



Hastings-on-Hudson

Happenings

The recreation department hosts an **End-of-Year Party for senior citizens** with a performance by Stolen Moments and dinner tonight (June 27), 5-7 p.m., at the community center. Fee: \$5. For reservations and transportation, call 478-2380, ext. 644.

The **village board** meets Tuesday, July 1, 7:30 p.m. in village hall.

Village offices are closed next Friday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day.

The **Hastings Flea** returns on Sunday, July 13, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., at the Zinsser Commuter Lot, 134 Southside Ave., with antique and vintage furniture, crafts, collectibles, jewelry, food, and live music. Lower Hudson Valley vendors and local artisans return for the Flea on the second Sunday of every month through October. Visit Hastingsflea.com.

The **weekly farmers' market** on Saturdays, 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., in the library lot off Maple Avenue, continues through the end of November. Vendors now accept SNAP cards (formerly the food stamp program). For further information, visit www.hastingsfarmersmarket.org



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Jay Rosenthal speaks during the Orchard School's graduation on June 19.

Alumnus shares his strife-to-success story

By Jackie Lupo

Everyone expects to see happy faces at a graduation ceremony, but the proud families and friends at the Orchard School's graduation on June 19 seemed to wear even wider-than-average smiles. The 46 graduates, who have been residential or day students at the Yonkers school for children with psychological or behavioral conditions or a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, were completing the eighth grade despite what for many had been overwhelming odds against success. Some will be progressing to a mainstream school, while others will move on to private high schools that

serve special-needs kids. And some, like the day's keynote speaker, 23-year-old Jay Rosenthal of Armonk, could even earn a college degree.

But when students arrive at the school, which is on the campus of the Andrus Children's Center just south of the Hastings border, their problems can seem overwhelming. Kids are referred there when they are unable to function or learn in a conventional school set-

ting. Nevertheless, on their big day last week this particular group of well-behaved, blue-gowned teens seemed like any other class of graduating middle-schoolers, showing an equal mix of excitement and apprehension about what would come next.

Compared to a typical middle or high school, the Andrus campus is a highly

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Orchard

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sheltered environment. Located on the former Dyckman farm-turned-orphanage, the Orchard School is part of the larger nonprofit Andrus organization, which has several sites around Westchester that offer various services to troubled children and families.

The Orchard School serves students in grades K-9. Its 79 day-school students and 73 residential students are a mixed bag socio-economically and racially, although boys outnumber girls. Some students in grades 6-9 attend a specialized program designed to meet the needs of those with primary or co-occurring diagnoses of the three autism spectrum disorders: Asperger disorder, autism, or pervasive developmental disorder-NOS (not otherwise specified), often called “atypical autism” because the classic criteria for autism may not all be met.

Mimi Clarke Corcoran, the president and CEO of Andrus, addressed the graduates, saying, “You should be proud of all the hard work you’ve done, making friends, managing your emotions. You’ve learned to fall down and pick yourself up and push yourself forward. There are plenty of people to tell you you won’t do this, you won’t go there.”

Certainly this was the message Rosenthal had received before he entered the Orchard School. Rosenthal said he arrived at Andrus “as a frightened, distrustful and emotional child and left a more mature person.”

While Rosenthal, who graduated from Orchard in 2005, had only good things to say about his experience there, he said he had been in “both abusive and nonabusive residential and hospital environments.”

Rosenthal just graduated from Adelphi University in Garden City, Long Island, with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. “If you told me just five years ago that I would accomplish that,” he told the graduates, “I would have said, ‘Are you out of your mind?’”

Rosenthal told the class to “be your own best advocate,” and advised them to “make your own decisions, despite the limitations others want you to accept.”

In an interview with the Enterprise after the ceremony, he said that when he started at Andrus he had been socially and emotionally withdrawn and depressed. “Somehow things got better, trying one medication after another. Here I had 24-hour supervision and care.” He described some residential schools as “little better than prison,” and was particularly vehement about the practices at those that are for-profit. “These schools have a higher instance of being abusive,” he claimed. He said parents considering sending a child to such a school should find out whether there have been reports of abuse or death at the institution, what degrees and qualifications the staff has, and whether their practices have been validated by research.

“We all want to help our children but sometimes people are so desperate,” he said. He recommended visiting the website astartforteens.org for more information about questionable practices in the “troubled teen” industry and the dangers of teen boot-camp programs for kids with behavioral problems.

From Rosenthal’s perspective, the ideal placement for kids with problems is one where they get to live at home. “Ideally, nobody wants to leave their community,” he said. “You become detached and it causes some emotional issues. When you go from place to place, you have to keep starting over.” Having lived away from home for so many years of his edu-

catlonal career, he said his hometown “has no social meaning for me.”

He said there was “some thought in the background that I might not graduate from high school and college.” In fact, even when he was graduating from high school — a private residential program in Connecticut — the idea of his being on his own at college was “a very heated issue” for his family. But he was ready to go.

After spending two years at Mitchell College in New London, Conn., Rosenthal transferred to Adelphi, where he received a merit scholarship. He quickly became involved in research programs at the university’s Gordon F. Derner Institute of Advanced Psychological Studies, completing a semester-long practicum on brain functions in autism at the cognitive neurophysiology lab at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. During his senior year, he interned with the National Tay-Sachs and Allied Diseases Association, where he was the principal investigator in a research study into the psychosocial deficits experienced by patients with late-onset Tay-Sachs, a rare and fatal hereditary disease.

With this already impressive résumé in hand, he hopes to work in a psychology-related field for a year before continuing on to grad school to earn a doctorate in clinical psychology. He’s proof that with determination and the right program, some children with serious challenges can succeed.

Rosenthal said that parents might blame themselves when something’s not right with their kids, especially if there is a genetic component. But even if the results of psychological testing indicate problems, “during childhood our development is very plastic and can change very easily,” so the results of testing should be used by parents and the child’s therapists “as a guide to developing a plan for success — not a permanent prognosis.”

School notes

Wash. U. dean’s list

Craig Laing was named to the dean’s list at Washington University in St. Louis for the fall 2013 semester.

Coastal Carolina dean’s list

Kaitlyn P. Pecylak was named to the dean’s list at Coastal Carolina University for the spring 2014 semester.

National Merit Scholarship

Jesse M. Litvin, a senior at Hastings High School, was a winner of a college-sponsored National Merit Scholarship award.

Bowdoin chemistry award

Julia Hogan, majoring in Chemistry and Computer Science, was awarded the Philip Weston Meserve Prize in Chemistry on Bowdoin College’s Honors Day Ceremony on May 7.

Bates dean’s list

Alexandra Lefevre and Nina Wineburgh were named to the dean’s list at Bates College for the winter 2014 semester.

Connecticut dean’s honors

Elizabeth Bolger and Sophia Delevic-Orey achieved dean’s high honors at Connecticut College for the spring 2014 semester. Jesse Guterman achieved dean’s honors for the spring 2014 semester, and won The Foundations of Education Award at the annual Honors & Awards ceremony on May 5.

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