

B A R B E R

FALL 2021

SPIRIT

*Share in the Magic of the
Barber Christmas Ball*



Barber National Institute



Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

There is a new term in America's discourse: Covid fatigue. We are all growing weary of the ramifications of the pandemic that has certainly brought many new challenges to our organization. I look with great pride, though, at the dedication of our staff who continue making the health and safety of our children, adults and families their highest priority.

Like many employers, hiring has become an often overwhelming challenge. Unlike some other industries, though, we cannot close our doors because of staff shortages. Our individuals and families are depending on us to meet a wide variety of needs. Our group homes, for instance, are making a home for our residents 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Our school faculty are working to maintain in-classroom instruction for children who may have difficult challenges. Our therapists are in homes and other settings, providing services for early intervention and behavioral health issues.

The way that our employees have risen to this challenge, which has continued for much longer than we ever anticipated, is truly inspiring. As a friend who supports our mission, I want you to know how much we are all committed to carrying out Dr. Barber's legacy to bring hope and opportunity to those in need.

A recent bright spot was the return of Barber Beast on the Bay in September, which you will read more about in these pages. We are also planning for a safe return of our holiday events with the Ladies Only Luncheon and the Barber Christmas Ball. These are vital fundraisers for our organization, but equally important is the role they play in helping our friends and donors learn more about our mission and the lives we are changing every day.

I want to thank you for your continued support and extend my warmest wishes for a blessed holiday season and good health in the New Year.

Sincerely,

John J. Barber
 President & Chief Executive Officer

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

Recreational Opportunities

- 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
- Online Gift Shop

BarberInstitute.org

ON THE COVER

Join the Honorable Phil and Chris English for the return of the Barber Christmas Ball. See details pages 4 - 5.

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.



Summer Fun

An outing to Liberty Park on Erie's bayfront was one of many activities that young adults enjoyed this summer as part of the Expanding Social Opportunities (ESO) Camp. The group visited a local fire station, picked berries, created clay artwork and had many other experiences that helped to build social and everyday living skills. The recreational Camp Shamrock also offered a wide variety of activities to children with disabilities.

Youngsters with high functioning autism built relationships with their peers and their community during this summer's Connection Camp. Their visit to the Erie Humane Society also provided an opportunity to meet friendly cats, dogs and even a bunny. Other fun outings included the Erie Maritime Museum, Erie Zoo, Donato's Pizza and Adventure's Erie Mini Golf.



Outdoor Classroom Opens Opportunities

Who says a classroom has to have four walls? Teacher Samantha Wheeler holds a fun small group activity with students in a new outdoor learning space that was constructed in summer 2021. The large, covered pavilion located behind the gym has rows of picnic tables and is equipped with internet access for online lessons and resources. Classrooms have scheduled outdoor times throughout the week to enjoy activities in the new facility.



Share in the Magic of the Barber Christmas Ball



**2021 Christmas Ball Chair Couple,
the Honorable Phil and Chris English.**

The 2021 Barber Christmas Ball, "Sharing the Magic," will celebrate the enchantment of a festive holiday gala, bedecked with decorations, music and splendor. It will also showcase the magic of families and friends coming back together to rekindle relationships and connections after the challenges of the past year kept them apart.

But for the 2021 Ball Chair Couple, it is the magic that happens as children and adults realize their dreams of a better life that is most inspiring about this event. The Honorable Phil and Chris English say that the Christmas Ball is a way that they – and others – can support the work of the Barber National Institute.

"We support the mission of the Barber National Institute because of its generations-long commitment to supporting persons with intellectual disabilities and their families," said Mrs. English. "Not only can we celebrate the season and enjoy the festivities at the Barber Ball, but at the same time support one of the most significant organizations in our community."

The Chair Couple are both Erie natives who are well known in the region. After serving as Erie City Controller, Mr. English was elected to represent the northwestern Pennsylvania district in the U.S. Congress from 1995 to 2008. He is now a senior



government relations advisor and co-chair of the government relations practice for Arent Fox, an organization providing strategic legal counsel and advisory services around the world.

