

## Young Athletes

*New Special Olympics program for preschoolers*

Most Sunday afternoons in May and June, five to 15 young children with special needs, their parents and siblings, eight teenagers, and leader Cheryl Theriault could be found having a good time together at Skidmore College's gymnasium.

The newly launched group, called the Young Athletes Program, is an extension of Special Olympics and designed for children with disabilities between the ages of 2 and 7. The program aims to engage children through developmentally appropriate play activities, welcome family members to the Special Olympics network of support, raise awareness

about the abilities of children with special needs, and provide children with a sense of self esteem and confidence.

Setting this project into motion was a collaborative community effort. Parent volunteer Cheryl Theriault led the way, along with teens involved in the local chapter of Peace Jam, a community volunteer organization. Skidmore College provided the gym space and Mattel donated equipment, such as balls and a trampoline. At least fifteen



Photo by Jim Melillo  
Eric, age 4, throws a bean bag in the large hoop, while teen helpers cheer him on. The hoops station is one of 14 activity stations found at the Sunday afternoon Special Olympics program for young athletes.

families in the community expressed their eagerness to participate in this free weekend program. Many said they were interested in providing physical, recreational activities for

their children, and this structured program, which provided plenty of staff supervision, seemed ideal. The participating children,

*(Continued on page 8)*



## View Connections on the Web!

Thanks to our friends at Parent to Parent of New York State, *Preschool Connections* can be viewed online at the Parent to Parent Web site. Visit <http://www.parenttoparentnys.org/> Go to "Information," then "Library," and then "Newsletters"

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## About Helping Hands School

Helping Hands School is a private, nonprofit preschool for birth to 5 with special needs. Situated on 5 acres of rolling hills, woods, and fields in Clifton Park (Exit 9 off the Northway), Helping Hands School currently provides special education preschool and early intervention services to children from Saratoga, Rennselaer, Schenectady, Washington, and Albany counties. A nursery school for typically developing children is also offered.

## Services

- A continuum of services for preschool children with disabilities, including various integrated and self-contained special education classroom models.
- Early Intervention home and community-based services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays.
- Intensive program options for children with a diagnosis along the autism spectrum.
- Developmental play groups for toddlers with special needs.
- Special Education Itinerant Teacher services provided in home, nursery school, daycare and community settings.
- Related services, including speech/language, occupational, and physical therapies.
- Comprehensive evaluations for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers suspected of having a developmental delay or disability.
- Family support services available including parent support groups and social work services.
- Parent education workshops and newsletters for families of preschoolers and families of children with special needs, birth to 5.

## About the Newsletter

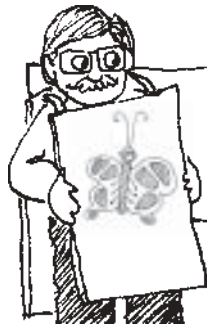
*Preschool Connections* is a quarterly publication of Helping Hands School. The newsletter provides parents with up-to-date information about issues related to raising children of all abilities. Readers are welcome to copy and share information from this publication, but please credit Helping Hands School and *Preschool Connections*.

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Helping Hands School  
41 Werner Road  
Clifton Park, NY 12065  
(518) 664-5066

Editor: Deborah Reed  
Artwork: Dave Ross  
Contributors: Kathy Ross  
Dianne Burke  
Nancy Cupolo  
Patti Crisafulli  
Ed Lake  
Cheryl Ryan



# Happenings

## Family Events

**Saratoga County Fair.** Rides, animals, displays and fun! Saratoga County Fairgrounds in Ballston Spa, July 14-19, 9:00 am to midnight. Admission: \$7-\$10 for adults; children under 50 inches are free. *Call 885-9701.*

**Family Fun Day.** Come to the Washington County Fair Farm Museum's "Family Fun Day" on July 11, 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Activities revolve around the adventures of Peter, the mischievous rabbit in the classic "Tales of Peter Rabbit" by Beatrix Potter. Visit Peter and his friends; play in Mr. McGregor's garden; squeeze through the fence; enjoy foods and activities. Free admission. *Call 692-2464.*

**Circus Smirkus.** Every summer a company of talented Smirkus Troupers, ages 10-18, go on a 2-month performance tour around New England. The 2009 Big Top Tour continues the tradition of theme-based shows with Smirkus Ever After: A Big Top Fairytale. July 5 and July 6, with shows at 1:00 and 6:00 pm each day at Saratoga Racetrack. Children (ages 3-12) \$15.75; adults \$18.75. *Call for tickets, 1-877-SMIRKUS, or 587-0549.*

