his own. He took it in stride,” Sue recalls.

Despite a supportive workplace and loving family, Mike’s life does have additional challenges. “He’s diabetic,” John says. “And he gets seizures,” Sue adds.

"Truthfully, I would say that Friendship Circle is the first place that really fit him, and where he was completely accepted, at the ripe old age of fifty," Sue admits.

What advice would Sue and John give parents who are thinking of pursuing international adoption? "A lot of people say, 'you were so great taking in a child, blah, blah, blah.' But Michael brought as much to this family as we gave to him," Sue says. "My first piece of advice would be to prepare. Prepare to give that person as much as love as you can," John adds.

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BUILDING SKILLS *Through Passions*

By Joan Elovitz Kazan

When Harry Fairbanks was three-years-old, his parents Margaret and Mark, heard three disheartening words from their neurologist: “lower your expectations.” But Margaret and Mark chose to ignore that advice and instead, they focused on Harry’s abilities and interests. The Fairbanks believed with the right tools and support, their little boy would prove that neurologist wrong.

Margaret and Mark discovered the best way to connect with Harry was through his passions: trains and technology. “Just like every individual with a disability, Harry has his own unique qualities. We found he engaged the most and did the best when you focused on his area of interest. He was also very intuitive and savvy with tech, and based on what he was learning, he needed a varied level of support,” Margaret recalls.

But early experiences with programs and activities left Harry and his parents disappointed. “It was difficult to find something that was more than a buddy system, which is a wonderful thing. But we wanted something that he would innately want to go to and intrinsically be motivated to pull us out the door, rather than us bribing him to get out the door,” Margaret explains.

What do intelligent, resourceful and committed parents do when they can’t find engaging programming for their son? They create it themselves. It was a lot to take on but both Margaret and Mark’s backgrounds and experiences aligned with their vision for an extracurricular program for Harry.

“I have close to thirty years in the creative industry, specifically marketing,

advertising and design,” Mark explains. “I was working as a creative director in Minneapolis and I had that existential moment where I thought, ‘I work with brilliant people, but is this all we can do? Make ads? Isn’t there something more meaningful we can do...can’t we use our creative process to impact the community?’” he recalls.

The answer was ‘yes’ which led to a new question, ‘how?’ “Harry walked into my home office while I was working on Illustrator and asked if he could try it. And then with minimal instruction, he proceeded to create a Thomas the Tank Engine character in the span of about half an hour, without my assistance,” Mark says. “That was the spark of an idea that is very familiar to me, being in the creative industry.”

“We found he engaged the most and did the best when you focused on his area of interest.”

Mark and Margaret knew they could apply their professional skills to build something valuable for Harry and other children like him. “Mark came up with this wonderful idea of using technology and really zoning in on a student’s area of interest. So for Harrison, it was trains,” Margaret explains.

Margaret brought experience as a special education professional to the table. “I had gone back to get my master’s later in life primarily because I was looking for work, but I was living in a world of special ed and it just made the most sense. I needed to learn to be a better parent, but also

to better understand what was happening in the world that I was invited into,” she recalls. “We took our idea and wrapped the appropriate amount of special ed support around it.”

Strong relationships between students and volunteers is a backbone of Islands of Brilliance. “We provided one-to-one mentorship support, so it’s a creative mentor working alongside the student collaborating with them on a project, usually a poster,” Margaret explains. “There was special ed oversight in the design. We made sure we had communication, visual supports, things like that,” she adds.

Armed with a workable concept, the next step was recruiting participants and mentors. “We did an ‘all call’ to our networks and general outreach to any parents we knew,” Margaret says. The positive response was a pleasant surprise. “Honestly, it took a level of trust for families to come and meet with somebody they’d never heard of, at a program that had never been done before,” Margaret says.

Recruiting mentors was also surprisingly easy. “We had a meetup for potential mentors and amazingly, twenty people came. It still blows me away. And then we selected seven. Me working with Harry, that’s one thing, but to ask a very busy creative person to work with a student that they don’t know,



HARRY FAIRBANKS WORKS WITH HIS DESIGN MENTOR PATRICK BLEND DURING THE ISLANDS OF BRILLIANCE PILOT WORKSHOP AT DISCOVERY WORLD, NOVEMBER 2012

who's autistic, that's another level of community involvement that we never take for granted," he adds.