An educator for more than 30 years, Mrs. English taught in the Erie School District and went on to serve as the facilitator for the high school gifted program. She also chaired Erie's Promise, the local affiliate of The America's Promise Alliance, founded by General Colin Powell to improve the lives and future of all young people.

Mrs. English previously served on the Elizabeth Lee Black School Advisory Board as well as the boards of several local and national organizations.

The couple now divides their time between Erie and Washington, D.C., but remains committed to supporting community organizations in their hometown, especially the Barber National Institute.

"People in other parts of the country that we have met are amazed at what is being done in our city and in our state by the Barber National Institute," said Mr. English.

"This is an organization founded nearly 70 years ago by Dr. Barber that has continued to grow and excel and be an important part of our community. It is one of our strongest institutions and we are committed to supporting the work that is being done here."

Sharing the Magic

THE BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL

Saturday, Dec. 11

8 p.m. - Midnight
Bayfront Convention Center

Continuous music from Stiletto Fire, a dance and show band from Detroit, Michigan, and entertainment by Tony B.
Doors open at 7 p.m.

Guests will enjoy heavy hors d'oeuvres, tasty desserts, soft drinks and two cocktails per person (cash bar also available). Complimentary valet parking.

Reservations are \$95 per person; Proceeds benefit services for children and adults with autism, intellectual disabilities or behavioral health challenges at the Barber National Institute.

Reservations and information at BarberInstitute.org/ball. Questions? Call 814-878-4096.

Special overnight packages are available for Christmas Ball guests. Contact the Sheraton Erie Bayfront Hotel at 814-454-2005 or the Courtyard Marriott at 814-636-1005 by Dec. 1 for reservations or look for the link at BarberInstitute.org/hotels.

Beast Makes Triumphant Return



After being sidelined for a year, Barber Beast on the Bay was back in great form, and participants, volunteers and spectators could not have asked for a more perfect day.

Blue skies framed Presque Isle State Park as more than 1,100 participants from 16 states made their way across 10 miles of sand, trails, water and roadway. They crossed thirty natural and manmade obstacles before reaching the finish line at Waldameer Park.

Inside Waldameer, nearly 100 teens and adults with physical and intellectual disabilities took on 15 obstacles across the one-mile adapted course.

If you missed it, you missed a lot of fun! It's not too early to get ready for the 9th annual Barber Beast on the Bay set for Saturday, Sept. 9, 2022. Sign up now at BarberBeast.org



The Mercyhurst University Men's Lacrosse team was voted best Cheer Zone by Beast participants and was awarded the \$500 first prize. Placing second was the JAM Team Foundation and the Erie Federal Credit Union Wellness Program took third place. Participants frequently express appreciation for the Cheer Zones that provide needed motivation on the course. Thanks, Cheer Zones!





What it Takes to **Build the Beast**

Heavy equipment is needed to put together the half pipe.

Every September, steel structures and steep ramps seem to rise up overnight to span the beaches of Presque Isle. The spectacle keeps Beast on the Bay participants and spectators wondering, just how does this happen?

For Jake Binney and the rest of the Beast Builders, that's never been a question. Their most challenging obstacle isn't *on* the course, *it is* the course.

"All throughout the year we're thinking about the Beast," Jake said. Even though they all have full-time jobs, the Builders dedicate a good portion of their free time throughout the year to be ready for that second Saturday in September.

You could count the number of Beast Builders on one hand, and yet they somehow fill the distance from Beach 10 to Waldameer with nearly 30 unique obstacles. So how do they do it?

After each year's Beast, the first step is taking inventory. This means counting every single nut, bolt and screw, and inspecting every single inch of the obstacles while noting anything that may be broken and needing to be repaired or replaced.

The winter and spring months are some of the most crucial, as the team plans and prepares for the next race.

