

B A R B E R

JULY 2025

SPIRIT

Education Edition



Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.



This group of Pre-K Counts children celebrate the countdown to summer with a teddy bear party



Aldon Smith welcomes spring on a swing



Emma Little makes her way through one of the obstacles during the Mini Beast event



Amanda Zielinski, volunteering as a guest musician during Week of the Young Child, helps Novahleigh hold an instrument

President's MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

As an administrator in the Erie School District, Dr. Gertrude Barber was faced with the difficult task of telling parents that there was no place for their children with disabilities. These youngsters would either be educated at home or sent to a distant institution to live.

Society has made remarkable progress since our founding in 1952 and the first class of students with intellectual disabilities in a borrowed classroom at the Y.W.C.A. in Erie.

The spirit of that first classroom lives on in our commitment to lifelong learning- a belief that all persons can learn, have the right to learn and must be provided with experiences for growth and development: spiritually, morally, aesthetically, socially, physically, and educationally.

This special issue of Barber Spirit celebrates Barber National Institute's education programs, our students' countless accomplishments, and our unwavering dedication to providing hope and opportunity for all. I am sure you will be as inspired as we are!

Congratulations to our graduates – you are the heart of our mission and a shining reflection of all that is possible with perseverance, support, and belief in every individual's potential.

Sincerely,

John J. Barber

John J. Barber
President & Chief Executive Officer

ON THE COVER: Celebrating National School Choice Week 2025

Our Mission Statement

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.

We are "making dreams come true." We provide children and adults with autism, intellectual disabilities and behavioral health challenges



A PLACE TO BELONG: YOUR ERIE GIVES DAY GIFT WILL Strengthen Foundations



Getting settled on the front porch in Philadelphia



A home needing a ramp adaptation



Jerry uses his wheelchair to access the trashcan

Imagine a place where love isn't defined by blood, but by the people who choose to stand by you. For so many individuals living with disabilities, home isn't a childhood house or a relative's embrace – it's the place they've built with caregivers and housemates who have become their family.

Across Barber National Institute's Pennsylvania footprint, 303 adults live in 93 community group homes – 55 homes in Erie, 32 homes in Philadelphia, and 6 homes in Pittsburgh. Residents range in age from 19 to 95. Of the 303 residents, dozens have only known institutional living before coming to live in a community-based setting with Barber National Institute. Many have complex medical and behavioral needs that require specialized care, consistency, and a familiar environment to thrive.

"As the residents age, their needs become more complex – mobility declines, medical conditions advance, and behavioral challenges require greater support," said Thad Jackman, Barber National Institute senior director of residential services. "Aging in place means investing in accessible kitchens and bathrooms, lift systems, floor plan modifications, and other physical adaptations to ensure they can remain safe and comfortable in their home."

But, as with any home, time brings the natural need for updates. Most of Barber National Institute's housing stock was purchased more than 25 years ago. "Many of our homes will require costly renovations to their living spaces," said

Thad. "Barber National Institute is committed to helping our adults age in place with dignity, but the reality is that public funding falls short of what's needed."

For the people with disabilities in Barber National Institute's care, staying in their home requires more than just routine maintenance; it demands essential renovations that directly impact their safety and quality of life. Widened doorways and accessible bathrooms aren't cosmetic upgrades – they are necessities for individuals who rely on wheelchairs and mobility aids. Lift systems and adaptive equipment aren't conveniences – they are lifelines that prevent injury and ensure direct support professionals can provide the best possible support.

Thad estimates the home modifications will cost over \$1M. "These modifications are the key to helping our adults maintain their independence. This is an enormous financial burden, and we can't do it alone. Your generosity to Barber National Institute's **Strengthening Foundations: Home Renovation Campaign** on Erie Gives Day can help ensure our adults age with dignity in the place they call home, surrounded by the people who love and care for them."

This Erie Gives Day, will you help strengthen the foundations that our individuals call home?

ERIEGIVES.ORG



Will you help us Strengthen Foundations this Erie Gives Day?

Erie Gives is an inspiring community-spirited event like no other! Thousands of donors from across the country - and globe - give to hundreds of local nonprofits during Erie Gives. To date, Erie Gives has raised over \$66.3M for local nonprofits, thanks to the support of sponsors and donors like you!

Erie Gives is **Tuesday August 12 from midnight to midnight!** Gifts made to Barber National Institute on Erie Gives Day will receive a pro-rated match which makes your gift have even more impact.

All gifts given to Barber National Institute will be directed towards the **Strengthening Foundations: Home Renovation Campaign**.



Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey congratulates Luke Jones on his graduation



From First Steps to First Day: GETTING READY FOR KINDERGARTEN



Novahleigh, Yeva, and Khylif chatting on a bench just days before their Pre-K Counts graduation

Kindergarten may be a child's first big step into school, but the journey starts long before the first bell rings.

In Barber National Institute's early learning programs, children aren't just learning letters and numbers – they're building the social, emotional, and problem-solving skills that set the stage for lifelong success. Through play, exploration, and personalized support, children develop a love of learning that lasts well beyond preschool.

"We provide the traditional learning experiences you'd expect for kindergarten readiness, but we also focus heavily on social-emotional development," said Kathy Bastow, early education coordinator/Pre-K Counts director at Barber National Institute. "It's important to us that kids leaving our program know how to be part of a classroom community, understand their role, and have age-appropriate problem-solving skills."

Research shows that early experiences, especially those involving fear, loss or instability, can shape the way a child learns, behaves, and connects with others. "Trauma-informed care means recognizing these effects and creating a supportive environment where children feel safe to verbalize and deal with their emotions," said Kathy. "It's not about focusing on what's 'wrong' with a child, but rather asking, 'what has this child been through?' and responding with compassion and tools to support the child."

Today, graduating preschool children are the first generation to begin their school years in the shadow of a

global pandemic – often called the "COVID kids". Because today's children are coming to school with such a wide range of experiences, emotions and needs, a one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't work.

"We take the best of what we know from special education, early childhood education strategies, behavioral health, early intervention, and trauma-informed care, to adapt to meet the needs of the children," said Kathy. "Some students may need quiet spaces to regulate their emotions or routines to help them feel safe. Kindergarten readiness is more than 'abc, 123'. It's stepping back and looking at the whole child."

Margarita Yunikov, mom of three Pre-K Counts children, says, "My children have grown in so many ways through Pre-K Counts, not just academically, but socially and emotionally too. The teachers work with parents to ensure cultural and religious inclusiveness, helping every child feel seen, respected, and valued. Through active play, children are learning."