**Big Trucks.** The Children's Museum at Saratoga hosts Big Truck Day 2009. Meet the big trucks of Saratoga and the people who drive them. Dump trucks, emergency vehicles, construction trucks, and more. August 8, 10 am to 1:00 pm at Maple Avenue Middle School. Rain date is August 15. Children \$5; adults are free. *Call the Museum at 584-5540.*

**Saratoga Springs Public Library.** The library is a hoppin' place this summer. Highlights include: Family Concerts in the Park (July 9 and July 23); The Zucchini Brothers (July 29); Roger the Jester (August 5); and The Uncle Brothers sing-along concert (August 12). *For a complete listing and more information, call 584-1198 or visit the library's Web site.*

**Saratoga Race Course Family Fun Fest.** The two-day festival will take place at the track on the last two days of the racing season, August 31 and September 1. During this time, the backyard area will host a variety of family-friendly attractions such as carnival games, face painting, caricatures, spin art, giant inflatables and pony rides. Juggler and stilt walker Sparkles will entertain both young and old and the Backyard Circus will provide family amusement with its whimsical circus act. Families can also climb Coca-Cola's inflatable rock wall, try the Adrenaline Rush obstacle course, or bounce in the Bounce Around house. *Call 584-6200.*

## Self-contained Classroom

*(What's that mean?)*

A special education service model in which students receive all or most of their instruction or support from special education teachers and staff, apart from their typically developing peers.

*Special education jargon can be confusing. If school professionals use words or acronyms you don't understand, speak up immediately. Most people will be happy to slow down and explain anything that is unclear.*





# Books for Kids

## Let's go camping

*Experience the magic of sleeping out under the stars with these fun stories about family camping*

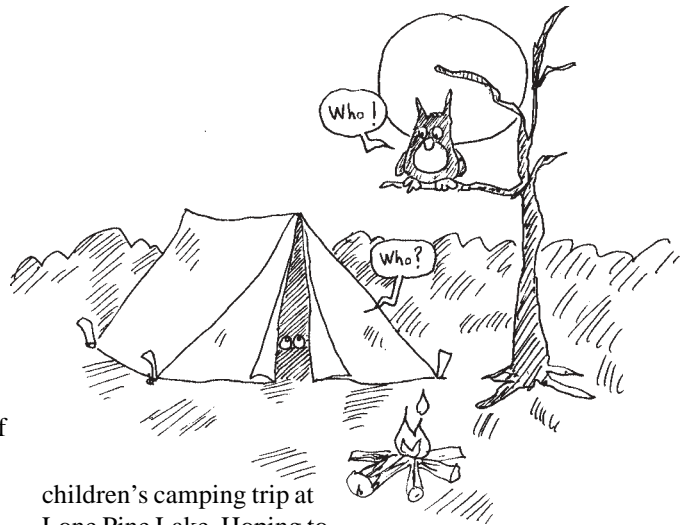
**Bailey Goes Camping** by Kevin Henkes (*HarperCollins, 1997*) Very young readers will relate to this story of a little brother who is too young to do all the fun things his older brother and sister get to do. Fortunately, his parents create a special day just for him. The wonderful illustrations and simple story are enough to make any little child enjoy this book. Camping indoors is fun for any age, but especially for a little boy bunny who gets to do all the things his older siblings get to do. *Warning! Be prepared to create your very own indoor camping experience!*

**Curious George Goes Camping** by Margaret Rey (*Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 1999*) George and the man with the yellow hat are going camping! George tries to be helpful, but after he upsets a neighboring camper, he is chased into the woods and gets lost. Before long, an encounter with a

cute forest creature throws George into a chain of outrageous events that allows him to find a way to be helpful after all. Like all of the other *Curious George* books, George is up to a lot of mischief, but in the end, all is well.

**A Camping Spree with Mr. Magee** by Chris Van Dusen (*Chronicle Books, 2003*) The colorful story, written in catchy rhyme, details a camping trip that is complicated by a marshmallow eating bear, a runaway camper, and a near fall into the water. In typical fashion, Chris Van Dusen's super-detailed illustrations simply jump off the page. Full of excitement and adventure, this book will become a favorite for both parents and children.