When brainstorming ideas for new obstacles, bigger isn't always better and there are unique constraints the Builders have to work with. While they always try to make challenging and fun obstacles, Jake says it's important to remember that every obstacle has to fit on a truck and must be able to be assembled in under 12 hours.

Come summer, the Beast Builders begin what they call "staging," taking every obstacle out of the warehouse and grouping all the materials needed with their respective obstacles.

Then, on the Friday before Labor Day weekend, they pack the obstacles with the help of Building Systems, Inc. (BSI). Between the semi-trucks from BSI and the Builders' personal trucks and trailers, they strategically load each obstacle to transport to the peninsula.

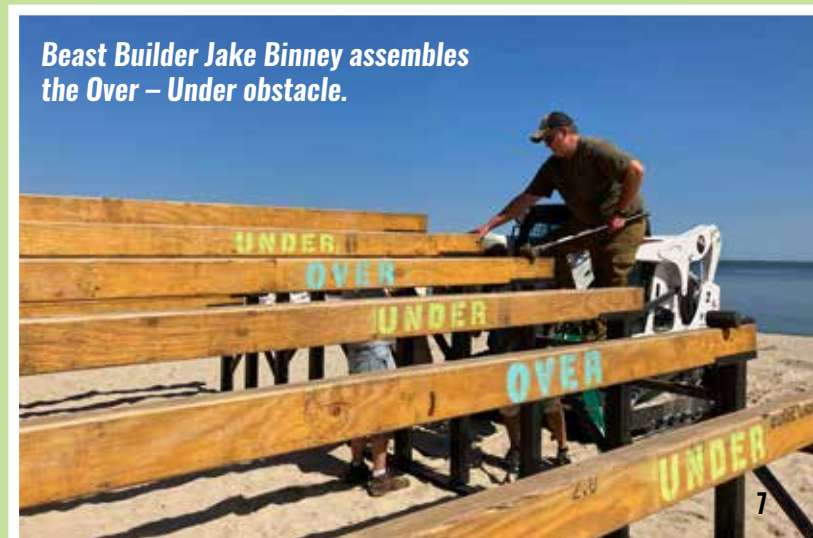
Unloading and reconstructing the nearly 30 obstacles is no small task. All must be put up with both machinery and manpower in less than 12 hours on the Tuesday before the Beast. According to Jake, he and his team have a lot of sleepless nights strategizing the best path forward. Come 6 a.m., all of them are out on the beach setting up the course.

"It's one of those sayings you hear all the time: 'blood, sweat and tears,' but literally, with setup and tear-down, there is blood, sweat and tears," Jake said. "It is not a small task. It's a beast."

After the last participant crosses the finish line, the Beast Builders are still out on the course, dismantling every remnant of the Beast. With just a 12-hour window to tear everything down, it can mean working until nearly midnight.

For Jake and the rest of the Builders, the Beast on the Bay is a laborious project that lasts all year, so why do they keep coming back? It's simple. They believe in the mission of the Barber National Institute.

"When we started this, it was all about helping the Barber Center," Jake said. "But at this point in the game – for the Beast Builders – the reason the core five guys keep coming back is loyalty. The Barber Center does wonderful things for the community and it's so rewarding. Personally, I am so proud to be a part of that."



Beast Builder Jake Binney assembles the Over – Under obstacle.



Family joined Dan Rossman, second from right, at the 2021 Beast. From left, Dan's brother Ed; his niece Lierin; his brother Joe; and nephew Marty. Lierin and Marty drove in from Indiana to run the event with their father, Joe.

“Not Done Yet”

Crossing the Beast finish line felt pretty good for Dan Rossman. The 57-year-old Fairview resident had tackled every obstacle and shaved ten minutes from his 2019 time. He didn't really have time to think about the fact that it was nearly 19 years to the day that a horrific accident changed his life forever.

“The Beast comes at an interesting time,” said Rossman, remembering that, at one point, doctors weren't sure he would ever walk again, let alone run a 10-mile obstacle course.