Thirty preschool children from Barber National Institute's Pre-K Counts and Happy Hearts Childcare graduated to kindergarten in June. Sitting on a park bench just days before their preschool graduation, Yeva, 5, was most excited to sing on stage while Khylif, 5, couldn't wait to wear his special hat. Their friend Novahleigh, 5, was looking forward to wearing a new dress and high heels.

The three giggled as they talked about Kings and Queens Day, learning to blow bubbles and spell their names. "Miss Kristen helps me read when I get stuck on a word," said Khylif. "Miss Casey sits with me at lunchtime," said Yeva. Novahleigh chimes in, "I like it when they play with us. It makes me happy."

As for advice for the new group of preschoolers, Khylif says, "Don't worry! You're going to learn lots of stuff and be smart, like me!"



A large body of research confirms what parents and educators have recognized for years: that a quality preschool education prepares children for long-term academic success. Barber National Institute is committed to providing a quality preschool experience to meet every child's needs with programs that include:

- ★ Happy Hearts Inclusive Preschool and Childcare
- ★ Pre-K Counts Preschool in Erie and Corry



Building a Lesson: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR LIFE

Following lunch in classroom 117 at Elizabeth Lee Black School, the girls gather at a shared table while the boys head to the gym. Miss Jan, their beloved Healthy Relationships curriculum instructor and retired nurse who worked both in a hospital and school setting, sits down and catches up on “girl talk”. She asks about their weekend, their summer plans, and how their day is going.

The girls share tidbits of information which Miss Jan quickly turns into the foundation for this week’s lesson: different types of relationships.

The girls begin to chime in with types of relationships ranging from close friends and family to the bus driver and bullies.

The lesson takes the girls through categorizing relationships using the analogy of a traffic light and a visual aid to help the girls understand. “If you met someone online, where would you put them?” asks Miss Jan. One of the girls answers, “Yellow - because I don’t know them very well.”

“How about someone you meet at a picnic? Where would you put them? You don’t want to be unfriendly, but you need to keep your distance until you get to know them better,” advises Miss Jan. “You can ask a trusted adult to stand near you.”

The lesson continues through varying life scenarios and relationships, each scenario asking the girls to think about their own safety and trust.



Miss Jan leading a Healthy Relationships discussion on safety and trust

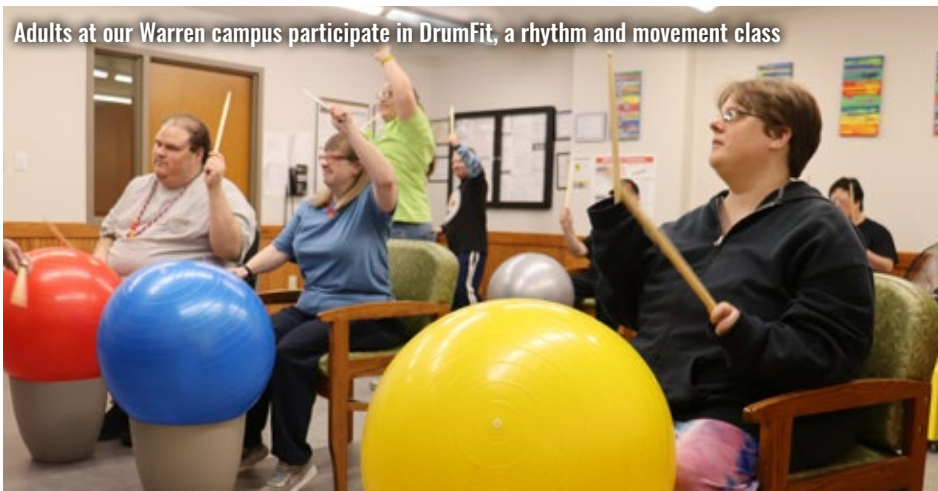
“They’re learning so much more than just relationship skills,” said Miss Jan. “They’re building confidence, learning how to express themselves, and starting to understand what healthy boundaries and respect really look like. It’s incredible to see them grow each week – not just as students, but as young women stepping into their independence.”

The Healthy Relationships curriculum at Elizabeth Lee Black School was introduced last year to help high school students with autism or other developmental disabilities with life and social skills they will need as they move on to the next stage of their life.

Miss Jan incorporates fun hands-on activities to enhance learning, videos to support topics, and role-playing, when appropriate, into each visit she has with the students.

“Our students have questions, and we need to find the best way to talk/model/role play with them about these sensitive subjects. This is the first curriculum that focuses on social, sexual, and emotional issues that students do not get in public education,” said Cindy Priester, Barber National Institute director of children and youth programs. “Rooted in real-life scenarios, the curriculum reflects both the growing needs of our students and our continued belief in their ability to thrive in all aspects of life- including meaningful relationships.”

Adults at our Warren campus participate in DrumFit, a rhythm and movement class



Community Foundation of Warren’s Annual Gives Day Breaks \$1M in Donations

It was another record-breaking year for the Community Foundation of Warren County’s annual give day on Wednesday, May 14. This year’s event surpassed \$1M in donations and \$75,000 match pool sponsorships. This year, 110 organizations received donations from 45 states. Our thanks to our donors who gave over \$7,600 to expand art and sensory activities.

Thank you to the match pool sponsors: The Betts Foundation, Calvert Pearson Insurance Group, Community Foundation of Warren County, Crosset, Inc., DeFrees Family Memorial Fund, Ellwood, McComas Charitable Fund, Northwest Charitable Foundation, Richard T. Betts Family Foundation, Sara Sokolski Memorial Fund, Superior Tire & Rubber Corporation, and United Refining Company.



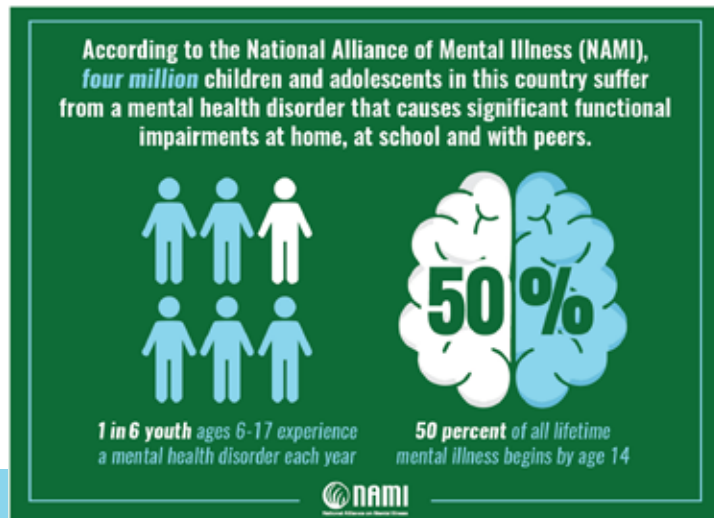
The new home of Barber Behavioral Health's Children's Behavioral Health Center in Erie

NEW CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER EXPANDS SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Erie, like the United States, is facing a growing crisis in children's behavioral health. According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness, four million adolescents and children in this country suffer from a mental health disorder that causes significant functional impairment at home, school, and with peers.