Margaret agrees. "It's a big ask. There's no client, there's no budget, it's all about helping that student bring an idea to life through true creativity and collaboration. A lot of our creatives say it brings a beautiful reset. They say, 'Now I remember why I love creativity and why I went into this business altogether because that's what it's about: expression,'" she says.

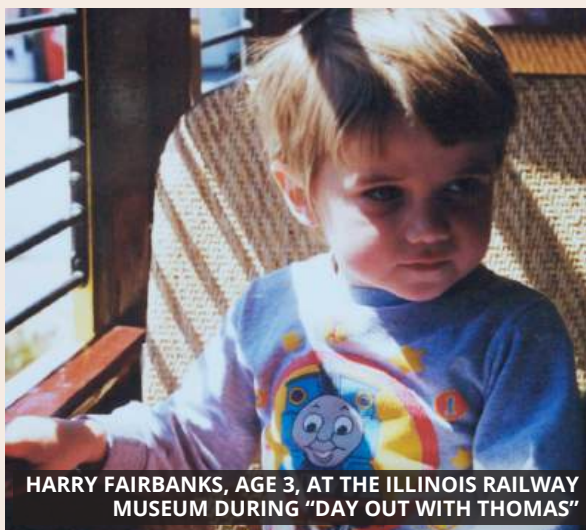
Twelve years ago on a Sunday morning in downtown Milwaukee, fourteen people sat down in a computer lab. "We started with seven students and seven mentors," Margaret explains. "Nothing like this had ever been done before. We wanted a lot of consistency and a lot of understanding. We wanted to design an experience that could be universal and flexible at the same time," she adds.

Despite early enthusiasm, no one knew if the program would succeed. "We thought, 'we're going to try

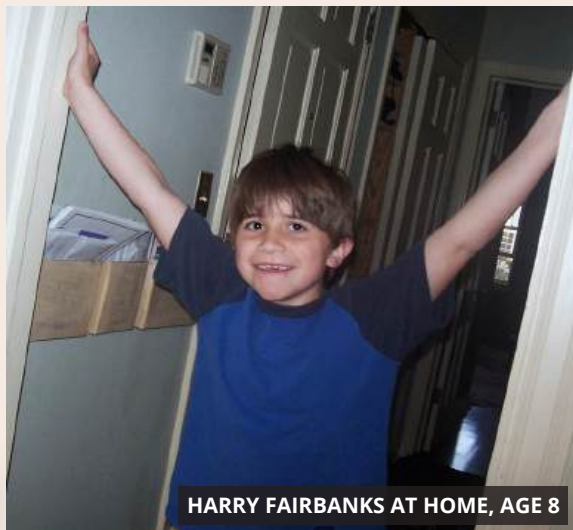
this thing but it is definitely an experiment,'" Mark admits. Through the generosity of Discovery World's leadership, they secured a location. "The only slot they had open was on Sunday mornings. So we would go down there every Sunday and bring in a carton of coffee for the mentors. And we had access to a computer lab there that had all Mac equipment," Mark recalls.

"The first Sunday went great. The students had fun and mentors had a blast because they were working with kids who are subject matter experts on kind of geeky things," he adds. "A lot of the programming that's created for individuals with autism is guardrail versions of other stuff, so they're not always into it," Mark explains.