The date was Sept. 9, 2002. Rossman was 38 years old, a 12-year veteran of the City of Erie Police, riding his motorcycle in pursuit of a driver who had sped through a school zone. Suddenly, a car pulled out into his path. The collision sent him flying 35 feet through the air and another 75 feet across the pavement. Rossman doesn't remember the crash itself, but still has the helmet bearing the dents and scratches created by the impact.

The worst of his injuries was an open book pelvic fracture that literally split his pelvis about eight inches. While rare, nearly half of all open book pelvic fractures are fatal, due to significant blood loss and damage to internal organs in the pelvis. He needed 16 pints of blood and was placed in a medically induced coma. A priest was called to administer last rites.

Rossman also had other injuries, including a serious concussion, broken foot, dislocated jaw and a badly fractured wrist. He underwent several surgeries and had to temporarily have a colostomy due to the damage to his intestinal tract. Ten inch rods extended out of his pelvis and wrist to hold the bones in place.

Coming in and out of anesthesia, he heard talk about wheelchairs and home adaptations. Right then, he resolved to walk again. “I had been active my whole life, and was an athlete in high school in football, track and wrestling,” said Rossman. “It was what I knew.”

The recovery was slow and grueling, but after 100 days in the hospital rehab unit, Rossman walked out of the hospital with a cane. His rehabilitation continued for two years, and, in spite of his progress, the wrist injury ended his career on the police force. “The break was so bad that I lost a couple of the bones in my wrist and I still have very limited range of motion,” said Rossman.

“There were a lot of things I failed at after the accident, but I would just try to keep on improving,” said Rossman. “I never dwelt on it or felt sorry for myself. I knew of many people who had faced worse things.”

He had heard about Barber Beast on the Bay, and in 2019 decided to give the event a try. “I would like to say I was doing it for a greater cause, and I really like that it supports the Barber Institute, but the truth is that I wanted to challenge myself,” said Rossman. “I wanted people to know, ‘he's not done yet.’”

Rossman's family was supportive as he started training that summer, running 3 – 5 miles near his home five days a week. At the first event, he couldn't complete some of the obstacles, and called the sand running “a nightmare.” But with his family cheering him along the course, and celebrating at the finish line, he was ready to sign up again.

Rossman felt better prepared for the 2021 Beast. He added upper body training to his running regimen and dropped 20 pounds. He also planned out how he was going to do the



Rossman makes his way through a trench filled with water.

obstacles to compensate for the effects of his injuries. “I noticed on some obstacles, such as the one where you reach for the rings, that my hand does not work well because I can’t really move my wrist,” said Rossman. But for what he termed the most difficult obstacle, the Over – Under, he watched YouTube videos to get ideas for tackling this challenge.

Rossman also convinced his two brothers, a niece and a nephew to join him. Rossman was determined to give it his all and finished in two hours and 23 minutes – ninth in his age group. His family all stayed to celebrate at the event and then continued the gathering at dinner and even at a karaoke bar later in the evening.

“When I think about the reason I ran the Beast, the answer is very simple, yet getting there was so much more of a journey of how I view life and thanking God for my blessings.

“This is a really beautiful event, and everyone there is just so nice,” said Rossman. It was such a great experience that he’s signed up for 2022 and is recruiting even more friends and family to join him.

“I run this with four screws in my pelvis,” laughs Rossman. “No one says you have to be a ‘musclehead’ to do this; just do a little better each time.”

Good advice.



Rossman’s daughters, Hannah and Kate, cheer him on along the course.



Beast Fundraisers Recognized for Support

The Beast joined Barber National Institute President John Barber in congratulating the top fundraisers for this year’s event. First-place fundraiser James Dobrich of Erie raised \$3,200 this year, bringing his total raised to more than \$12,000 since 2017. Dobrich participates in honor of Blaize Cheeseman, the Elizabeth Lee Black School student that joined him at the event. Second-place fundraiser is Emily Smeltz from Indiana, Pennsylvania, who raised \$1,205 this year. Not available for photo is the third-place winner, Scott Getty of Erie, a new fundraiser in 2021 who raised \$750. Beast fundraisers commit to raise a minimum of \$500 in donations for the Barber National Institute and receive a free registration.