The demand for mental health services continues to rise, yet families struggle to access timely, comprehensive, and specialized care. The lack of a centralized children's behavioral health center in Erie leaves many children and adolescents without comprehensive care and the support they need to thrive.

To address this urgent need, Barber Behavioral Health, a service of Barber National Institute, is opening Erie County's only comprehensive children's behavioral health center in downtown Erie through a dedicated facility to provide essential mental health services, diagnosis, and family support for children with an intellectual disability or autism diagnosis.



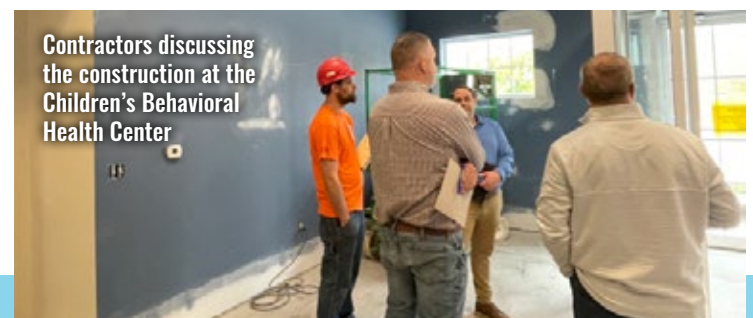
The new \$1.4M center will be located at 1319 Sassafras Street in Erie and has been partially funded through corporate donations and private foundations.

"This project has deepened our understanding of the urgent and growing need for accessible children's mental health services in our community. Through engagement with families, schools, healthcare providers and local agencies, we've gained valuable insights into the barriers families face – such as long wait times, transportation challenges and stigma," said Karlee Meckey, director of Barber Behavioral Health. "It also has revealed the strong desire within our community for a coordinated system of care that addresses the whole child and supports families as partners in treatment. A comprehensive children's behavioral health center will be a transformative resource for Erie County."

Barber Behavioral Health is one of less than 20 providers in Erie. For some services, such as intensive behavioral health services, there are no licensed facility-based providers which attributes to more than a six-month waiting list for pediatric patients. For the acute partial hospitalization level of care, there is only one other provider in Erie. Barber Behavioral Health's acute partial hospitalization program accepts children with autism and intellectual disabilities, which is unique compared to the other Erie providers.

"Currently, Barber Behavioral Health's children's services are scattered throughout Erie County in buildings in need of investment to meet the growing demand. The new center will provide outpatient behavioral health services to children and adults and be a home for Erie's first facility-based intensive behavioral health services program," said Cecelia Hollands, senior director of Barber Behavioral Health. "The services offered will range from initial diagnosis of behavioral health concerns to acute partial hospitalization focusing on stabilizing children who are in desperate need of support. Finally, this site will allow Barber Behavioral Health to bring together individuals impacted by various behavioral needs and concerns by having a centralized meeting space for autism and other support groups for children and their families."

The new center is expected to open this fall. **To contribute to this important project, contact Tammy Roche, (814) 969-8027.**



Contractors discussing the construction at the Children's Behavioral Health Center



Courtney and Andrew Doyle HOST THE 2025 BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL



Andrew and Courtney Doyle at the 2024 Barber Christmas Ball

Save the date for the 61st annual Barber Christmas Ball on Saturday, Dec. 13 at the Bayfront Convention Center in Erie. This year, Courtney (Victor) and Andrew Doyle have been named the Ball's host couple.

Longtime supporters of Barber National Institute, Courtney and Andrew share a deep family commitment to Erie.

Andrew's parents, Robert and Lynne Doyle, were previously chairs of the Barber Christmas Ball and Lynne, the Ladies Only Luncheon, and remains active on the event's steering committee.

Courtney's father, Michael Victor, has been a longtime supporter and advocate of Barber National Institute's mission, instilling in her a strong commitment to service and community involvement.

"It's an honor to support Barber National Institute and its extraordinary work in uplifting individuals with disabilities and their families. Erie is our home, and we believe in showing up for the institutions that make this community stronger, more inclusive, and more hopeful," said Courtney. "Hosting this gala is one way we can help celebrate and expand Barber National Institute's impact."

Courtney brings a wealth of experience to her role, both professionally and personally. With a strong background in event management and a passion for community engagement, Courtney's longstanding connection to Barber National Institute has given her a deep appreciation for Barber National Institute's impact. Her expertise in planning, paired with her creative energy and eye for detail, ensures that every aspect of the Barber Christmas Ball will be both meaningful and memorable. Courtney founded True North Events in August 2024,

a woman-owned, Erie-based event planning company specializing in high-impact, highly personalized experiences. She also is actively involved in the Erie community through political engagement, charitable involvement, and volunteer work.

"With everything that's going on in the world today, it's hard to know where to start. . . . Here. You start at home, with support of places like Barber National Institute . . . and what better way to show your support than by attending a fabulous ball," said Courtney.


A dedicated advocate for causes that make a meaningful difference, Andrew has been a steadfast supporter of Barber National Institute and its mission. With a background in business, he approaches this role with both heart and purpose. "We've always believed in the power of people and community. Supporting Barber National Institute is a privilege because it represents exactly that- a commitment to human potential and compassionate programs."

His professional experience brings valuable insight into the planning and execution of this year's event, ensuring it is not only a successful fundraiser, but also a celebration of purpose and community. Known for his ability to build lasting relationships, Andrew spent 15 years with Perry Construction Group in a variety of project and operational management roles. He currently serves as head of Human Resources at Fralo Industries, where he guides leadership development and employee relations across the company.

"We're proud to stand behind such a meaningful mission and to help bring the Erie community together in celebration of it," said Andrew.

With Courtney's creativity and expertise and Andrew's leadership and vision, the 2025 Barber Christmas Ball promises to be a joyful and inspiring celebration that honors tradition, brings the community together, and supports the vital mission of Barber National Institute.

