

B A R B E R

FEBRUARY 2020

SPiRiT



**STUDENT SUCCESS
STORIES**

PG. 2



Barber National Institute

DONOR REPORT EDITION

CHANGING A LIFE



Teacher Laura Hecht during gym with Max Alecia-Rossi: “He enjoys everything we do.”

Every morning when Ruth Alecia put her son on the school bus, she would tell him that she loved him. Then, one day, he said it back.

It was an emotional moment for Ruth, and a reminder of the many big—and little—ways that life was changing for Max Alecia-Rossi and their whole family.

Today, it is hard for Ruth and Max’s teachers to believe that this smiling, chatty five-year-old is the same boy who started in the early intervention preschool at the Barber National Institute in October 2017. He had no language and wouldn’t play with or even acknowledge his peers. When he didn’t want to participate in a class activity, he would act out or hide under a table.

At home, he had similar challenges. Ruth said that Max avoided most foods and would not sit at the dinner table for meals. Instead, she would have to follow him throughout the house with a plate to try to feed him.

“I remember I was at a low point and asking myself ‘how am I going to help him?’ Now, he is a different child,” said Ruth.

To get started, Max’s teacher, Laura Hecht, set some initial goals, such as following rules, participating

appropriately in group activities and playing cooperatively with other students. “We developed a visual schedule to help him transition between activities and provided a lot of positive reinforcement whenever he responded appropriately. The classroom staff modeled behaviors we were trying to build,” said Laura.

They also used the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to provide a way for Max to express himself, giving him choices for many of the things and activities he might want. He also received speech therapy as part of his school program to develop language.

“We made progress slowly at first,” said Laura. “But then, it was like a light bulb went off and certain things, like following directions, started happening very quickly.”

For Ruth, the changes in Max’s behavior have been noticed by everyone in their large extended family. One of eight children, Ruth recalled how getting together with her siblings and their children would be intolerable for Max. But Ruth described this Christmas as “fantastic,” where Max happily played with his cousins throughout their holiday celebration.

ON THE COVER

*Early Intervention Preschool
Teacher Laura Hecht with
student Max Alecia-Rossi.*

OUR MISSION STATEMENT



**BARBER
NATIONAL
INSTITUTE**

We “Make dreams come true.” We provide children and adults with autism, intellectual disabilities and behavioral health challenges and their families the education, support and resources needed to be self reliant, independent and valued members of their community. In addition, we provide the professionals who serve them with world-class education and training.

"It is really hard to hear that your child has autism," said Ruth. "But the school literally changed his life, my life and my daughter's life. Now, I believe that he can have a typical life— however that might be for him."

One of the best changes for Ruth is Max's language development. They can now talk about his day, movies, what he is feeling. "I say 'thank you' to God because he is talking – not just responding to questions but really having a conversation," said Ruth.

While previously Max could only mimic play that he saw on television, he is now using his imagination when playing with toys and other children, and even calls his older sister over to join him.

Laura sees similar behavior at school, where Max initiates play with his peers, even telling them when they should go ahead and take a turn.

"He is really a model student," said Laura. "He enjoys everything we do. It shows that all of the interventions do make a difference in the best way possible."



Max loves exploring movement and expression with Tricia Yates in a collaboration with the Erie Playhouse.

As Max prepares to graduate from preschool in June and likely attend kindergarten in his home school district, Ruth said they continue to work on teaching him to use his words to express his emotions.

But the distance he has already come continues to amaze Ruth. "The teachers are phenomenal. They are literally life-changers. One child at a time they are changing the future," said Ruth. "There's nothing I could do to repay them. They changed Max's life from where he would have been. Now, I feel there are no limits."



STUDENTS SADDLE UP

Samuel Johnson enjoys learning to ride with help from Beth Racine, right, from Hope On Horseback and two students from Gannon University.

It wasn't all horsing around, though students did have a lot of fun this fall when they participated in Hope on Horseback at the Tailwind Equestrian Center in Fairview. Every week, students from Room 109 in the Elizabeth Lee Black School participated in the innovative program that uses horseback riding to help develop dexterity and communication skills.

Teacher Claire Hogan said that while her students learned about anatomy, grooming and riding, they also got to interact with new people, which positively affected their social skills. She also noted that learning to ride helped students physically strengthen their core muscles.

"They learned to work well in groups and how to give directions to their horses as well," Hogan said. "The program was beneficial to my students physically, educationally and socially."