It's the Beast, Baby!

Brittney Barclay and her husband, Nick, tackle the beast seven weeks after the arrival of their daughter, Bella.

Brittney Barclay had been looking forward to the 2021 Barber Beast on the Bay for a long time. The 27-year-old fitness enthusiast was determined that having a baby seven weeks earlier – even by Cesarean section – was not going to stand in the way.

And that made crossing the finish line and seeing her daughter, Bella, waiting for her, all the sweeter. “Seeing her, I felt really proud, and I know that there will be a day when she is proud of me too,” said Brittney. “I also felt so lucky and blessed to have my health, to have my family, to have my daughter.”

This marked the fifth year that Brittney and her husband, Nick, both Erie area natives now residing in Beaver, PA, participated in the Beast. After the 2019 event was canceled because of Covid precautions, they deferred their registration and kept up their training for 2021. When Brittney learned she was expecting, she decided that the Beast was going to be her goal.

“We do a lot of events, but this is our favorite,” said Brittney.

Then, nature threw a curve. On July 19, she and Nick woke up early and exercised in their home gym as they always do. Brittney, working from home for a chemical

company, signed in to start the day. When contractions began around lunchtime, the couple made their way to the hospital.

Brittney was connected to a fetal monitor, and her medical team saw that the baby’s heartrate would drastically fall with each contraction. “They advised a C-section, and I just wanted what was best for her,” said Brittney. “I’m totally a planner and had pictured a lot of scenarios, but never thought about having a C-section.”

At 5:30 p.m., Brittney and Nick welcomed a healthy, six-pound, 14-ounce baby girl. Elated in her role as a mom, Brittney put aside thoughts about competing in the Beast. After undergoing surgery, her core muscles felt sore and weak, and she was having a lot of back pain.

Still, she asked her doctor when she could resume her fitness routine. “He said, ‘Do what you are comfortable with and what your body can handle.’ So right away, I began walking,” said Brittney.

Over the next few weeks, Brittney began adding to her routine, and seeing the benefits. “It made recovery so much easier. I still felt strong and felt more like myself so much quicker.”

Friends and family who knew she did the Beast started asking ... would she be there this year? She had planned to wait with Bella at the finish line. Then, just two weeks before the event, she made up her mind. "I couldn't stand the thought of being at the finish line and not doing the event," laughed Brittney. "Even if I had to walk, I would walk. If I had to skip obstacles, I would skip obstacles."