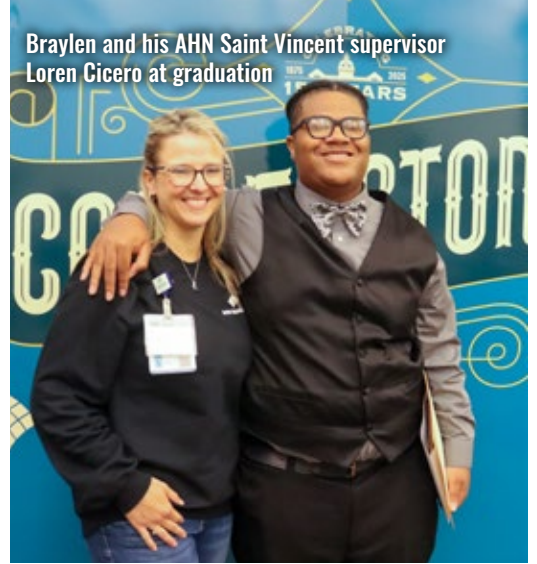
Courtney and Andrew reside in Erie with their two daughters Reagan (11) and Sawyer (9).



TO SPONSOR THE BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL, AND SUPPORT BARBER NATIONAL INSTITUTE'S MISSION, VISIT [BARBERINSTITUTE.ORG/BALL](https://barberinstitute.org/ball)



Braylen shares a proud moment with his mom and sister



Braylen and his AHN Saint Vincent supervisor Loren Cicero at graduation

Project Search® Prepares Young Adults for Meaningful Work

Braylen Easter, 19, has a million-dollar smile and a bedside manner that puts patients at ease. A graduate of Erie High School and Project SEARCH®, Braylen is now working in the imaging department at AHN Saint Vincent Hospital in Erie, PA.

One of Barber National Institute's main vocational services for workforce training and development, Project SEARCH®, is an international program designed to help individuals with an intellectual disability access competitive integrated employment opportunities. Barber National Institute works with five partners to operate Project SEARCH® including AHN Saint Vincent Hospital, Erie School District, Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Erie County Department of Human Services.

After going through the interview process with Project SEARCH's® partner organizations, students begin their internships at AHN Saint Vincent Hospital. They first learn soft skills and practice working and interacting with others. After these initial activities, they move to the physical work of the internship.

Now in its fifth year, Project SEARCH® has graduated more than 30 students to the workforce or continuing education. This year's class was no different- nine students graduating and nine entering the workforce or continuing education.

"Working at Saint Vincent feels amazing. They make me feel like family. I like making my patients feel safe – like they are at home – and put a smile on their face," said Braylen in an

interview right before his graduation in May. "This has been an incredible experience. I've not only found a job I love, but I met my best friends in the world (speaking of his classmates)."

Loren Cicero is the manager of the AHN Saint Vincent Hospital imaging department. "As soon as I heard about Project SEARCH®, I went to my team and said, 'yeah, let's do it'. Our team has been very willing to take interns and teach them skills, find their strengths, and help them build their future."

Braelyn feels lucky. "This program changed my life. I got hands-on experience, learned how to be professional, and found out what I was capable of. Thanks to Project SEARCH®, I believe in myself. I'm thinking about going to school to become a radiology technician."



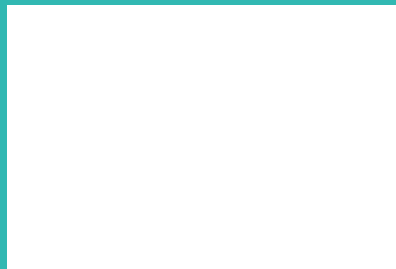
To learn more about Project SEARCH®, visit projectsearch.us



The resounding success of Barber National Institute's 40th annual Shillelagh Golf Tournament not only brought together 200 community members for a day of friendly competition and fun but also raised \$42,712 in vital funds to support the Dr. Gertrude Barber Foundation.

Tim Barnhart was honored as the 2025 Person of the Year. Tim's connection to Barber National Institute goes back decades. His support began in the early 1990s, attending his first Barber Christmas

Ball in 1992 and continuing his commitment ever since. Over the years, he has participated in Shillelagh Golf Tournaments and has always stepped in to lend a hand—whether through fundraising efforts, volunteering for Read Across America, or donating labor and equipment to support the Barber Beast on the Bay. Today, he sits on Barber National Institute's board of directors and helps lead the organization to serve for generations to come.



HAPPY 25TH ANNIVERSARY, *Camp Connections!*

Twenty-five years ago, Camp Connections began as a simple idea: create a place where children with autism could laugh, learn, and make lifelong memories. Today, that idea has blossomed into a beloved tradition- celebrating its 25th anniversary with even more heart, adventure, and friendship than ever before.

"Parents sought opportunities for their children with autism to build friendships and develop social skills in a nurturing environment. These children had difficulty thriving in traditional summer camp settings," said Holly Swope, Camp Connections director and assistant administrative director at Barber Behavioral Health's intensive behavioral health program. "Our social skills curriculum is updated annually to ensure campers receive the most effective guidance in building friendships."

Camp Connections' home base is Mother Teresa Academy in Erie, where the campers meet each morning and break into their camp groups. Two field trips are held every week to practice social skills in the community.

"Every year, parents approach the staff stating how Camp Connections has helped their child develop their social skills and make friends. The campers make friends and stay in contact throughout the school year, long after camp ends," said Holly. "This year, we have a record number of 50 returning campers!"

Behind every unforgettable summer at Camp Connections is a team of dedicated, energetic staff who bring magic to life with their creativity and commitment to every camper's experience. "This year, we also have a record number of returning staff! We find that our campers bring unique perspectives, strengths, and challenges that encourage our dedicated staff to grow both professionally and personally. The relationships formed are rewarding, as staff assist campers to progress in social skills and confidence," said Holly. "As we embark on 25 years, I am so proud of the staff and campers who make this camp more than a program. This is a place where understanding grows, friendships form, and we are building brighter futures. Here's to another 25 years of making a lasting impact on our youth!"

Congratulations, Camp Connections' staff and campers!



SAVE THE DATE
FOR THE 2026
SHILLELAGH
GOLF
TOURNAMENT
THURSDAY,
JUNE 18, 2026
AT WHISPERING
WOODS GOLF
CLUB.

With Love and Support, HE'S MAKING STRIDES EVERY DAY



Teacher Vinson Maruca, left, and teacher assistant Anna Belgiorio, right, are two of Ki's biggest cheerleaders saying, "Having Ki in our classroom has been an absolute pleasure. We are amazed at his growth and his dance moves are something you must see!"

When Kim Myers first opened her heart and home to a tiny baby in need, she didn't know the journey ahead would change their lives forever. Born medically fragile at 32 weeks—his stomach and intestines outside of his body—the infant needed more than a foster placement; he needed unconditional love and a forever family willing to embrace every challenge.