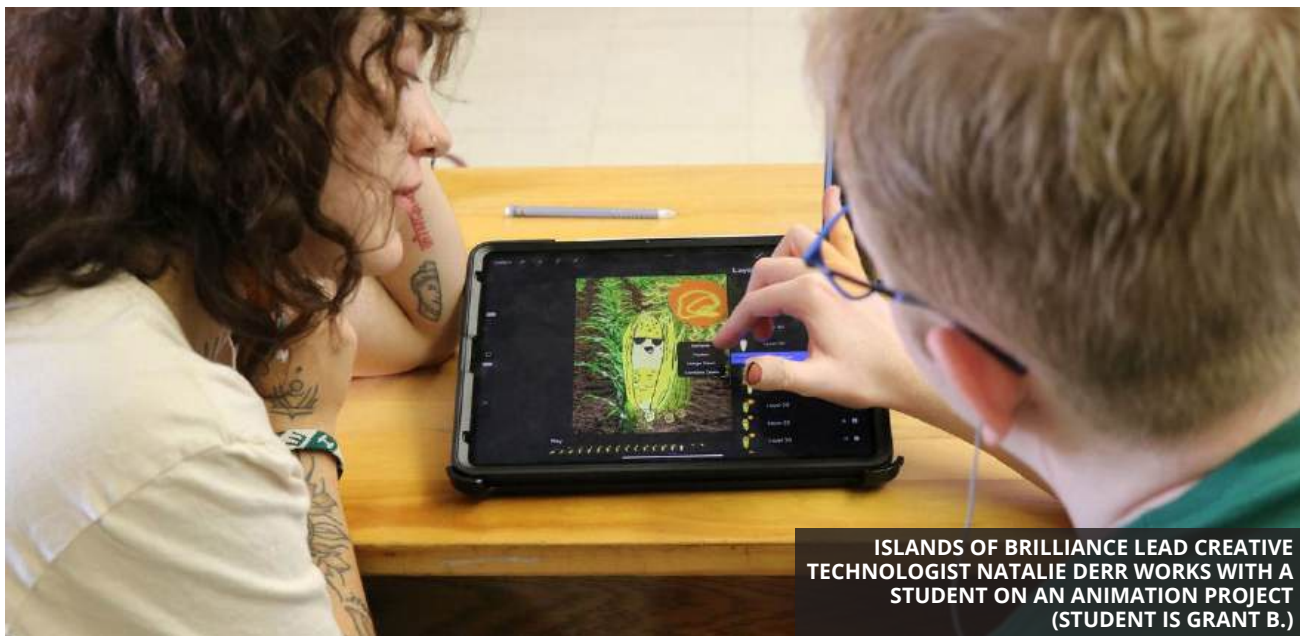
Labeling those early sessions a success would be an understatement. "After just one workshop, it was life changing for us. It was life changing for the participants, not just the students and their families, but also the mentors. So we knew we had something really, really unique," Margaret recalls.



HARRY FAIRBANKS, AGE 3, AT THE ILLINOIS RAILWAY MUSEUM DURING "DAY OUT WITH THOMAS"



HARRY FAIRBANKS AT HOME, AGE 8




ISLANDS OF BRILLIANCE LEAD CREATIVE TECHNOLOGIST NATALIE DERR WORKS WITH A STUDENT ON AN ANIMATION PROJECT (STUDENT IS GRANT B.)

Concrete proof came just before the second session. “Ten minutes before the start of the workshop, five of the seven students had already arrived. They had walked in and gone to sit down next to their mentors and wanted to get to work,” Mark recalls. “That’s when I was almost in tears because we thought, ‘holy cow, this thing works.’ They had already made a connection to their mentor, something that’s unusual for autistic individuals,” he adds.

Islands of Brilliance emphasizes process over product but one tangible example of a participants’ creativity is on display here in Milwaukee. “We had a student named Aaron and he would do one project in 75 minutes. His goal was to do the entire thing. So in a summer workshop when Aaron was eight years old, (he’s now fifteen), Aaron came in with an idea. At the end of class I looked over at his screen and he’s created a solar system made out of M & M’s. They’re the correct color, and they’re scaled. It was perfect,” Margaret recalls. “Today there’s a version of it hanging up at UWM at the Lubar Entrepreneurship Center,” Margaret says. “They hired Aaron to redo it in a high res version and he got paid for that,” she adds.

“That’s when I was almost in tears because we thought, ‘holy cow, this thing works”



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MARK, HARRY, AND MARGARET FAIRBANKS AT THE UWM DESIGN & VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS SENIOR CAPSTONE SHOWCASE, DECEMBER 2019