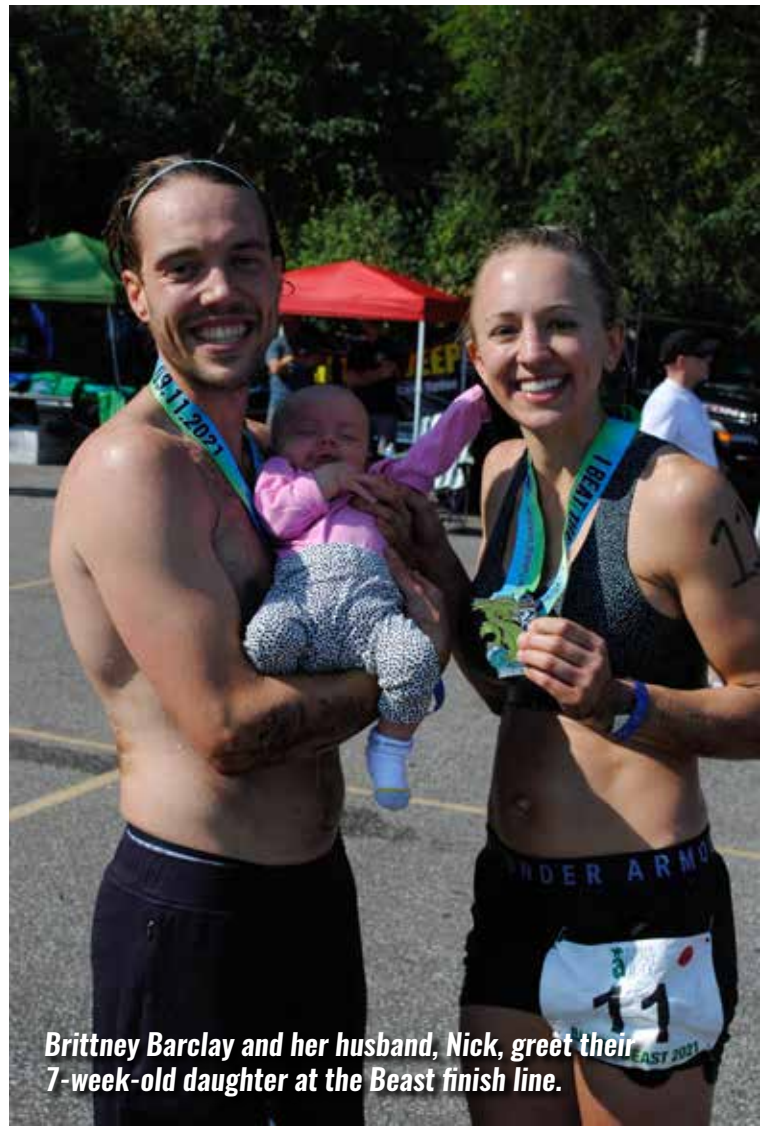
Brittney and Nick were registered for the Elite Wave, so she knew she would be alongside some fierce competitors. Some obstacles, such as the wall positioned in the lake, felt harder and she needed help to get over. But for the first time, she was able to do the monkey bars all on her own.

"I just went pretty steady. There were times I thought 'I can't believe I'm doing this,' but it felt really good," said Brittney.

Brittney crossed the finish line in two hours and 37 minutes, a respectable time for any participant. More important, though, is what Brittney realized in the process. "Fitness has always been important for me, it helps me get in a good head space for the day," said Brittney. "But being in good health and good shape helps me be a better mom. If you aren't there for yourself, you can't be there for anyone else in your life.

"The Beast was a really special day, and I want Bella to know all about it when she is older," said Brittney.

Bella will have the chance soon. Her parents have already signed up for the 2022 Beast.



Brittney Barclay and her husband, Nick, greet their 7-week-old daughter at the Beast finish line.

Fitness Tip

"Do what you can do. Not every workout is going to be your best workout. But I've never regretted making the time for working out."

— Brittney Barclay, Five-Time Beast Participant

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER 20

LADIES ONLY LUNCHEON | Kahkwa Club

DECEMBER 11

BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL | Bayfront Convention Center

MARCH 10

BEAST & BREWS | BrewErie

MARCH 24, 25 & 26

ART SHOW CALL FOR ENTRIES

Barber National Institute

APRIL 21

ART SHOW ARTISTS RECEPTION & AWARDS PRESENTATION | Barber National Institute

APRIL 25 – MAY 6

ONLINE ART SHOW & SALE

For more information about all events, visit BarberInstitute.org



Celebrating at the award ceremony are, from left, Amy Bacon, program specialist; Supported Employment operations manager Violetta Galustyan; Patrick Barber, vice president, treasury management; Carrie Kontis, chief officer, intellectual disabilities services; James Minier; Ashleigh and Drew Walters, Onex administration.

Celebrating Employment

National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month was marked with awards to an Erie manufacturing company and to one of its employees.

The Barber National Institute presented its 2021 Employer of the Year Award to Onex, an employee-owned manufacturer that has hired two adults through the Supported Employment program.

In addition, Onex employee James Minier was presented with the Self-Advocate of the Year Award by PAR, Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability.

After being hired in February 2020 for cleaning and janitorial duties, Minier has been given added responsibilities in manufacturing. At his one-year anniversary, he received a promotion and a pay raise.