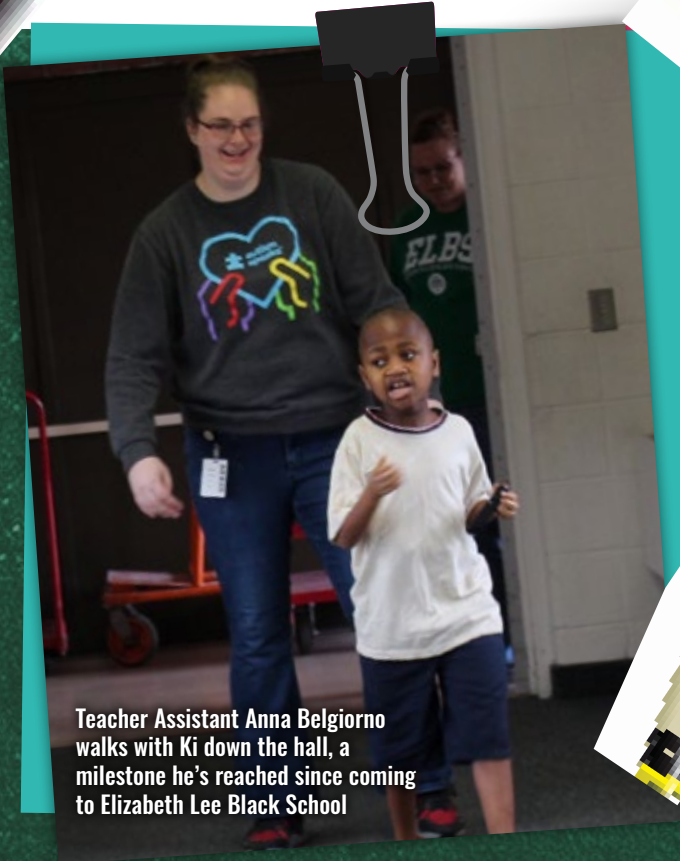
"Maki (Ki) was too little for complicated surgery to put his organs back into his body. He was vented with a tracheotomy and died six times from respiratory failure. He lived in the NICU in a South Carolina hospital for 16 weeks with a tent around his belly to protect his organs," shares Kim. In addition, Ki was diagnosed with autism.

As Ki grew and his educational journey began, Kim found support through early intervention and applied behavior analysis (ABA) programs in her South Carolina school district. "We had a wonderful preschool teacher who was trained in working with children with autism and the interpersonal behavior techniques of ABA," said Kim. "Unfortunately, Ki's elementary school district struggled to provide the individualized education Ki needed and he regressed considerably."

Kim recalls severe self-harm behaviors as a way to cope with his frustration, a sign of how deeply he was struggling to communicate his needs. "In these moments he might slap his face or bang his head with such force that he caused bruising or even bleeding. I have shed many tears, heartbroken to see him struggling."

Kim knew she needed to look for schools to accommodate Ki's autism and provide a learning environment where he could thrive. An Erie native, Kim found herself not only returning home, but to Barber National Institute where she once worked as a registered nurse. "I was familiar with the distinguished reputation of Elizabeth Lee Black School as a leader in special education. I knew this was the learning environment that Ki needed."

Ki is now 11 and a thriving student at Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School. "I won't forget the moment I got a call from the school that a spot had opened for Ki. We were at a medical appointment—his behavior was so bad—I had to take a minute to pull myself together. This is the moment I knew our lives were going to change."



Teacher Assistant Anna Belgiorno walks with Ki down the hall, a milestone he's reached since coming to Elizabeth Lee Black School



Ki works on spelling his last name



Anna Belgiorno and Ki work together daily on an "About Me" book

Ki began attending Elizabeth Lee Black School in February 2025, initially part-time, while he and his support team acclimated to one another.

"When Ki came to Elizabeth Lee Black School, he had difficulty adjusting to the school day. He was very anxious and got upset easily. We shortened his school day to just a few hours, and he handled that much better," said Maria Brown, behavior analyst at Barber National Institute. "After two months, we were able to extend his day another hour and then after an additional few weeks, he could tolerate the full school day. Ki got used to the classroom routine and now needs fewer prompts to participate in classroom activities."

With the support of Ki's team including a psychiatrist, behavior specialists, special education professionals, a nurse, and occupational, speech and physical therapists, Ki is soaring!

"He is so smart. He is learning to read and understand foreign languages. He knows what's expected of him and wants to get tasks done. He's participating in therapies, trying new foods, drinking from a cup, and following instructions," said Kim. "He's 99 percent happy every day - bouncing on the bed, clapping, and breakdancing. The transformation has been incredible. My boy is coming back to me."

Ki is integrating into school activities including earning third place in this year's student art show and participating in an obstacle course event – earning a completion medal.

Kim offers these words of hope and encouragement for families,

"Hang in there. Don't give up- keep seeking treatments and help. When you run into a roadblock, just keep going. It's so worth it."

WE'VE GOT SPIRIT: *Mercyhurst Women's* **LACROSSE TEAM**



The Mercyhurst Women's Lacrosse team at the 2024 Barber Beast on the Bay

Since 2019, the Mercyhurst University women's lacrosse team has brought their energy and team spirit to the shores of Lake Erie as an official Cheer Zone at Barber Beast on the Bay. Known for their drive on the field and commitment to their community, the team has cheered on participants, offered encouragement, and helped keep the momentum going through one of the toughest, and most inspiring, events of the year.

Coach Lindsay Weaver says Mercyhurst is a school rooted in service. "As they get to campus as freshmen, the first thing they do as a Laker is go into the Erie community for a day of service projects. Bringing that same culture to my team is how we continue to instill the value of engagement and service to those within our community."

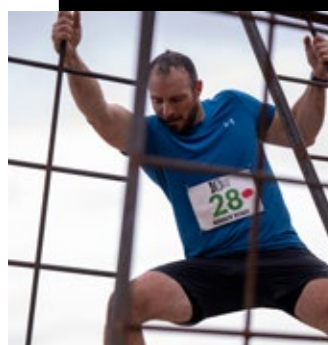
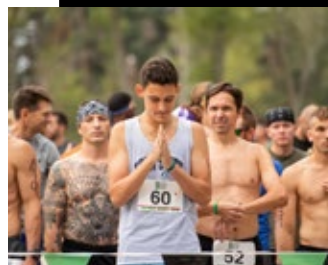
Volunteering at Barber Beast on the Bay has become a natural extension of the team's values – teamwork, perseverance, and giving back. "Lacrosse is very much a team sport, and our young women love to take part in events as a group. It helps build team chemistry on and off the field. Volunteering at Barber Beast on the Bay is the closest event to what our girls experience on game day."

Lindsay says that volunteering at Barber Beast on the Bay is an event that the team looks forward to. "Anyone that's been to a Mercyhurst women's lacrosse game knows how rowdy our sidelines can get. The group of young women we have here are highly motivated to cheer on others success and being part of Barber Beast on the Bay allows them to do that with complete strangers."