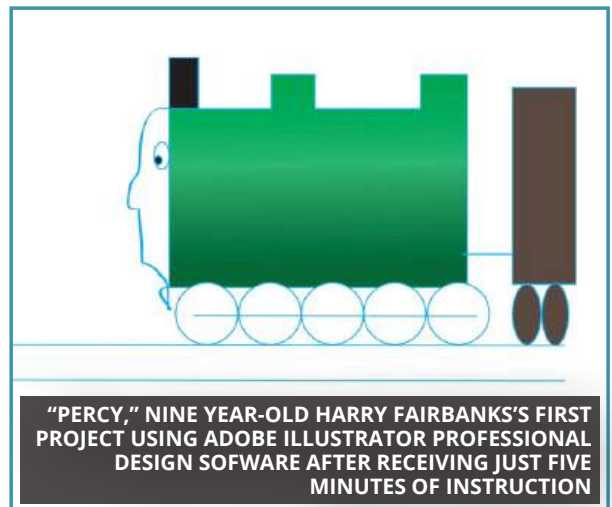
Twelve years and countless workshops and programs later, Islands of Brilliance continues to provide engaging programming for young neurodivergent adults. Running the organization has become a full-time job for both Margaret, Mark and their older son, Charlie, who serves as a Creative Technologist.

“We basically kept very close to the same format for, going on twelve years now. And it is working,” Margaret says. “This program would not be what it is without tremendous generosity on behalf of the mentors,” Mark adds.

“One thing we're very proud of is, five of our full-time staff identify as neurodivergent and two are specifically autistic. In terms

of, our mission and who we're serving and who we're employing, to serve our community is something that has grown over the years and something we anticipate growing in the future as well,” Mark explains.

And Harry? After more discouraging advice that the couple chose to ignore, Harry went to school and to Islands of Brilliance. “They said he won't be ready for first grade, he won't understand the beginning or ending of a book, and don't plan on college,” Margaret says. Did Harry prove them wrong? “Harry graduated from UWM with honors,” she adds. “He works as a verification specialist, doing background checks. He's got an income and a driver's license.”



“PERCY,” NINE YEAR-OLD HARRY FAIRBANKS'S FIRST PROJECT USING ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR PROFESSIONAL DESIGN SOFTWARE AFTER RECEIVING JUST FIVE MINUTES OF INSTRUCTION



ISLANDS OF BRILLIANCE PILOT WORKSHOP AT DISCOVERY WORLD, NOVEMBER 2012

Flips 4 All Gymnastics Center OPENS NEW LOCATION TO SERVE PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES **By Brittney Lewis**



Even on a dreary day, there is a feeling of warmth and cheerfulness at Flips 4 All before you even take a step inside. Perhaps it's the way the doors are open to the outside, a gesture that anyone is welcome or the bright colored mats and "Happy Birthday" signs you can see through the tall front windows when you pull into a parking spot.

It could also be the big smile on owner Sarah Banck's face as she greets you at the door.

"I'm happy, I'm happy," she said as she shows off her new gym.

On June 3, Flips 4 All officially opened its new location at 8643 North Port Washington Road in Fox Point. The

gym had previously been in Glendale for nine years, in a location Banck joked "People needed to use a "bat signal" because it was not easy to find."

"In nine years there, nobody ever accidentally walked into my gym. However, in this new location, just in the time that I was getting the gym ready today, people were coming in and asking what we do here. That's never happened," she said.

Flips 4 All offers gymnastics classes, open gym, yoga classes, summer camps, movie and pizza nights, private lessons, and a space for private parties.

"Our motto is 'Flips 4 All, we have fun,'" said Banck. "And that's for everyone, of all abilities."

The gym is usually bustling with activity, but it is quiet on this dreary day, giving Banck a chance to reflect on her journey from starting Flips 4 All in 2015 to where she is now.

"I just saw such a wonderful opportunity for a sport that physically develops the neurotypical child in almost superhuman ways and thought about what this could offer somebody whose brain and body don't have perfect connection, whose body wasn't born with all the physical elements," said Banck. "So not only can they finally experience something that may have never been an option, but parents can bring their five-year-old with autism and their seven-year-old neurotypical child and they can all play here together."

"all of a sudden that type of confidence, that self reliability starts to kick in in other areas"

Banck, a mom of three, has been coaching gymnastics since she was 19. All of her kids were competitive gymnasts, which allowed her to see what the sport could offer all kids. She combined her passion for gymnastics with her love of working with kids as a former preschool director.

"There's a character building aspect of the sport that provides kids a greater self esteem that filters into other things. The end game is not a score, it's not even a certain skill, it's more the journey and all the things that come from that," she said.