**Stella & Roy Go Camping** by Ashley Wolff (*Dutton Children's Books, 1999*) Older preschoolers will appreciate this story about a mother and her two



children's camping trip at Lone Pine Lake. Hoping to see a bear, Roy is ever on the lookout for tracks. But new-reader Stella has her animal-identification book along, and she delights in showing Roy what kind of animals *really* made the tracks he's found. Roy spots coyote tracks and marmot tracks and lots of others, too--but no bear tracks.

At night when they are asleep in the tent, Roy hears a clanking, rolling sound outside. He peeks his head out, shines his flashlight and actually sees the bear. In the morning, Stella confirms the paw prints and knows that Roy really did see the bear.

This story offers a lot of good information about camping, hiking, and looking for animal tracks.

**When We Go Camping** by Margriet Ruurs (*Tundra Books, 2004*) The pictures do such a good job of evoking the sights, sounds and smells of camping, you'll find this book to be an excellent preparation for the real thing. Family members pitch a tent by a lake, hike, swim, canoe, and interact with their surroundings. The text celebrates the pure wilderness, and the characters are depicted as responsible campers---they hoist their cooler into a tree to protect it from bears, wear life jackets while out on the lake, and identify the correct berries to eat off the bushes. Children will love the "hidden" animals on each page.



### Backyard Camping

Camping doesn't have to mean a lot of fuss: try pitching a tent in your backyard. You can build a safe campfire in a portable grill or hibachi for cooking hotdogs and baked beans. After dinner, strike up a round of campfire songs or storytelling, roast marshmallows, and don't forget to help your kids search the sky for the Big Dipper and other favorite constellations. Then settle down in your sleeping bags for a night out in nature. (Don't forget the flashlights!) This simple family outing will be long remembered by any young child.

# Parent Resources

## On the Web

### *Thomas the Train Emotion Game*

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), in partnership with Thomas the Tank Engine, has created a new (free) online game to help children with autism recognize different emotions. Thomas and his four friends display happy, angry, sad, surprised and scared faces.



The game involves children focusing on the trains' faces and learning to identify the different expressions. Visit *Autism Spectrum Australia on the Web*.

## Summer Safety Tips

### Preventing Window Falls

Every year, thousands of young children are killed or injured in falls from windows. Do not assume screens will protect your children. The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends that parents install *window guards* or *window stops* to prevent young children from falling out of open windows.

Window guards easily screw into the sides of the window frame. They come in different sizes for various size windows, and adjust for widths. Window guards (about \$50) and window stops, which prevent windows from opening more than 4 inches, (about \$5) are available online at Web sites such as *Safe and Secure Babies*.

### Preventing Drownings

Drowning often occurs when children gain access to a pool during a brief lapse in adult

supervision. To reduce the risk of drowning, pool owners should adopt several layers of protection, including physical barriers, such as pool fencing equipped with self-closing and self-latching gates. If the house forms a side of the barrier, door alarms for pool access doors or a power safety cover over the pool should be used. There have also been accident reports of children entering the pool by exiting the house via a pet door. So take precautions for this possibility.

Lastly, be careful of children and pool drains. The suction from a pool drain can be so powerful that it can hold an adult under water, but most entrapment incidents involve children. The Pool and Spa Safety Act went into effect on December 19, 2008 and requires all public pools and spas to have anti-entrapment drain covers.

## Programs

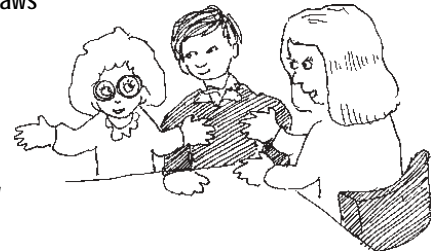
### Parent to Parent

**August 10: Application due for Intensive Lay Advocacy Training** Parent to Parent of NYS is currently seeking applications from family members of individuals with disabilities to participate in an Intensive Lay Advocacy Training.

The training is designed to provide knowledge about special education regulations and policies related to disabilities. Participants will develop advocacy skills and become more competent in advocating for their child and other children. The overall intent is to teach ways to become a more effective advocate and to give participants a better knowledge base of the laws and to improve communication skills.

There is a commitment required from each person who attends. If requested by Parent to Parent, participants will assist up to three families in their county over the course of one year.

Examples of this are talking to another parent about education advocacy, helping another parent problem-solve about their child's education and learning about special education laws. Sessions will be held on Saturdays, 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, on August 29, September 12, 19, and 26, in Schenectady. **Applications must be received by August 10, 2009.** Contact *Tina Beauparlant* or *Holly Bartczak*, Education Specialists, at 381-4370.