Along for the ride were psychology and special education students from Gannon University who helped Hope on Horseback director Betty Rositer develop and supervise goal-based activities for both ground and riding class activities.

All hope to continue the program in Fall 2020.



Students from Gannon University guide Blaize Cheeseman as he practices trotting with his horse.

STUDENTS FINDING WHOLE NEW WORLD



Student Micah Rohrer imitates teacher Madison Weischedel during instruction.

Hearing a simple verbal request from his teacher, Dominic walks over to the sink and washes his hands. What once seemed almost impossible is just one of many achievements that he has attained through a relatively new educational approach called Verbal Behavior.

In 2015, the Elizabeth Lee Black School became the first Erie-area school to adopt the Verbal Behavior program from the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network Autism Initiative (PaTTAN.) Since then, students have made such significant progress in their language development, social and play skills, and with activities of daily living, that the program has been expanded to another classroom in the current school year.

Faculty underwent extensive training to learn how to implement and track progress with the Verbal Behavior program, which is focused on teaching language to children with autism or other language delays.

“The approach breaks down every skill into very small increments that are consistently repeated and then reinforced,” said Mary O’Camb, associate behavior specialist. “Using a very systematic and sequential method of instruction, students are taught language and communication. Examples include requesting their wants and needs, following directives and imitating actions of others. Over time, those skills are generalized to practical applications, such as writing your name, washing your hands or playing with toys.”

Teachers collect data throughout the day that is analyzed to track a student’s progress or make changes to the program.

“We haven’t seen any student who has not made gains in the program,” said Jennifer Musolff, Ed.D., BCBA. “For these students, being able to communicate has opened up a whole new world.”



GETTING THE PICTURE: GRADUATE FINDS SUCCESS IN HEARING WORLD

As a child, Michaela Kessler got used to people staring and asking questions about her cochlear implant. She learned to explain how the device, with wires connecting a large transmitter behind her ear, was helping her hear.

Today, with the smaller, wireless implants, and Michaela’s perfect speech and diction, most people don’t realize that she has a profound hearing loss.

Still, at age 20, Michaela says that being deaf is an important part of her identity, and she’s open to sharing her story to help others understand what she, and others with hearing loss, experience in a hearing world.

An Early Start

After her hearing loss was discovered soon after birth, Michaela began therapy in the Barber National Institute early intervention program. Then, at age three, she started in the inclusive preschool where children who are deaf or hard of hearing learn alongside typically developing students.

Cherie Rouse, Michaela's speech therapist and a certified teacher of the deaf, remembers that Michaela had very little language when she started, but she made strides quickly. Cherie taught sign language to Michaela, as



well as to her parents and grandparents, to give them a way to communicate. She also focused on developing Michaela's speech, and provided auditory training to help Michaela develop listening skills with the hearing that she had.

At age five, Michaela became the first preschool graduate to receive a cochlear implant, and was well prepared with speech skills to adapt to the new device.

"Michaela was able to go on to a regular kindergarten in her home school," said Cherie. "The speech and language she had developed in preschool helped her achieve both academic success and success in other areas of her life."

Happy Memories

Walking into the classroom for the first time since her graduation 15 years ago, Michaela said that she felt a rush of the good memories about making friends, having fun and learning with Cherie and the other faculty. She feels that those early experiences helped shape her. "It really helped me understand what I was capable of," said Michaela. "I don't think I would be where I am today without my experience at this school."

When she was a sophomore in high school, Michaela developed an interest in photography that eventually led her to start her own wedding photography business. She loves capturing the special moments that are unique to each couple, and is booked to travel to a destination wedding in Mexico later this year.

Her website lets couples know that she has a hearing loss, and how this shapes her unique view point.

"I've found that people are usually very positive when I explain," said Michaela. "Most people really appreciate understanding, for instance, that I really need to be able to see their face when they speak to

know what they are saying."

Throughout her life, Michaela has also valued the close bond that she has with her younger brother Isaac, who received two cochlear implants at 18 months of age and also attended the preschool program at the Barber National Institute.

Michaela went away to college for a year before deciding to return home and build her business. While she also has a part-time job, she likes being able to look at all of the options open to her for a career path. Michaela credits her family and her teachers for helping her build the skills and confidence she has needed, and says that her hearing loss has led to some important lessons.