For her, there is nothing better than seeing a child come into the gym feeling

like they can't do something because of their abilities and then watching them accomplish more than they ever thought they could.

"When kids start to know what they can do and what they can accomplish, all of a sudden that type of confidence, that self reliability starts to kick in in other areas. Now they're doing more things on the playground, they're joining other groups, they're going out and getting in



the car and bucking themselves in the seatbelt or getting themselves out of the car. They're taking initiation in different social settings. They're also in activities they might have never normally tried and so that's phenomenal," she said.

Banck works hard to meet kids wherever they're at, socially and emotionally. If a child is nonverbal, she finds other ways to communicate with them to build trust

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and a rapport. One nonverbal gymnast she works with loves video games. Whenever they accomplish something, she makes a video game noise to make them laugh and to feel special.

"I think a lot of times when people are talking about inclusion and integrating kids, they're trying to find ways to bring kids into our world but realistically, and ideally, to meet them in theirs, genuinely brings them closer," she said.

At her new location in Fox Point, she's able to have an impact on more kids than she ever has before. She's working closely with The Friendship Circle to offer a space for various groups. For caregivers bringing their kids to the gym, there's a kiosk to order food and drinks from Friendship Cafe. Employees from Friendship Cafe deliver the orders to Flips 4 All.

"It's wonderful. It's wonderful," Banck said.

She's felt immense support from the community and ownership of the building Flips 4 All now calls home. She also feels grateful for the village she's created.

"I've serviced the most beautiful families, I'm certain, but nobody can do it alone. It really does take a village, and we have a great village here."

She tears up as she talks about how she feels as she walks out of the gym doors each night. The doors she has opened to make all feel welcome.

"I've had thousands of kids pass through my hands and I've taught a lot of skills, but I feel certain that if there have been one or two kids who have been genuinely impacted, where they advocate for themselves, where they feel better because of having the same gymnastics coach for many years, if that somehow leads them to a more physical life, a more rewarding life, a safer life, then I'm good."

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HE'S JUST REALLY *special:*

**HOW ONE MOM HAS NAVIGATED
HER SON'S AUTISM DIAGNOSIS**

By Brittany Lewis





Dr. Ilana Rufflights up when talking about her two boys, Jack and James. The energy and love she feels for them is palpable, even in just one conversation with her.

“I love my kids so much that I'd do anything for them,” she said.

As a single mom who is a stroke neurologist at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, it can be challenging to make it all work, but it is in the small moments where she and her boys find the most joy.

“As a single mom, it's a really special bond I have with my kids. We're together a lot and I think sometimes the best days are when it's just the three of us and we're just doing our normal thing and just getting to spend time together, laughing together. We just know we're always together as a family.”

Her journey through motherhood started eight years ago when Jack was born.

“There was always something different about him, even from the very beginning,” Dr. Ruff said.

As a baby, she noticed his extreme sensitivity to noise and his need to be close to her at all times.

“He would wake up if he heard a fork or knife when we were eating and he'd scream. Loud noises, everything would bother him. As he started to get older, we

called him the ‘little prince’ as a joke because he wouldn't hold his own bottle, we'd have to give him his own bottle, and it turns out, that was probably fine motor delay,” she said.

There were other things, too. At 18 months, he was drooling a lot. He had some speech delay, was a little bit more irritable than other kids, and when he came home, he would

"There was always something different about him, even from the very beginning"

have to close every single door on the second level before going down to the first floor. At swimming lessons, he would scream if he had to go under water and would refuse to go back in.

“Nothing so, so obvious to me but just these little things that didn't quite fit,” she said.

When he was two and a half, Jack became a big brother when James was born. The adjustment was hard for him.

“It was a huge change in his routine and he had a really hard time, always had a lot of trouble with change,” Dr. Ruff said.



After meeting with a pediatrician and noticing he was unable to perform certain fine motor skills when Jack was three, the doctor suggested sending him to occupational therapy.

“That was my ticket in. Honestly, he was just the perfect therapist for him.”

Dr. Ruff said the therapist helped with various behavioral issues and navigating the way Jack saw the world. They were sad to leave him after moving from Chicago back to Wisconsin where Dr. Ruff was from.