### PESI

**August 7: Over 75 Quick, On-The-Spot Techniques for Children with Emotional and Behavior Problems.** Presentation by Jennifer Wilke-Deaton, MA. 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Albany. Call 800-844-8260 or visit [www.pesi.com](http://www.pesi.com)



## Summer Library Reading Programs

Children ages 3 and up are invited to take part in the 2009 Summer Reading Program at local libraries. Bookmarks, reading records, certificates, free ice cream, and other prizes are fun incentives. This is a great way to inspire your child to read this summer. *Saratoga Springs Public Library*, 584-1198; *Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library*, 371-8622.

## What is...

### Lyme Disease?

Lyme disease is usually transmitted by small deer ticks, common in summer and early fall. Symptoms develop three to 32 days after a bite. With this infection, small white hard lumps can appear on the skin surrounded by a circular rash. Aches, chills, fever, enlarged lymph glands and swelling around the joints are also common. Signs and symptoms of later-stage disease (several weeks to several months after infection) are more serious. These can include joint inflammation, facial paralysis and heart palpitations.

#### Prevention:

Ticks live in grassy and wooded areas. Follow these tips to help prevent tick bites:

- \* Before your outing, dress appropriately. Wear a long-sleeved shirt with tight cuffs and long pants. Put on shoes, not sandals.
- \* Avoid tall grass and dense woods as much as possible.
- \* After your outing, inspect for ticks. If you find one, remove it promptly and carefully using tweezers to grasp the tick by its head. Try to remove the whole tick without crushing it. If a tick lodges in your skin, it doesn't necessarily mean you are infected. In order to pass on the Lyme disease bacteria, a tick must be embedded in the skin for about 36-48 hours. And not all ticks carry Lyme disease or other disease. Lyme disease is best treated as early as possible. Patients who are treated with antibiotics in the early stages of infection usually recover completely. If you think you have symptoms of Lyme, and especially if you may have come in contact with ticks, call your physician. (Source: Mayo Clinic Health Information)

# Health and Development

**Melatonin, sleep, and autism.** A new study reported in the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* reports that over-the-counter melatonin medication can improve sleep in children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and Fragile X Syndrome (FXS). The authors of the study note that sleep problems are reported in up to 89 percent of children with autism and 77 percent of children with FXS.



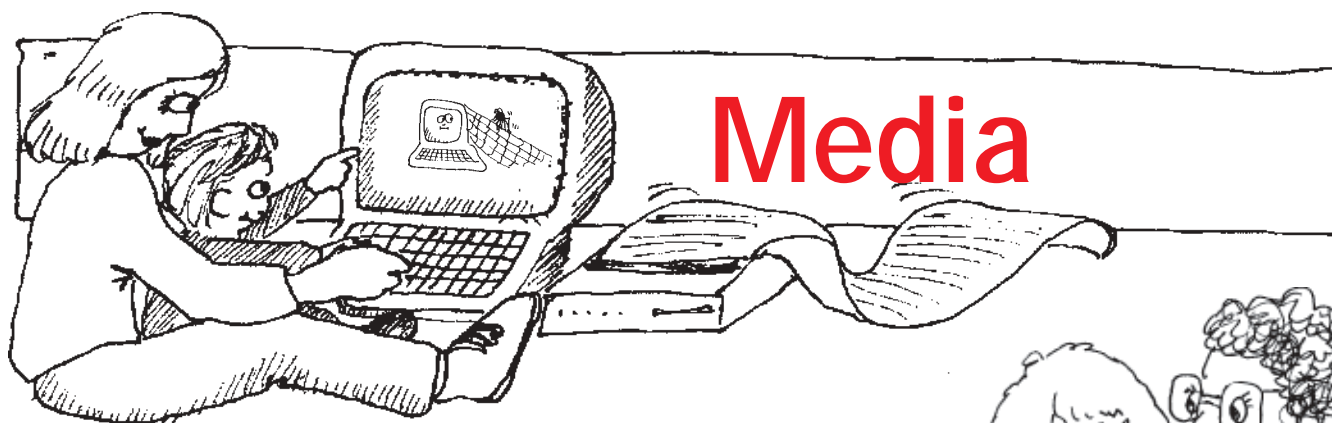
Results of the study indicated that children who received over-the-counter melatonin treatments experienced significant improvements in total time they slept during the night (duration), how long it took them to fall asleep (sleep-onset latency), and when they fell asleep (sleep-onset time). Mean sleep duration was longer on melatonin than placebo by 21 minutes, sleep-onset latency was shorter by 28 minutes and sleep-onset time was earlier by 42 minutes. (Before using melatonin or any other over-the-counter drug, consult your child's physician.)