“Onex is a great example of how a business can find solutions that support competitive employment for people with disabilities and benefit the employer,” said Carrie Kontis, chief operating officer for intellectual disabilities services at the Barber National Institute.



HOLDING TIGHT to a Dream

Chuck Wragg returned to the job he loved at a Lowe's Home Improvement store in Philadelphia.

When Chuck Wragg landed a job at a South Philadelphia Lowe's Home Improvement store in 2017, he felt that he had achieved an important goal in his life. Three years later, he was determined not to let a worldwide pandemic get in the way of that dream.

Chuck enjoyed stocking shelves and getting to know both customers and the other employees at the store. On his days off, he also continued volunteering at Lankenau Hospital.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, causing massive layoffs and business closings, Chuck was among the thousands of workers who lost their jobs. It wasn't long though, before Chuck decided that he did not want to sit home, and he began a new job search. He started an employment assessment with Supported Employment at the Barber National Institute to evaluate his skills. Job coaches formed the same conclusion as before: Chuck would be a wonderful employee for any willing business.

After placing many applications, Chuck knew that, in his heart, he wanted to return to Lowe's. When the Supported Employment team contacted the store, they determined that Chuck's position was considered “essential personnel,” and that he could return to employment. Chuck retained his previous three years of service, and Lowe's implemented all CDC requirements to keep Chuck and other employees safe.

Chuck is committed to doing his job well, making clear to job coaches that he can do this by himself. He is also a testament to what can be achieved when you don't give up on a dream.



Puppeteers prepare for a Kids on the Block presentation.

Family Activities Return

For months, puppet shows were viewed on computer screens and children waited to gather again with friends. With the start of Fall 2021, many of the activities sponsored by Family Support Services at the Barber National Institute return to gathering in person with precautions for Covid-19.

- SibSessions offers gatherings on the third Saturday of every month from September through May. The program offers children ages 5 through 15 who have a sibling with a disability the opportunity to enjoy lunch, crafts, games and a chance to share.
- Time for Me is held on the second Saturday of every month with structured activities for children with autism or an intellectual disability, providing some fun time for children and some “me time” for parents.
- “Kids on the Block” Puppet Shows are offered to schools, scouting groups or other organizations. The puppets portray a variety of disabilities to help children—and adults—understand that we are much more alike than different. Shows are provided free of charge.

For more information about SibSessions and Time for Me, visit BarberInstitute.org/families. For information or scheduling Kids on the Block, visit BarberInstitute.org/community-resources.

Tournament Supports Advocacy Efforts

A team from the Barber National Institute joined organizations across the state in supporting PAR, Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities, at a golf tournament in October in Ellwood City. The team, pictured from left, Robert Barber, Barber Foundation board member Kevin O’Hare, Courtney Edwards and Patrick Barber, won second place honors, while Robert Barber and Courtney Edwards also won longest male and female drives, respectively. The event raised funds for legislative advocacy efforts undertaken by PAR on behalf of persons with disabilities and their families.



FAMILY BELIEVES LIFE IS BETTER WHEN SHARED

When Judie Gleason went to work on a snowy January day in 2019, she never expected that a woman coming into her group home would soon change her life.

That's the day that Judie first met Karen, a 50-year-old woman who was moving from her family home for the first time. Karen's mother had passed away, her father was aging, and she was searching for a way to explore new interests and gain greater independence. Soon, Karen would find all of that – and much more – when she went to live with Judie through the Lifesharing program.

For her dedication to Lifesharing ideals, in October Judie was presented with the 2021 Excellence in Lifesharing Award by the Pennsylvania Lifesharing Coalition.

Lifesharing matches an adult with an intellectual disability with a provider, whether that is a traditional family, a single person, a couple or an “empty nester.” The program fosters an enduring, family-like relationship with support from Lifesharing staff at the Barber National Institute.

The Barber National Institute group home where Judie works also serves as a Respite Home for adults in emergency situations or while awaiting a permanent opportunity. The five men living there fulltime were happy to have Karen as part of their home – even if it was to be for a short period. Karen was anxious about leaving the only home she had ever known, but immediately found a bond with Judie.