“When we got to Wisconsin, it started to dawn on me that maybe he was on the spectrum,” she said. “I’m a stroke neurologist which means I’m pretty good at speech and I can classify speech abnormalities and I’m like something is wrong and I can’t figure it out. He was almost four at this point and he didn’t know the difference between a he and a she.”

After navigating the process of having him evaluated, Jack was eventually diagnosed with autism.

“For me, I was suspecting the diagnosis so it was actually kind of a relief and it actually gave me the opportunity to then be part of a community. I remember even as I was going through all of this, I would say he didn’t need a diagnosis, he has my support, he has my family’s support, he’s getting all his therapies, but honestly it’s been amazing because I can talk to people more about it,” she said.

Dr. Ruff is really open with people about Jack’s autism.

“It kind of gives him an understanding and a little bit of leeway as far as, he’s really sweet and wonderful, he’ll just want to look straight at you and maybe ask questions over and over again and hopefully then there’s going to be a little more patience and understanding,” she said.

His diagnosis has also helped her build a community for their family, both online and offline.

“Online I can hear from autistic adults. I love hearing their voices because they’re

able to explain what they're thinking or how something might affect them. I can have a better understanding of how Jack might react to something," Dr. Ruff said.

Friendship Circle has been incredible for her family.

"He had a friends group with some older children who would come and play with him. It was amazing," she said.

Jack is on a special needs baseball team he loves. He's gone to music therapy and horse therapy.

"All these really cool ways that he can learn and get his therapies," she said.

He also learns to navigate the world with the help of his little brother, James.

"Having a little brother has been great for Jack because James has a lot of energy. As much as I want to provide this perfect world for Jack, we also live in the world we live in, so he also is going to have to learn how to adjust to some of these changes. As much as we want the world to adjust for him, that's just not the way the world works in a lot of ways, so James provides a little bit of spontaneity that Jack has to respond to and that's good because it provides more of a safe way for him to experiment with the world."

For Dr. Ruff, the diagnosis of autism does not define

Jack. Instead her focus is on all the beautiful ways her boys teach her to live.

"He's Jack. He just is who he is. I really do believe we're given the children we're meant to have and Jack really adds so much more to my life. He's just incredible. He's so thoughtful and the way he sees things makes me slow down and appreciate them," she said. "It's just who he is, he's just really special."

As a mom and a doctor, Dr. Ruff understands the complexities behind when and what to share about a child's autism diagnosis. She has always been very careful about Jack's privacy in all matters so she understands why parents may be worried about sharing their child's diagnosis with others.

However, she's always been very open with others about Jack's diagnosis. For her, sharing allowed her to do the following:

- Others give him more grace and compassion knowing he is autistic, which often opens the door for people to ask questions they have or to share experiences they have had that help them understand neurodiversity.
- She's been able to become part of a wonderful community, that has helped her entire family.
- She is able to ask questions of autistic adults and parents who have children who are on the spectrum, which has allowed her to have the best understanding of how to support Jack.

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We proudly support The Friendship Circle!

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR EVERYTHING:

Man rides in Bike4Friendship after near-death experience



By Pavlina Osta
Reporter, CBS-58 News

Scan to watch:



MEQUON, Wis (CBS58) -- On Sunday, Aug. 4, a unique nonprofit hosted its annual fundraiser to support kids and adults with special needs.

"Friendship Circle is working with special needs kids and adults. It gives the kids a friend and teaches adults to learn employment skills," said Eliot Scheuer, a cyclist attending Bike4Friendship.

Sunday morning, the Friendship Circle hosted their annual Bike4Friendship. It's a one-of-a-kind cycling adventure on Lake Michigan to support the cause. Organizers say the event was extra special because this year, it was led by a man who reminds us miracles do happen.



Eliot Scheuer and his family have worked with the Friendship Circle for 17 years.

"For those in our community who may know a neighbor who has a kid with special needs, or they have a kid with special needs, get them in touch with Friendship Circle – it's a wonderful organization that will benefit not just the kid but the whole family," explained Eliot Scheuer.

The Scheuer family have always been there for their community, but almost one year ago...

"I was hiking in the high mountains north of Rocky National Park and unfortunately had a fall of about 50 feet," said Scheuer.

Eliot is a survivor, a fighter.