**SPEEDY babies.** Researchers at the University of Helsinki have named a new behavioral disorder called *Speedy babies*. These children have good language comprehension skills, but their speech is very unclear, although they may start speaking early on and can be quite talkative. In some cases, the speech production is delayed, the child speaks less, and the speech maybe unclear, especially when speaking long sentences. What makes the child's speech unintelligible are words and sentences that are produced incorrectly, but each time in a different way, in addition to consistent sound distortion. Consistent sound distortions are associated with tongue dysfunction and are manifest in sounds in which the tip of the tongue is used.

SPEEDY babies develop motor skills early, and often start walking unassisted at ten months. They are often avid runners, climbers and eager to jump and skip, and, all in all, are quite agile and physically active. They are usually in good physical health, and do not typically suffer from respiratory infections, ear infections or allergies. Cognitively, SPEEDY babies tend to perform better on vision-based tasks than linguistic-based activities.

**Tourette's syndrome.** In a large scale study, led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, researchers found that Tourette's syndrome occurs in 3 out of every 1,000 school-aged children. The disorder--known for its physical tics and, in a few cases, shouted obscenities--has long been considered a rare condition. The new number means it's more common than past estimates, but confirms that it's far less common than other neurological conditions like autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Researchers found Tourette's was more than twice as common in white children as in blacks or Hispanics; boys had a rate three times higher than girls; and about 80 percent had been diagnosed with another mental illness or developmental disability.





# Media

## Helping your child develop "social understanding"

*New study stresses importance of mothers talking to their children about feelings and intentions*



**T**he way mothers talk to their children when they are young has a lasting effect on children's social skills, according to a research study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The researchers found that children whose mothers often talked to them about people's feelings, beliefs, wants, and intentions developed better social understanding than children whose mothers did not include much "mental state talk" in their conversations.

The study, based at the University of Sussex, followed children from the age of 3 to the age of 12, measuring their ability to perform tasks designed to assess their social understanding. One of these tasks, developed by the researchers to test social understanding in middle childhood (from 8 to 12 years old), used clips from the TV comedy, "The Office."

Dr. Yuill, who led the later stages of the research, explains: "Ricky Gervais'

character, David Brent, is a typical example of someone who is very insensitive and reads social situations incorrectly. We cringe to watch it because we are embarrassed by his complete lack of social understanding."

From the age of 8, the children in the study were beginning to cringe too, rating scenarios with David Brent's social mistakes as more embarrassing than those without, and showing a good understanding of what he was doing wrong. By the end of the study, children did as well as mothers on this and other tasks measuring social understanding, showing that by the age of 12, children can be quite socially sophisticated.

The researchers also observed how each of the mothers talked to their child when they were 3 years old as they looked at a series of pictures together. They found that children whose mothers had often described the mental state of people in the pictures (their emotions

or what they might be thinking or going to do next) did particularly well on the social understanding tasks. The link between early mental state talk and the development of social understanding was strongest in early childhood and was independent of the mother's IQ or social understanding. By the time the children were aged 8 to 12, the influence of early mother talk was less strong, probably, the researchers suggest, because older children are less dependent on their mothers and more likely to be influenced by their peers and other adults.

### Practical Application

Reading books and watching videos with your child offers ideal opportunities to use mental state talk. It is not difficult and parents can incorporate this sort of discussion into nearly any book you read with your child.

Take the series of *David* books by David Shannon, in which a rambunctious David is always creating messes

and engaging in other shenanigans. Here are a few of the possible conversations you could have: *Do you think David feels sorry for breaking the vase? What is his mother feeling? Do you think David meant to spill his juice? What happens when you make a mistake? How do you feel?*

Take advantage of television viewing, too. When watching Nick Jr.'s "Wonder Pets," for example, you could discuss: *Why do Linny, Tuck and Ming-Ming like to help others? How does it make them feel? When did you help someone else? How can we help others?*

Books, TV and videos offer rich sources of potential conversation and opportunities for your child to grow in their social and emotional understanding. Given that many experts now feel that emotional intelligence (EI) is a better predictor of success than traditional IQ tests, mental state talk is an easy way to help your child succeed.