"I think that it's taught me not to take things too seriously. I've learned not to get upset about every little thing," said Michaela. "It's also taught me to be grateful and more patient; I'm asking people to be patient with me, so I have to show them patience, too. Everyone makes adaptations through their lives, and living with a hearing loss is mine."

How Cochlear Implants Work

This small, two-part electronic device provides sound to someone who is deaf or severely hard of hearing. A transmitter sits behind the ear, and an electrode array is surgically placed under the skin to directly stimulate the auditory nerve. The implant sends signals that the brain recognizes as sound. Hearing through a cochlear implant is different from normal hearing and often takes time and training to learn.

An Ambassador for ENERGY SAVINGS

Looking for ways to conserve energy and save on your electric bills? Just ask Janine Moore, a participant in the Supported Employment program, who has been selected as an Energy Force Ambassador for PECO, formerly the Philadelphia Electric Company.

PECO partners with Philadelphia area non-profits to select and train adults with intellectual disabilities to educate the public on ways to save energy and money. Ambassadors participate in 12 PECO events throughout the year with activities to help the community understand the benefits and importance of energy efficiency and conservation.

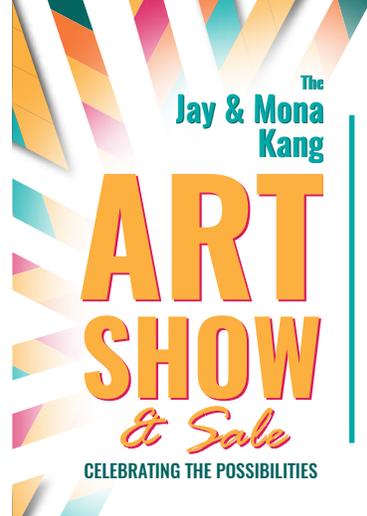
Janine was nominated for the opportunity because of her friendly attitude and ability to advocate on her own behalf. "Janine was very interested in employment opportunities and this is a great way to get professional development and gain skills in speaking before other people," said Gale Williams, Supported Employment manager. "She really enjoys talking to people about energy conservation and does a very good job of teaching her peers and people in the community."

PECO awards a stipend to compensate Janine and cover travel costs and additional support and assistance.

For her part, Janine is a natural ambassador, said Gale. "Her smile alone lights up the room."



Congratulations to Janine Moore, serving as an Ambassador for energy conservation.



ART SHOW TO AGAIN AMAZE



One of the region's largest and most inclusive art exhibits, the Jay & Mona Kang Art Show & Sale will open in April at the Barber National Institute. Our thirteenth year in "Celebrating the Possibilities" will feature creative work by adult amateur and professional artists, as well as local youth artists.

Join us for this year's exhibit on:

FRIDAY, APRIL 17 – The Show opens at 10 a.m., with an evening Wine & Cheese Reception from 5 to 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 18 – Noon to 3 p.m.

SUNDAY, APRIL 19 – Noon to 3 p.m., with family-friendly activities for children and the youth artist award presentation at 1 p.m.

MONDAY, APRIL 20 – 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Vote for your favorite piece for the People's Choice Awards. Many pieces are available for purchase. With the Barber Foundation receiving a commission from each sale, you can enjoy locally made artwork while supporting the mission of the Barber National Institute.

Admission is free of charge.

SUPPORT THE SHOW!

Show your support for the Art Show by becoming a Benefactor (\$250 donation), Patron (\$100 donation) or Friend (\$50 donation.) Information at BarberInstitute.org/ArtShow or call the Advancement Office at 814-874-5640





WORKING TOGETHER: ARTISTS EXPRESS CREATIVITY

Frank Fecko supervised as Inna Dovbush, left, spreads paint with a roller, while Sarah Shaffer, right, directs the rolling.

to go," he said. "They just evolve on their own. I facilitate the process and they do the creating. That is what makes them exciting."

When it came time to paint, Inna Dovbush and Sarah Shaffer took over. Inna has been regularly doing art in the Community Participation Supports Program, but Frank was eager to work with Sarah, who has only been in the program for half a year.

"Sarah's always watching me work with the individuals

If two heads are better than one, think about the painting that four artists could create if they worked together.

That is what four adults proved as they worked on "Pathfinders," a collaborative painting that will be among the works in the Jay & Mona Kang Art Show & Sale.