NOAH RICKUN, AND MARYLYN AND ELIOT SCHEUER RECEIVE FUNDRAISING AWARDS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY.



BIKERS GET READY TO START THE 100-MILE ROUTE, FOLLOWED BY THE 65-MILE, 30-MILE, AND 5K ROUTES.

“It's a lot easier to get on with recovery each day when you have a lot of people clapping for you.”

“I broke my neck, broken back, 14 broken ribs, 2 broken arms, facial fractures and some other stuff. I was a month in the ICU so all I basically saw was a ceiling, I couldn't really move. Then I was two months in a rehab hospital in Denver,” said Scheuer.

Eliot has undergone intense therapy on his road to recovery and his spirit was never broken.

“Everybody in their lives has moments of struggle and this was my turn to have a moment of struggle. So, I just said 'okay, it's my turn let's get on with it let's move forward,’” said Scheuer.

Eliot says he took his recovery day by day and couldn't have gotten through it without this family and community support “It's a lot easier to get on with recovery each day when you have a lot of people clapping for you. My wife was an amazing caregiver in a very difficult situation,” said Scheuer.



CBS58 ANCHOR AND REPORTER TAJMA HALL, WHO EMCEED THE BIKE4FRIENDSHIP SENDOFF, PRESENTS AN AWARD TO ROBERTA LONDON FOR RECEIVING THE MOST INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS. THEY ARE JOINED BY FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS LEAH AND LEVI STEIN.



LT. GOVERNOR SARA RODRIGUEZ SHARES HER GREETINGS.



160 BIKERS START THE BIKE4FRIENDSHIP.

Eliot and Marylyn have been married for 28 years; Marylyn says the past year hasn't been easy.

"It's been very long incredibly, challenging, and truly miraculous, it's been a year that you would never wish on anyone but a year that the growth and the blessing and the gifts were just incredibly apparent," said Marylyn Scheuer.

Marylyn learned a lot about herself along the way.

"I learned that I'm capable of doing a whole lot more than I knew, I'm stronger than I realized. That by staying present and in the moment and dealing with what is right in front of me at that moment and expressing gratitude for everything that we could be grateful for just that we woke up that day," she explained.

"I'm capable of doing a whole lot more than I knew"



MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE DAVID CROWLEY DELIVERS OPENING REMARKS.

Marylyn says practicing gratitude every day has made the biggest difference, no matter how small.

"He moved a toe for the first time when he couldn't move a leg, he couldn't move his leg so we thought he may never walk again. He moves his toe and it's the greatest thing in the world to celebrate," said Scheuer.

Eliot has been walking and independent for just four months now and plans on getting back to all his favorite activities... with the support of his caring community.

To learn more about Friendship Circle visit fcwi.org

Scan to watch the
Bike4Friendship on

FOX6
MILWAUKEE



PARTICIPANTS AT THE FINISH LINE RECEIVE MEDALS AND PHOTOS OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENT.

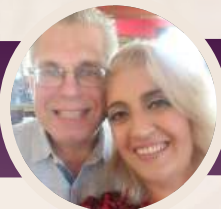


SABER
Group Homes
Let our family care for your family

WE CURRENTLY OWN AND OPERATE 4 OTHER GROUP HOMES IN SOUTH MILWAUKEE, BAYSIDE, THIENSVILLE AND GLENDALE.

BAYSIDE 8820 N Rexleigh, Bayside, WI **GLENDALE** 2145 W Hemlock Rd, Glendale, WI
SOUTH MILWAUKEE 812 Marquette Ave, South Milwaukee, WI **THIENSVILLE** 213 W Alta Loma Circle, Thiensville, WI

ROBERT LEE KNOLL
Chief Operations Officer



SARA IZGELOV
Chief Executive Officer

Our Goals and Mission for Saber Group Homes: Our primary goal is to keep residents safe, happy and satisfied in a homelike environment. **Our mission** is to provide quality, individualized care in a home-like environment and deliver compassionate care, health, nutrition, and safety in a minimally restrictive environment while promoting residents' independence. We are strong believers that positive and productive communication is key to everyone's success. We are happy and proud to serve Bayside community.

GET IN TOUCH

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Join us as we sit down with teens to
have the important conversation about
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