

BARBER

NOVEMBER 2025

SPIRIT

A Colorful Christmas

BARBER BALL



Barber National Institute

Making dreams come true.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

Each issue of Barber Spirit gives us an opportunity to reflect on the remarkable progress we're making together. In these pages you'll see that spirit at work—the dedication of our staff, the achievements of the individuals we serve, and the generosity of our community.

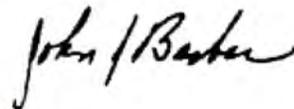
This issue celebrates our Strengthening Foundations campaign, which is building the resources we need to make important adaptations to our community homes. You'll also read about our Select Tier designation in Pennsylvania's performance-based contracting—a step that underscores our commitment to innovation, accountability, and excellence.

We're proud to highlight the milestones of our staff, whose skills and compassion bring our mission to life every day. We also mark the close of an era with the end of Barber Beast on the Bay, honoring all who helped make it such a powerful tradition of inclusion and community spirit.

Finally, we share stories that show our mission in action—from supported employment success at Barnhart Transportation to the powerful voices behind Brown Side of Autism. We meet a young man, once struggling with mobility, who found the rhythm, joy, and encouragement he needed through our community drumming circle.

Take time this season to reflect on life's changes and the blessings that remain or have grown stronger. I invite you to make space for gratitude for life's simple joys, which often go unnoticed until we take the time to pause and appreciate them.

With gratitude,



John J. Barber
President & Chief Executive Officer

Our Mission Statement

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.



Brothers David (right) and Daniel (left) Gillespie stop for a photo in the Founder's Room.



Jason spins the anchor wheel at this year's Beast on the Bay adapted course.



Abby (right) and Seth (left) at the Community Drumming Circle.



Sueann Wiest (left), Pat (center), and Lucas Russell from Barnhart Transportation share their employment story on page 8.

ON THE COVER: Courtney and Andrew Doyle, 2025 Chair Couple of the Barber Christmas Ball.



Nathan (left) and Chief Derosa (right) show off their fire truck.



Nathan sits proudly on Tower 479 at West Ridge Fire Department

Camp Connections

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

While Barber National Institute's summer camps are filled with laughter and smiles, they are developed with a goal in mind - creating community connections, building confidence, and making friends. Nathan Kinzig, 17, a two-year returning camper at Barber Behavioral Health's Camp Connections, has done just that.

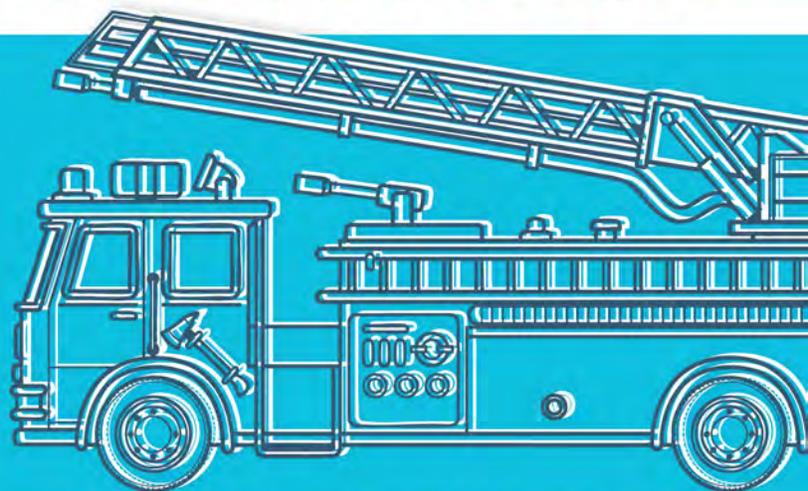
After visiting a fire station during a Camp Connections' field trip, Nathan became fascinated with the career of firefighters.

"Camp Connections made me feel more comfortable with myself. I used to be quiet and didn't talk to people I didn't know," said Nathan. "But with the help of Camp Connections' counselors, friends, and family, I have learned to open up and believe that I can do things."

