



San Gabriel Valley **Examiner**

25 cents

Since 1997 • Published in GLENDORA, California
A Weekly Adjudicated Publication Serving all of Los Angeles County

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Volume XII, Issue No. 28

STRIVING FOR JOURNALISTIC EXCELLENCE

July 10 - 16, 2008

First Female Student Graduates from LeRoy Haynes Center School of Autism Capping 12-year Success

LA VERNE — The first long-term female student in the educational program for autistic children has become the first female to graduate from the program, now the year-old LeRoy Haynes Center School of Autism at LeRoy Haynes Center in La Verne.

Julie Marie Stride, 19, donned her cap and gown and received her diploma during commencement exercises at the school last month at LeRoy Haynes Center. In all, there were 10 members of the 2008 graduating class at the Haynes Education Center.

Amy DeLoera, Co-Director of Haynes Education Center, told the graduates that graduation is bitter-sweet but that for the graduates, it was “time for you to move on.”

Julie’s mother, Jeanine Weigel-Stride, of Covina, has a long list of organizations she credits for her daughter’s success.

“I want to tell all the parents out there who have autism students, don’t give up on your



Please turn to **JULIE / B8**

Julie

First female graduate from Autistic program

Continued from / A3

child, keep pushing," she said. "There's always somebody out there who will help you and will open the door."

Stride said there was an immediate bond with LeRoy Haynes Center from day one.

"The teachers and staff at LeRoy Haynes are wonderful," she said.

She added that her daughter's success proves that other parents with autistic children could have similar success if they simply "find the right program for that child."

And she said her goal is to "open the door for other parents starting out with autism."

"We need to do more research on autism – there's not enough

people knowing what's going on," she said. "I just don't want people to give up. The children with autism are beautiful children – I would never send my daughter back. I want the best for her."

Stride said the need is there with one child out of every 150 born with autism.

She explained Julie will remain at LeRoy Haynes for another year in a transitional program in which she will learn how to take the bus, do her own laundry, write checks and balance a checkbook – all basic day-to-day living skills.

Julie also is continuing as a client of the San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center in Pomona, which works in partnership with individuals with developmental disabilities, their families and the community to promote independence and full integration into community life.

Stride said it is important that other parents of children with autism and other disabilities become aware of the Regional Center.

Keith Penman, Executive Director of the Regional Center, said diagnosed cases of autism have increased dramatically in recent years.

"We serve almost 2,000 people in the (San Gabriel/Pomona Valley) area with a diagnosis of autism," Penman said, adding that his agency serves a total of about 11,000 people with roughly 21 percent of them diagnosed with autism.

He said that is an "enormous increase over previous years" since 15 years ago only 2 percent of the agency's clients were diagnosed with autism.

Of course, he said the reason for the increase remains a mystery; researchers are looking at potential causes such as genetics, environmental causes, childhood inoculations or even improving diagnostic capabilities.

He explained that his agency, created under state law, provides parents with children they believe may be developmentally disabled a resource for assessment, evaluation and determina-

tion of eligibility for additional services under California's Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act.

The bottom line is that as a parent, Stride believes the system is working.

After Julie's four years at LeRoy Haynes, her mother doesn't want her to go. Initially attended public school followed by a period of home schooling before her referral to LeRoy Haynes. She has two brothers, Mitchell, 16 and Karl, 21, who also have been supportive.

"They just want the best for their sister and (want) to make sure she is taken care of right," Stride said. "There is hope for these children – we cannot give up."

The Leroy Haynes Center School of Autism – which serves students from both public and private schools – currently is celebrating its one-year anniversary.

And Amy Benson, a special education teacher who helped

build the School of Autism she now heads, has been named this year's Haynes Education Center Teacher of the Year.

For more information on the program, call (909) 593-2581, ext. 277.

The LeRoy Haynes Center for Children provides specialized treatment and educational services to entire families of emotionally troubled, abused or neglected children in order to enable them to form and maintain healthy productive relationships.

It was founded in October 1946 by LeRoy Haynes, a former chaplain at the Fred Nellis Youth Authority in Whittier, as a way to help many of the troubled boys he served through intervention and treatment in a home-like setting.

The group home facility has grown from its initial 10 residents to six cottages, each housing 12 children. Mental health treatment services are provided to every resident.

The Haynes Education Center, a non-public school founded in 1989 as a compan-

ion to the group home facility, initially provided schooling to the children of what was formerly LeRoy Boys Home. It has grown to serve not only the children who live on campus but the community as a whole, accepting children (boys and girls) from 14 school districts throughout Southern California.

Credentialed teachers working in a highly structured environment address curriculum as well as learning disabilities including autism, emotional challenges and developmental disabilities.

The entire facility serves 350 to 400 children annually through its three basic programs – residential, Haynes Education Center and mental health.

For more information, contact the LeRoy Haynes Center for Children & Family Services at 233 West Baseline Road, La Verne, CA 91750, (909) 593-2581, or visit the web site at www.leroyhaynes.org.