# Ask Nancy



*Nancy T. Cupolo is a regular contributor to Preschool Connections. A popular educational consultant and training specialist, Nancy draws on 32 years of teaching and administrative experience in special education, elementary education, and early childhood education. She is currently the Department Chairperson of Teacher Preparation at Hudson Valley Community College. Nancy is owner of her own consulting business, Children First. E-mail your questions to Nancy at [ncupolo@nycap.rr.com](mailto:ncupolo@nycap.rr.com)*

## Understanding Four-Year-Olds

**“There seems to be so much emphasis is now on nutrition and exercise for young children. Should I be concerned about my four-year-old daughter who prefers to play inside? Is she getting enough physical activity?”**



Children need at least 40-60 minutes of daily physical activity, and the outdoors offers many wonderful opportunities for exercise. Your daughter, who prefers spending time inside, may need extra help in learning to enjoy the pleasures of outdoor play.

Take advantage of your four-year-old’s insatiable curiosity by exploring the natural world together. Bugs, trees, leaves, butterflies and bird’s nests are fun to investigate. Take a nature walk together, collecting items in a basket or bag. Bring along your investigative tools, such as old glasses for “observations,” a note pad to record your discoveries, a pail and shovel to dig for clues, and a bug jar to catch insects to observe. One of my happiest memories was running outside catching fire flies during the summer months when I was young. While exploring the outdoors, your child will be moving and exercising.

Children your daughter’s age are learning to hop on one foot, gallop, pedal a bike, climb ladders, throw a ball overhand, and skip. You can help your child develop these age-appropriate skills by playing games together. Chase, kickball, softball, catch, and “red light/green light” are good choices at this age.

Remember, physical activity is good for the body and stimulates the brain, so get outside and have some fun everyday together!

**“My son seems to only eat when I am sitting with him and talking to him. He sometimes refuses to eat by himself. Is this normal?”**



Let’s take a moment to look at the world through the eyes of a child. At this age, your son is a very social being. He may be friendly and outgoing one minute and sulk about being left out the next. If you don’t eat with him, he will create an imaginary playmate who will. Most four-year-olds like to make up stories, seek frequent adult approval, and show pride in their accomplishments. They like to “talk,” and conversing with you at meal time is a wonderful time to gain your attention. The four-year-old would tell us, “It is not the food that I am interested in, it is you!” His appetite may fluctuate from good to fair. He may develop dislikes for certain foods and refuse them. Pressuring him to eat may cause more serious emotional problems. If possible, decide ahead of time that meals will be your “shared time” of day with your child. Let him help you prepare the meal and set the table, talking all the while together.

Personally, as a mother, I ate meals with my own children for twenty years. Now I think every day about how much I miss their company. So enjoy the time with your child and celebrate this social gathering together.

(Special Olympics from page 1)

mostly ages 3 to 5 1/2, had such disabilities as autism, Down's syndrome, and cerebral palsy. Siblings were welcome and many attended, making this a true family affair. Teen helpers were assigned to each child and guided kids through 14 different activity stations set up in the large gym. Walking a balance beam, playing tee ball, and making popping sounds as you jumped on bubble wrap were a few of the fun options.

The final session was June 14 when participants were awarded ribbons and medals.



### Program to continue

Everyone involved agreed that the initial effort was a success and that the program should continue in the fall. At this point in time, Cheryl is looking for other parents who can help organize the fall program.

The group also hopes to reach more families with young children who will take advantage of this free opportunity for exercise and fun. If interested, contact Cheryl at 518-527-5732 or e-mail her at Cheryl.Theriault@hotmail.com.

## Peace Jam

Ninth graders Justin Fabian and Spencer Patterson are two members of the local chapter of Peace Jam, a worldwide movement of young people and Nobel Peace Prize Winners working together for social justice and peace. Founded in 1996, the organization's mission is to create a new generation of leaders committed to positive change in themselves, their communities, and the world through the inspiration of Nobel Peace Laureates.

Each service project addresses one of 10 core issues: ending racism and hate; social justice and human rights for all; halting the spread of disease; equal access to water and other natural resources; rights for women and children; eliminating extreme poverty; restoring the earth's environment; controlling the proliferation of weapons; investing in human security; and breaking the cycle of violence.

Local chapters choose one group project each year. This year, the Saratoga chapter opted to help create and participate in the Special Olympics program for young children. This was a new and eye-opening experience for these teens, as none had prior experience working with children with disabilities.

*Kudos to Justin, Spencer and the other members of this local Peace Jam chapter as they help others in our community.*

Address Correction Requested

Helping Hands School  
41 Werner Road  
Clifton Park, NY 12065  
(518) 664-5066