Their ongoing involvement perfectly reflects the spirit of the Beast: strength, support and showing up for others. "My hope is that our team's involvement with Barber Beast on the Bay is teaching them the value of showing up for others, even in small but meaningful ways. Encouragement can have a powerful impact, especially in moments of challenge or fatigue, and I want them to see how their presence and energy can uplift someone else."



REMEMBERING SOME OF OUR FAVORITE MOMENTS FROM THE PAST 11 BARBER BEAST ON THE BAY EVENTS



THE FINAL OBSTACLE

SATURDAY, SEPT. 6 - PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK, ERIE PA

For over a decade, Barber Beast on the Bay has been an incredible event that brought thousands together, overcoming obstacles, in support of Barber National Institute and individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism.

"We are deeply grateful for the enthusiasm and generosity of our participants, sponsors and volunteers. Organizing an event of this scale requires extensive time, effort and resources," said Robert Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president. "Over the years, more than 13,000 people have participated and raised over \$830,000 for Barber National Institute. We are proud of what Barber Beast on the Bay has accomplished and have made the thoughtful decision to conclude the event at its peak. We are so grateful to the participants, volunteers, sponsors and community partners especially our obstacle builders, Waldameer Park and Presque Isle State Park."

The 2025 Barber Beast on the Bay will be the final Beast event. Organizers said rather than seeing it wind down over time, or produce a "less than" version, organizers have chosen to celebrate its success and leave behind a lasting positive legacy.

"Barber Beast on the Bay has been an incredible event and we're so proud of what it accomplished. As an organization, we're always looking at how to make the biggest impact, and we've made the thoughtful decision to shift our focus to new opportunities that best serve our mission," said Robert.

While the 10-mile Barber Beast on the Bay is ending, the adapted course – one of the most meaningful parts of the event – will continue in a new format. Organizers say that more details will be coming on a "reimagined" adapted course.

"While the Beast on the Bay is coming to an end, our commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities is unwavering. We will continue to channel our resources into innovative programs and services that create opportunities and transform lives," said Robert. "We encourage our community to stay involved at Barber National Institute in other meaningful ways – through volunteering, giving or advocating for inclusion."

THE 12TH BARBER BEAST ON THE BAY WILL BE HELD AT PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK IN ERIE ON SEPT. 6, 2025. REGISTRATION IS \$125 THROUGH AUGUST 1.

NO MORE SHOULD'VE, COULD'VE, WOULD'VE. DON'T MISS OUT – THE TIME IS NOW!

REGISTER FOR THE FINAL BEAST



VOLUNTEER FOR THE FINAL BEAST

THANK YOU 2025 SPONSORS



FOUNDER'S ROOM

Celebrates the Life and Legacy of **DR. GERTRUDE BARBER**



Barber National Institute's new Founder's Room, officially opened and dedicated July 9 at its main campus in Erie, stands as a heartfelt tribute to Dr. Gertrude Barber and her visionary legacy. This curated room offers a glimpse into its history, featuring photographs, documents, and memorabilia that tell the story of a mission rooted in faith, hope, and love. This space is open to the public during normal business hours and is located adjacent to the main campus's North Lobby.

In conjunction with opening of the Founder's Room, Barber National Institute also is publishing a commemorative yearbook this September that captures decades of progress, impact, and the countless individuals – students, families, staff and supporters – who have helped shape Barber National Institute's journey since Dr. Barber's passing in 2000. The book's publishing is timed in celebration of Dr. Barber's September 16 birthday and the annual Founder's Day event.

Together, the Founder's Room and the yearbook serve as lasting tributes to the beginning and the enduring spirit that guides Barber National Institute forward.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DR. BARBER'S LIFE,
VISIT DRBARBER.ORG**



Father James Power, Postulator, Cause of Gertrude Barber

Father James Power Appointed Postulator

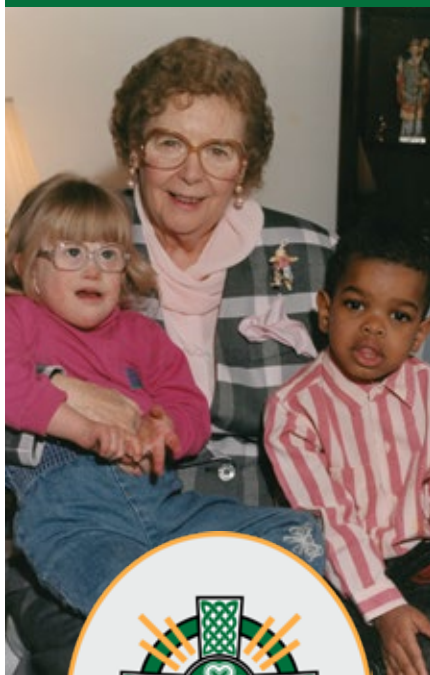
Father James Power has been appointed as Postulator to the Cause of Gertrude Barber by Erie Bishop Lawrence Persico. In this key role, he will advocate for the Cause and work to meet requirements of the canonization process. Fr. Power has served as Vice Postulator for the past three years, and now assumes this position following the death of Msgr. Tom McSweeney.

An Erie native, Fr. Power graduated from Cathedral Prep, Gannon University, and St. Mark's Seminary before completing his preparation for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore.

Since his ordination in 2016, his appointments have included Parochial Vicar at St. George Church, pastor for St. Mary Crown and St. Ann churches in Marienville, where he also served as chaplain for the SCI-Forest Prison. He now serves as pastor for St. Joseph and St. Anthony parishes in Sharon and on the faculty of Kennedy Catholic High School.

Fr. Power is the nephew of Bridget and John Barber and son of Bill and Carolyn Power. As such, he has known about the mission of Barber National Institute for most of his life, and is very dedicated to working on behalf of the Cause.

Please continue to pray on behalf of this effort and to Dr. Barber for her intercession.



Prayer for Canonization

Merciful Father,

You guided your servant, Getrude Barber, in bringing hope to children and families who faced the often overwhelming challenges of living with autism and disabilities, while inspiring all of us to recognize all individuals as people of God. We know you hear our prayers as we gather in your name.

Through her intercession, please grant the intention I ask in Jesus' name (state your intention) if it be in accordance with Your Divine Will.

If it is in your design that Getrude be glorified by the Church, so as to further her extraordinary mission, show us Your will. Grant us the grace to hear Your answer and commit ourselves to take up her cause by the merits of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.