“Judie was a mentor and natural support for Karen, showing her a new world as she encouraged her to experience new things,” said Cassie Pilarski, Lifesharing Associate Director. During the day, Karen attended the adult day program at the Barber National Institute main campus, where she had made a lot of friends. But when she returned to the group home, she came to rely on Judie.

After a potential Lifesharing provider had to withdraw from the program, staff asked Judie if she would be interested.



Karen and Judie have made a home through the Lifesharing program. Karen, left, holds their pet cat that she cares for now that Judie's daughter has moved away.

“I was shocked when the Lifesharing specialist called. I had never thought about it, and didn't think that I would even qualify,” said Judie.

At the time, Judie's son and daughter-in-law were having medical problems and moved in with their 9-year-old son, and her daughter was still coming home during college breaks. Also, she had three energetic dogs in her home. But if there was any way, Judie wanted Karen to move in.

After Judie's application was approved, Karen came for her first visit. It was love at first sight – for everyone. “She and my grandson took to each other immediately, teasing each other and laughing,” said Judie. “Even the dogs seemed to know that this was someone special.”

In June 2019, they arranged for a two-week trial stay, and Karen has been there, a part of the family, ever since.

Karen had never been outside of the Erie area, so when Judie's family planned a reunion in West Virginia, she jumped at the chance to go. Since then, she has travelled to many places with Judie and her family, including a friend's farm where Karen rode horses for the first time. Karen began attending church with Judie and her group home friends.

Judie continues to involve Karen in activities at the group home, such as bowling and birthday parties, where she has formed strong friendships. Her increased activity and healthier eating habits have helped Karen lose 40 pounds.

With Karen's biological family still playing a big role in her life, Judie has arranged many outings for all of them to foster the relationships. When Covid hit and most outside interactions ended, Judie encouraged Karen to keep in touch with her family through phone calls and Facetime on her iPad.

“Karen is a very social, happy person who is genuinely interested in others,” said Judie.

Others believe that Judie has played a big role in Karen’s happiness. “Soon after moving in, we saw Karen blossom into a confident young woman,” said Cassie. “She has become a valued member of her community and Lifesharing family and is open to finding new opportunities to explore.”

Judie sees the benefits for both of them. “This was an opportunity to share your life with someone who doesn’t have what you have had,” said Judie. “There isn’t a day that goes by that she doesn’t tell me that she loves me.”

When she applied to Lifesharing, Judie was not aware of the bimonthly, federal tax-free stipend that she would receive, but soon learned that it was the answer to a prayer. “I had a financial need, and then Karen came into my life. It was a blessing all around. For Karen, for me and for my family.”

Judie didn’t know that Karen’s family was also praying that she would become the Lifesharing provider after meeting her at the group home. “Judie is an answered prayer and a gift from God,” said Karen’s father.

For Karen and Judie, it is a matter of being there for each other. Even as Judie’s children have all moved out, she isn’t feeling an empty nest. “The most rewarding thing is our friendship,” said Judie. “We are good friends and companions. I’ve told her, we’re in this thing together.”

And isn’t that what family is all about.



With Judie’s help, Karen was able to ride a horse at the farm of a family friend.



Become a Lifesharing Provider

Being a provider is a rewarding experience that includes a federal tax-free stipend to cover room and board. The adult’s benefits cover other expenses. For more information in Erie, call 814-878-4115; in Philadelphia, 215-871-0731.

BARBER SPIRIT

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Thank You, Erie Gives

One day of giving has turned into an untold number of dreams coming true for children and adults with disabilities or behavioral health challenges and their families.

A total of 264 donors made gifts to the Barber National Institute during Erie Gives in August 2021.

With a pro-rated match from the Erie Community Foundation and its sponsors, the giving event resulted in a \$49,214 donation to support the mission of the Barber National Institute.

Thanks, Erie Gives!

 Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.