Frank Fecko, fine arts supervisor at the Barber National Institute, develops many different ways to enable adults with varying abilities and challenges to express themselves through art. Collaborative pieces encourage cooperation and communication, and, it turns out, are a perfect way to play to the strengths of each artist.

When Frank wanted to encourage Donna Straight to create artwork for the show, he found that her limited mobility would not be a barrier when he brought her together with three other artists.

"Because Donna can't use her hands, she draws with a laser affixed to her headband," Frank said. "She designs the whole piece." While Donna drew the pattern, Frank followed the laser closely with a pen to capture her idea on paper.

The completed design was projected onto a large canvas and outlined with chalk. With Donna's vision as the basis for the piece, Alfred Brown then used his precision skills to layer scotch tape over each of the lines. He carefully placed short pieces that have a staggered look, which surprised Frank.

"You really don't know how these projects are going

here, but would never really initiate her desire to come over and paint," Frank said. "She's got a certain set of skills that would be perfect for this kind of painting, even though she's never worked on it before. So we gave it a try."

Sarah and Inna both took turns dripping paint onto the canvas while the other would spread it with a roller. Despite it being her first project, Sarah took to the process naturally. She made sure Inna felt included in both the dripping and rolling, and helped direct her to work in certain areas.

Frank is pleased with the teamwork the duo exhibited and the direction they took the piece. Once satisfied with the painting, Inna and Sarah peeled the tape off the canvas in preparation for the final phase of the project.

Alfred returned with a paintbrush in hand to paint over the exposed chalk lines with a variety of colors.

The end result is something that visitors are invited to see at the show in April.

While Frank developed the process to create this piece, he said he still learned a lot from watching the adults in relation to his own work as an artist. He also believes this type of project perfectly exemplifies one of the goals the program sets out to do: foster social engagement.

"Interaction with each other is really a major component to the program," Frank said. "Art is just a vehicle to do that."



BEAST FAMILY KNOWS NO LIMITS

Team Limitless – from left to right, Brett Ferrell, Pam Ferrell, Doug Ferrell, Kerry Hoffman and Jordan Hitzges.

Many families sign up to beat Barber Beast on the Bay together, but for Pam Ferrell and her family, it's about more than just completing an obstacle course event.

Pam heard about the Beast when it began in 2013, but she never considered it would be something she could do, let alone her two sons, Jordan Hitzges and Brett Ferrell, who have autism. "I wasn't in shape and my children weren't the most physically active," she recalled. "But I know a lot of children with disabilities lead sedentary lifestyles and I didn't want that for them."

In 2016, Pam decided to tackle the Beast head-on with Jordan by her side. Jordan was already an avid swimmer who loved the water, but he expanded his routine to walking and biking in preparation for the big race. Although he's non-verbal, Pam said Jordan expressed his love for the course with a smile the whole way through.



The Beast on the Bay greets Brett after crossing the Finish Line.

When the 2017 Beast rolled around the next year, Pam knew it was time to get Brett involved. "Originally, he was not excited at all and was very apprehensive to get dirty and wet," she said. "In his mind, he couldn't imagine hopping into the lake and getting wet with his clothes on." But they made some adaptations, skipped the water obstacles and walked when necessary.

While the water and mud may not be his favorite, there is one thing that Brett looks forward to: meeting the Beast. "He loves his mascots," Pam laughed. "He still asks me every now and then 'Do you remember when I met the Beast?' "

Pam, Brett and Jordan continued to beat the Beast as a family in 2017 and 2018, and even got dad involved. Doug Ferrell joined his family from the sidelines, following their progress and serving as the unofficial photographer.

Pam said that beating the Beast is one of the hardest things she's ever had to do, and she is no stranger to obstacle course racing. "I did a Tough Mudder and this is 10 times harder! If you can do anything, this is the course to do."

Pam said they run the Beast every year to encourage other people who think they aren't able to take on the course. "Don't ever say you can't," she said. "If you can't do an obstacle or if you're scared to do an obstacle, just go around it! There's nothing to be afraid of."

The family also finds motivation knowing they are supporting a cause close to their hearts: the Barber National Institute. Both Jordan and Brett attended the Elizabeth Lee Black School and continue to receive services.

HURRY! FINAL DISCOUNT ENDS SOON!

Sign up now for the 2020 BARBER BEAST ON THE BAY set for SATURDAY, SEPT. 12. The \$100 discounted registration rate for the 10-mile course ends Sunday, May 31.

Adapted course registration is \$25 until the event.