Dr. Gertrude Barber with a group of school children

CAUSE FOR CANONIZATION ADVANCES AT US CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The journey toward possible canonization for Erie's Dr. Gertrude Barber took an important step forward, when members of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) voted to advance her cause for sainthood. Her candidacy was considered by the group of more than 200 active and retired members of church hierarchy at their annual Plenary Assembly held in Baltimore, MD.

Bishop Edward Lohse, currently Bishop of Kalamazoo, MI and former Vicar General of the Diocese of Erie, delivered a presentation on Dr. Barber's life and work that brought hope to children and adults with disabilities

and their family. In his former position, Bishop Lohse was involved in preparing the canonization cause that was opened by The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico in a decree issued on Dec. 12, 2019, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

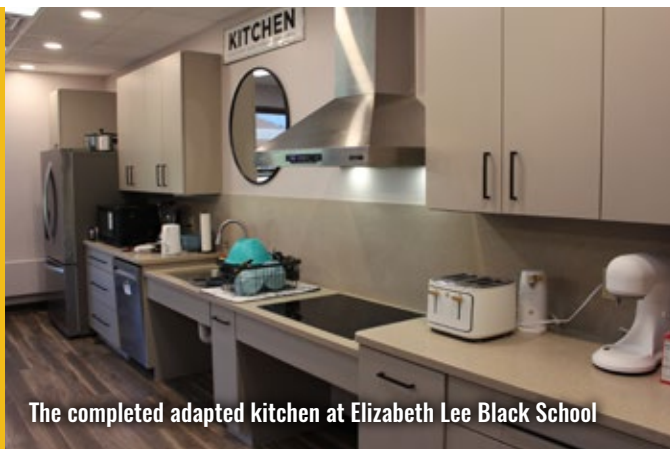
Three levels of notification are required in the canonization process: an announcement to the faithful, which was made when the edict opening the Cause was displayed in St. Peter Cathedral in December, 2019; approval from the Vatican, which issued a "Nihil Obstat" to indicate that no obstacles "stand in the way" of the cause proceeding; and the presentation and vote by the USCCB.

Following the presentation, USCCB members voted in support of advancing the canonization effort, fulfilling an important requirement of the church process.

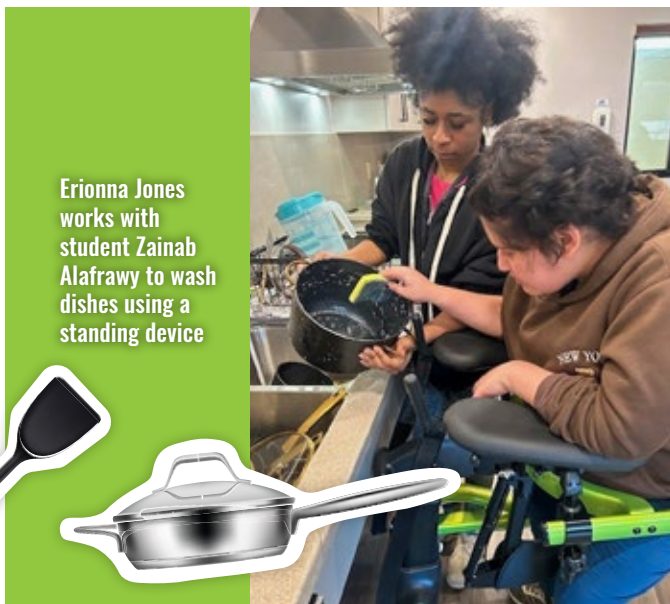
For more information about Dr. Barber, to schedule a group presentation about her life, and for help in reporting a possible miracle, **visit DrBarber.org**



Watch Bishop Edward Lohse's Presentation



The completed adapted kitchen at Elizabeth Lee Black School

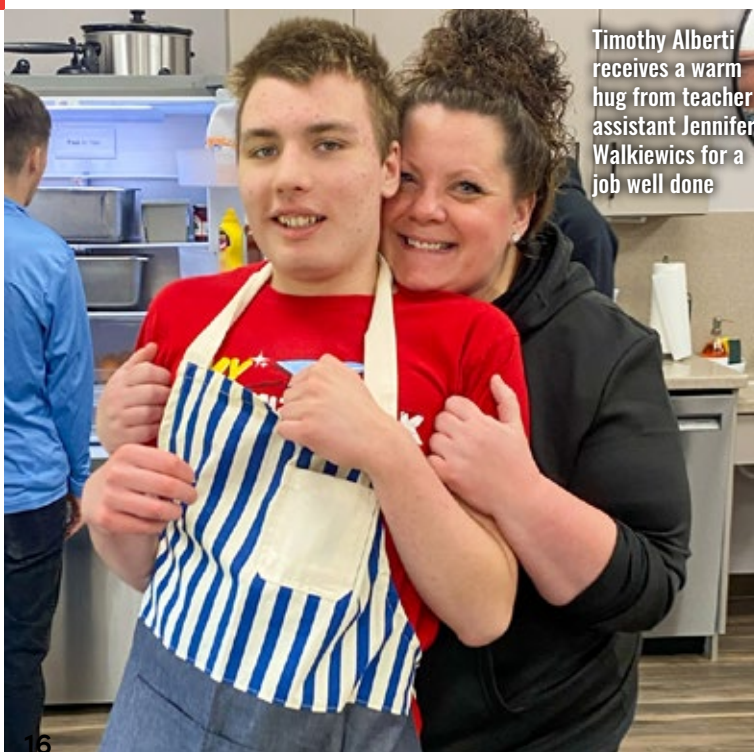


Erionna Jones works with student Zainab Alafrawy to wash dishes using a standing device



Blaize Cheeseman pours syrup on his pancake with the help of Theresa Fuller

STIRRING UP SUCCESS: STUDENTS THRIVE IN ADAPTED KITCHEN



Timothy Alberti receives a warm hug from teacher assistant Jennifer Walkiewics for a job well done

At Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School, learning doesn't just happen in the classroom; it happens in every corner, including the kitchen. Thanks to the addition of a fully adapted kitchen, students now can build essential life skills in a space designed specifically for their abilities.

From practicing simple recipes to learning how to safely use appliances, the adapted kitchen helps students gain confidence, independence, and real-world experience.

"The idea of an adapted kitchen originated from a blend of universal design principles, occupational therapy practices, and to assist our students with the challenges to develop independence in daily living tasks like cooking," said Cindy Priester, Barber National Institute director of children and youth programs. "They eat everyday so they must learn to plan, shop, prep, cook, and clean-up. The main goal is independence in daily living skills."

When equipped with a wide range of culinary skills, students with intellectual disabilities become valuable contributors to society. Whether finding roles in hospitality and service industries or simply demonstrating greater independence, the benefits are far-reaching.