Information and registration at
BARBERBEAST.ORG



Their ties made it even harder when – after three years – Pam didn't think she could sign up for the 2019 event. As their mother, Pam pushed herself physically to help her sons through every obstacle, but as they grew, it became harder and harder for her to keep up. "It had gotten to the point where I just couldn't do it alone anymore," she said.

Luckily, her husband, Doug, and good friend Kerry Hoffman stepped in to lend a hand for the 2019 Beast. Pam, Doug and Kerry, along with Brett and Jordan, formed a new team that captures their spirit: Team Limitless.

For Pam Ferrell, Barber Beast on the Bay has become more than just an obstacle course race; it's now a rewarding way to bring her family together. The best part? Seeing her sons cross the finish line. "They get their medal at the end, and the volunteers and everyone are making a big deal," she said. "It feels good knowing they can do the whole course. We know they can do it, even if they might not know themselves."

"It's a great fundraiser. It's a great course. The people who put the course together work so hard. The volunteers are the best!" -Pam Ferrell



Campaign Committee Chair Kelly Johnson, Bollinger artist Jennifer Kersey, Bollinger Executive Director Dr. William Clark, Larry Blair and Jessica Reitzel of Trees Trust, and John Barber, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Barber National Institute.

Founder's Day both commemorated the past and celebrated the future as Bollinger Enterprises Inc. (BEi) announced the launch of a \$1.4 million capital campaign in November for the Warren facility.

BEi, an affiliate of the Barber National Institute, began a three-year effort to help the organization expand and enhance services to adults with intellectual disabilities and their families in the Warren-Forest County region.

The theme of the campaign, "BEinspired, BEincluded and BEinvested," will focus on three major areas:

1. Renovations to the current facilities located at 44 N. State Street in North Warren;
2. Adding to the vehicle fleet to enable more opportunities for community activities and involvement;
3. Expanding programs relating to community employment and community participation support.

"We are excited about the opportunities that we can bring to more adults in our region," said Dr. William Clark, executive director of BEi. "We are thankful for the tremendous support we have always received from businesses and donors in the Warren area, and I am confident that they will again invest in our mission and the adults and families of our community."

BEinvested
Be inspired. Be included.

For more information about the campaign and video stories about our adults and families please visit BEIWARREN.COM/GIVE.



Representatives from the Barber National Institute joined four other community partners to launch Project Search in fall 2020. At the announcement were, from left, Michelle Izbicky and Maggie Dimitriadis from the Intellectual Disabilities Adult Day Program and Violetta Galustyan and Marquis Wallace of the Supported Employment Program. Project Search is a yearlong school-to-work program that will enable a group of graduating seniors from the Erie School District to get hands-on work experience at Saint Vincent Hospital. Other partners are the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Erie County Office of Intellectual Disabilities.

Adult day programs in Bedford and Somerset, Pennsylvania, marked the one-year anniversary of their transition to the Barber National Institute family. The programs have focused on expanding community participation over the past year, with adults volunteering at a local food bank and bell ringing for the Salvation Army in Somerset, while several adults have learned more about using their banks and post office and helping at a food bank in Bedford. In all, it has been a great year!



MAKING A GOAL

Adults in the Community Participation Supports have been exploring new opportunities in the Pittsburgh area, including a weekly outing to a local recreation center for fun and physical activity. Mike Miorelly, Tony DiFloria, front row, and Zack Deily enjoy floor hockey, as well as riding bikes, shooting baskets and playing soccer and football. The goal of the program is for adults to gain skills while exploring resources in their own communities.



PITTSBURGH PIRATES Score Big

Players from the Pirates – from left to right, Will Craig, Geoff Hartlieb and Nick Burdi – met with happy fans.



Pirates Coach Mike Rabelo joins fans in playing a ring-toss game, one of the carnival activities set up for the event.

All hands were on deck when the Pittsburgh Pirates came to visit students, adults and families of the Barber National Institute.

The team’s winter Care A-Van tour brought players Nick Burdi, Geoff Harlieb and Will Craig; coaches

Joey Cora and Mike Rabelo; Pirates in-game host Joe Klimchak; and members of the Bucco Brigade.