"Their ability to live more autonomously reduces the demand for more extensive support systems. Their participation in the workforce enriches the local economy and fosters social cohesion, creating a more inclusive and vibrant community," said Cindy.

Today, students are fully immersed in a structured and adaptable curriculum designed to familiarize them with the kitchen environment, while emphasizing practical skills.



Cindy Priester, left, beams with pride at Zemir Fleming's graduation. He has attended the Elizabeth Lee Black School since preschool

Celebrating 43 Years of Dedication at **ELIZABETH LEE BLACK SCHOOL**

After an incredible 43-year career of service, leadership and heart, Cynthia Priester is retiring from her position as director of children and youth programs at Barber National Institute. Her impact has stretched far beyond the classroom – beginning in occupational therapy, extending through early intervention programs, and continuing in support of group homes and families across Erie County.

Known for her compassion, steady presence, and deep commitment to every child and staff member she served, her legacy is one of care, growth, and dedication to helping others thrive.

One moment that stands out to her as a true accomplishment was leading the effort to standardize assessments across the school. "It wasn't just about the paperwork. It was about making sure every child's needs were being seen clearly and consistently," Cindy reflected. "By streamlining the way students were evaluated, we helped create a stronger foundation for individualized instruction and services, ensuring that each child received the support that would help them grow."

Over the course of four decades, she's witnessed remarkable changes – not just in technology and teaching practices, but in how we understand and support children with special needs. "Our students are the best. The changes might be small. It's the kids, it's really their stories."

Through it all, what's most meaningful remains the everyday accomplishments: a child speaking their first word, taking their first step, or making a new friend. "I've seen the differences in great achievements – a child once walking on their knees now standing upright and walking, a child who couldn't roll over is now sitting up in a wheelchair, and a child who couldn't communicate now using a communication device with her eyes. Those little moments," Cindy says, "are the biggest reminders of why we do this work."

As she steps into retirement, what she'll miss most are the children. Watching them grow, overcoming challenges, and celebrating the smallest milestones has been the heart of her work. "They've taught me as much as I've taught them," she said. "It's been a privilege to be part of their journey."

AROUND

Elizabeth Lee Black School



Congratulations, Graduates!

Barber National Institute Executive Vice President Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey was joined by Kathleen Bastow, Barber National Institute Pre-K Counts director and Stephanie Robertson, Happy Hearts Childcare director in celebrating the preschool graduation of over 30 children on June 10.

The children sang the Goodbye Song which they learned during the school year as part of the Erie Playhouse's PlayTime program. Congratulations, graduates!

It was an emotional milestone for five Elizabeth Lee Black School graduates and their families as they accepted their diplomas presented by Barber National Institute Executive Vice President Dr. Maureen

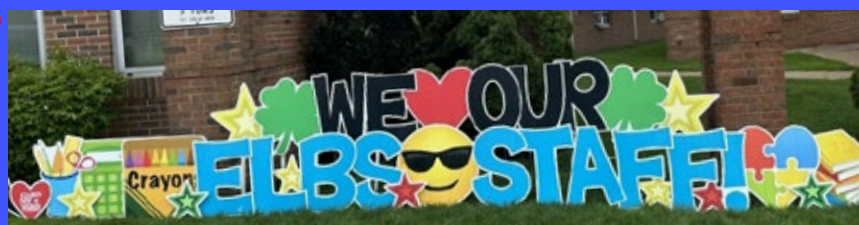
Barber-Carey and Special Education Director Mandi Kostovick. Several of the graduates have attended Elizabeth Lee Black School since preschool. Faculty and staff shared tears and hugs as they wished the graduates well on their continued journey to reach their full potential.

Chris and Julie Moore sang their original song, Celebrate What's Different, the theme song of Barber National Institute.



Week of the Young Child

Pre-K Counts and Happy Hearts Childcare celebrated Week of the Young Child April 5-11. Through daily themes, teachers reinforced learning through creative play. Children marched in a purple parade with handmade instruments, explored different art mediums, and hosted a garden party for their families.



National Teacher Appreciation Week



We celebrated teachers at Elizabeth Lee Black School and Barber Behavioral Health's acute partial hospitalization program May 5-9 with snacks, signs, and sweet student messages. We are deeply grateful for our dedicated teachers whose compassion, skill, and unwavering belief in each child's potential create an environment where students can truly thrive.



Garden Party

Students weeded the flower beds and planted seeds to be harvested this summer. Gardening is a fun and therapeutic activity for the occupational therapy team to help students develop fine motor skills and independence.



Handmade, with Love

When longtime supporter Midge Klebes passed away, she gifted us the collection of soft, colorful fleece fabric. That fabric is now being turned into warm, handmade blankets for our children. It's a beautiful reminder that even after someone is gone, their compassion can continue to touch our lives.



May Day Art Show

Elizabeth Lee Black School students held a multi-media art show on May 1 and 2. More than 100 pieces of artwork including paintings, sculptures, photographs, digital art, and collaborative pieces were exhibited and handmade by students. Families and community supporters joined us for a public exhibition in the school's gym.



Taking on the "Mini" Beast

Students bobbed and weaved their way through the rough waters, swamps, and sandy shores of Lake Erie during this miniature version of Barber Beast on the Bay. All students earn a participation medal at the end.



Magnolia Tree Planted by Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier

Environmental educators from the Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier (LEAF) helped students plant a new Sweet Bay Magnolia, *Magnolia virginiana*, in an outdoor play space. Students helped to dig the hole and place the tree in its new forever home; it's the perfect spot near a sitting bench!



Presque Isle Downs & Casino Employees Donate Food

Thank you to the employees at Presque Isle Downs & Casino for the food collection and donation. Your generosity helps families during critical out-of-school time, ensuring they have the food they need.

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
BNlerie@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

Tammy Roche
Director, Strategic Communications

Andrea Krivak
Event Coordinator

Lauren Harrington
Donor Relations Specialist

Anthony Esposito
Communications/Social Media Coordinator

Aubrey Smith
Web & Graphic Designer

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 355
Erie, PA



Upcoming Events:

ERIE GIVES DAY

August 12, 2025

BARBER BEAST ON THE BAY & ADAPTED COURSE

September 6, 2025, Presque Isle Park/Waldameer & Water World

LADIES ONLY LUNCHEON

November 22, 2025 Kahkwa Club

BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL

December 13, 2025, Bayfront Convention Center

ADULT SERVICES CHRISTMAS DANCE

December 14, 2025, Bayfront Convention Center

41ST SHILLELAGH GOLF OUTING

June 18, 2026, Whispering Woods Golf Club

**LEARN MORE &
SAVE-THE-DATES!**



**BARBERINSTITUTE.
ORG/EVENTS**



Barber National Institute