After “fielding” some fan questions, the team joined the crowd to sign autographs and participate in a variety of fun carnival games.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH 5, 6 & 7

ARTWORK SUBMISSION | North Lobby

MARCH 12

BEAST & BREWS | The Brewerie at Union Station

APRIL 17 – 20

JAY & MONA KANG ART SHOW & SALE | North Complex

APRIL 28

ANNIVERSARY MASS FOR DR. GERTRUDE A. BARBER | Saint Patrick Church

MAY 14

PITTSBURGH ART SHOW | Bridgeville Offices

MAY 21 - JUNE 12

BEI ART SHOW | Wetmore Gallery, Warren Public Library

MAY 22

“PASS IT ON” STUDENT PERFORMANCE | Erie Playhouse

JUNE 8

ELIZABETH LEE BLACK SCHOOL GRADUATION | Gym

JUNE 18

SHILLELAGH GOLF TOURNAMENT | Whispering Woods Golf Course

For more information about all events, visit BarberInstitute.org

SERVICES & SUPPORTS

Educational Opportunities

Bright Beginning Early Intervention (birth-age 3)
The Elizabeth Lee Black School (Approved Private School)
Autism Center
Happy Hearts Day Care & Inclusive Preschool
Deaf & Hard of Hearing Program
Pre Employment Transition Services for Youth

Therapies

Family Based Mental Health Services
Acute Children’s Partial Hospitalization Program
Speech, Occupational & Physical Therapy
Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services
Psychiatric & Psychological Services
Nutritional Services
Trauma and Grief Counseling
Health Services Department
Social Skills Training

Living In The Community

Respite Care
Lifesharing through Family Living
Residential Group Homes
Community Habilitation

Daytime Community-Based Services

Club Erie
Community Endeavors
Community Participation Supports
Prevocational Services
Small Group Employment
Supported Employment
Older Adult Daily Living Centers

Support for Families

Blended Case Management for Children & Adults
Family Support Services
Family and Sibling Support Groups
Agency with Choice, Habilitation Services

Recreational Opportunities

Aktion Club
Connections Summer Camp for children with high functioning Autism/Asperger Syndrome
ESO Dances and Summer Camp (Expanding Social Opportunities)
Learn to Ride Bike Camp
Camp Shamrock Summer Program
Time for Me

Community Resources

Before/After School & Summer Child Care Programs
Consultative services to schools & professionals
Swimming Lessons & Water Exercise Classes
Kids on the Block Puppet Troupe
Gift Shop

BARBER SPIRIT

Barber Spirit is a quarterly publication for friends of the
Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Center, Inc.
100 Barber Place • Erie, PA 16507-1863
814-453-7661 • FAX: 814-455-1132
BNierie@BarberInstitute.org
BarberInstitute.org

John J. Barber
President/Chief Executive Officer

Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey
Executive Vice President

William Gloekler
Chairman, Board of Directors

Bridget Power Barber
Vice President, External Affairs & Strategic Initiatives

Mary Rotunda Cuneo
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TEACHER | MENTOR | FOUNDER SERVANT OF GOD

As a child, Carol Reynolds lived in a state center. Today, she owns a home of her own. The journey from institution to community was guided by a woman who Carol still warmly remembers and celebrates: Dr. Gertrude Barber.

Carol's story is just one of those shared by individuals, parents and family members on DrBarber.org, a website that provides information about Dr. Barber and the process that may lead to her sainthood as the champion of the disabled.

In addition to video stories of those lives touched by Dr. Barber, the website offers biographical information and a pictorial timeline of the highlights of her life.

Visitors also may learn how to support the sainthood cause through the following:

- **PRAY** – Say an intercessory prayer written specifically for the cause of Dr. Barber.
- **SHARE A STORY** – Send in details about your interactions with Dr. Barber or provide testimony.
- **DONATE** – Support efforts to spread the good news about Dr. Barber's mission and the cause for her canonization.

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, announced the opening of the cause for canonization on Dec. 17, 2019. Msgr. Tom McSweeney, a retired priest and former director of the Office of Evangelization for Communications of the Diocese of Erie, has been appointed to serve as diocesan postulator for the cause. In this role, he is the main point of contact for gathering documentation and conducting formal interviews in the first phase of the canonization process.

Msgr. McSweeney can be reached at 814-878-5953 or through the website, DRBARBER.ORG



The community is
invited to attend a
Mass to be celebrated

by Bishop Lawrence Persico in
observance of the 20th anniversary
of the death of Gertrude Barber on
**Tuesday, April 28 at noon at Saint
Patrick Church, Erie PA.**