Nathan is now working as a junior firefighter at West Ridge Fire Department in Erie and hopes to be promoted soon after his 18th birthday this month.

At the 2025 Camp Connections' talent show, Nathan came onto the stage in full firefighter gear and shared a speech with Camp Director Miss Holly about his recent achievements and appreciation for his camp family in giving him the confidence to become a junior firefighter.

As a junior firefighter, Nathan takes care of necessary duties around the firehouse, like keeping gear in perfect condition and ensuring the firefighters have everything they need to succeed. West Ridge Fire Department's Chief Derosa recognizes Nathan's passion, loyalty, and hard work saying, "I'd love to have more passionate workers



just like Nathan on my team. Not only has Nathan found something he enjoys, but he also has shown his passion throughout the community."

Nathan's father, Patrick, explained, "Nathan has even volunteered outside of drill at school fire safety programs. He's helped out with Trunk or Treat and he's been in parades. Nathan has really come out of his shell with the fire department."

Camp Connections is more than just summer fun; it can help other children like Nathan build confidence to pursue their dreams. When asked, Nathan hopes to inspire others and says, "surround yourself with the right people you trust and you can do anything you want".

While this was Nathan's last year at summer camp, he is prepared to take on new challenges like finishing high school, starting a career in a trade, and continuing to volunteer at West Ridge Fire Department.



Melissa says "thank you" to Strengthening Foundation donors.

Building Momentum: **LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR HOMES WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE**



**DONATE
TODAY & KEEP
MAKING
A DIFFERENCE**



Thanks to the incredible generosity of our donors on Erie Gives Day in August, Barber National Institute kicked off our \$1M Strengthening Foundations campaign with donations of more than \$130,000! This remarkable outpouring of support has already allowed us to begin much-needed renovations in several of our community homes, including long-overdue kitchen upgrades that will make everyday life safer, more accessible, and more welcoming for the adults we serve.

"These early improvements are only the beginning," said Robert Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president. "With more than 50 homes in need of updates, our work to make adaptations so our folks can age at home, is just beginning. Every doorway widened, every bathroom updated, and every kitchen renovated brings us closer to each adult enjoying the comfort and dignity of a true home."

As the individuals we serve grow older, these improvements also make it possible for them to age in place –remaining in homes and neighborhoods they know and love, surrounded by trusted caregivers and friends.

There's still time to be part of this transformation. Together we can finish what we've started and create places where dreams come true every day.

SPECIAL APPRECIATION TO THE FOLLOWING DONORS WHO MADE A GIFT DURING ERIE GIVES:

<p>Aiden Kemp Aimee Baumann Alan Hannibal Alice Jurewicz Andrea Krivak Andrew Rupp Ann Marie Sitter Anne & Gene Connell Anne & Larry Piotrowicz Anthony Sherrell Arthur & Ruth Oligeri III Atty. Al & Josie Lubiejewski Atty. Brain O' Donoghue Atty. Raymond & Deborah Pagliari Barb & Bill Barthelmes Barb Mazon Barbara Carter Barbara Deist Barbara Shapira Barber Family Bethanne White Betty Wist Bill & Cherri Engell Bill & Patty Gloekler Bob & Amy Will Brett Swanson Brian & Kate Stark Carl Williams Carlee Nowlin Carol & David Hutzell Carolyn Angelotti Carrie Kontis Charles Perrotta & Diane Faber Cherie Reardon Cheryl Lepkowski Cheryl Moore Chinsky Family Fund Chris & Maria Ehrman Christine Trott Christopher Edgett Chuck Reams Craig Noyes Crystal Morosky Dan & Julia Goodman Dan & Theresa Dyleski Dan & Peggy Laughlin Daniel & Mary Ann Tempestini Daniel Gloekler Daniel Schaaf Dave & Pam Davis Dave & Peggy Ogle David Delinski David J. Murphy David Tillotson Dean & Lisa Huya Debbie Brumagin Debra Mercer Diane McQuaid Diane Niebauer Don & Deb Musloff Don & Linda Stolarski Donald & Marsha Niebauer Doug Rogers Dr. & Mrs. Thomas A. Wittmann Dr. Howard & Jane Levin Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey Dr. Sharon Coursey Drs. Chris & Caitlin Clark Drs. Jay & Mona Kang Elaine LaFuria Elizabeth Bucarelli</p>	<p>Elizabeth Doleski Elizabeth Gill Elizabeth Niebauer Elizabeth Piotrowski Ernest & Elizabeth DiSantis Esther M. Gallagher Florence Brower Florence Sinnott Francis Stawicki Frank Nemeth Gale & Terry Brugh Gary & Jeanne Lillis Geoffrey Gloekler Gerald Blaszczyk Geri Taylor Greg & Cindy Bastow Gretchen & Bryan Baumann HB Friends of Matt Callaghan Heather Stewart Heidi Sheehan Helen Overdorff Helena Power Hope Martinson In Honor of Katlyn Spiegel In Memory of Diane Koppes by Family Jack & Ann Quinn Jackman Family Jacqueline Rhen Jacqueline Skarzenski Jake & Maddy Fling James & Dolores Garvey James & Mary Rutkowski Jr. James & Natalie Washburn James & Patricia Schoening James E. Dailey James S. Macie James Schreiner Jane & Bob Davis Jay Gill Jean Lewis Jean Nielsen Jean Zarger Jeanie Gardiner Jeanne Bender Jeff Biletnikoff Jeffrey & Margaret Zibelman Jeffrey Nicola Jennifer Gross Jerry & Amy Coppersmith Jim Fehlman Joann Kish Joe & Rhonda Schember John & Linda Szkotnicki John & Loretta Clark John & Mary Gail Baldwin John & Mary Lou McCall John & Susan Hennip John Carneval John Harkins John M. Zeppenfeld John, Barb & Jen Kersey Joseph Bellotti Joseph Kelly Joseph Marchini Joshua Hopkins Judson & Theresa Abbey Julie Cella Julie Greissing Julie Myers June Vroman June Ward</p>	<p>Justin & Jaclyn Grubbs Karen Ewings Karen Foust Karen Miller Kate Hiles Kathleen Bastow Kathleen Ducey Kathleen Mae Stenger Kathy Fling Kathy Holler Katrina McDougall Kelly Richter Kenneth Kraut Kenneth Sharrer Kevin & Eileen O' Hare Kevin & Mary Cuneo Lake Erie Tri-State Mopar Club Lane Nelson Laura Domencic Lauren & Brian Sivillo Laurene & Tom Peterman Laurene Bucci Laurie & Tom Callaghan Leah & David Dieteman Linda Payne Lindsay Kopac Lisa & Chuck Jenkins Lisa Syrek Lois Borowy Lori Sobin Lyman Cohen Lynn & Doug Brumagin Lynn Ackermam Lynn Rupp Maria Spagnola Marion & Kenneth Barnes Mark & Diane Lugin Mark & Karen Momeyer Mark & Valerie Rose Mark & Veronica Golden Mark Becker Mark R. Lingenfelter Marlene Trambley Mary Gerber Mary Ita Power Mary Kay Eisert-Wlodarczyk Matt & Marian Wolford Matthew & Catherine Ehrman Matthew & Lydia Wethli Matthew & Tammy Roche Maureen Plunkett Melody Vogel Michael & Paulanne Reske Michael Edwards Michael Martin Michael Micsky Michael Priestes Michael Weber Michele Green Mike & Jane Zavasky Mike & Meg Eisert Mike & Sandy Fetznar Mollie Sweeny Mr. & Mrs. Garrett Antalek Nancy Sherwin Nathan & Nicole Ehrman Nathan Barber Nathan Twichel Nicole Lee Nik Zaphiris Owen McCormick</p>	<p>Pam & Bob Blakely Patricia Bojarski Patricia Lacy Patrick & Courtney Barber Patrick & Nicole Kress Patrick Cuneo Patrick Dugan Patrick McCreary Paul & Susan Corbran Peggy Proba Polly DeDad Rebecca Forster Rebecca Stelter-Turner Rob & Keely Doyle Rob, Breanna & Clara Adams Robert & Bonita Schlaufman Robert Akans Robert Barber Robert Bierre Robert Marz Robert W. Beckere Ron, Lynn & Rebecca Jones Rosalie Tellers Sandra & Robert Heinlein Santosh & Harjit Kang Sarah Lunger Scott & Darlene Morgan Scott Barbato Sean Candela Sharon & Mike Digan Sharon Johnson Sister Rita T. Lynch, Mhsh Slovak National Club Steve & Denise Davis Steve & Kathy Danch Steve & Susan Drabant Steve Groshek Sue Minarich Susan Felice Susan Moczulski Ted Allegretto Terry Lobdell The Carbo Family The Orzel Family Fund Theresa Lipiec Rzepka Theresa Rotunda Thomas Aciri Thomas Fessler Thomas McNamara Thomas Tupitza Tim & Laurie Brugger Tom & Linda Paterniti Tom & Mary Blose Tom & Pat Matson Tom & Pat Pianta Tony & Carol Gilmore Victoria A. Pangratz Virginia G. Boyer Virginia Titus Walter & Donna Skobodzinski William & Stephanie Cox William King William Lenart William Sullivan William Young</p>
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Responding with Care:

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM SUPPORTS CHILDCARE CENTERS AND FAMILIES

A YEAR IN PROGRESS



Contributed photo:
Children from The
Learning Ladder Child
Care Center form a
friendship circle.



Contributed photo: Janessa M.
building blocks.

When challenging behaviors put children at risk of suspension or expulsion from childcare, a Rapid Response Team from Barber Behavioral Health steps in with the support and strategies needed to change the child's trajectory. By providing on-site coaching, modeling positive behavior interventions, and partnering closely with staff and families, the team creates a more inclusive and responsive environment.

The program began in August 2024 through a \$200,000 grant to the Early Learning Resource Center and Barber Behavioral Health to begin a unique partnership – a Rapid Response Team – aimed at reducing suspensions and expulsions of children ages birth to five from Erie County licensed childcare centers.

"The Rapid Response Team has been an incredible resource for both our teachers and our families at the center. While our staff is highly skilled in early childhood education, they aren't specialists in managing intense or challenging behaviors," said Kenya Johnson, owner of The Learning Ladder Early Child Care Center in Erie. "The Rapid Response Team stepped in and changed the game. They provided us with tools we could use right away that were simple, effective strategies that helped our teachers feel more equipped, more confident, and most importantly,

supported. Their impact goes beyond helping individual children – it has transformed how we approach behavior and classroom management overall."

The Rapid Response Team helps identify patterns within daily routines that cause stress or dysregulation for several children. "With their guidance, we made adjustments that improved transitions and created calmer, more positive classroom environments," said Kenya. "One of the most valuable lessons we learned from their visits was the importance of being observant and flexible. Sometimes it takes an outside perspective to notice small details that make a big difference."

Teachers are now rethinking how to transition between activities and introducing new ways to help children "reset". "We've also learned that progress takes time and patience. They reminded us that behavior support isn't one-size-fits-all-what works for one child might look different for another."

The program is provided free to Erie County licensed childcare centers. To access the Rapid Response Team service, families or providers should call Barber Behavioral Health's Care Coordinator at (814) 823-5366 or email rrt@nwirelrc.org.

YEAR-ONE IMPACT STATISTICS

Based on Rapid Response Team referral

Rapid Response Team has served 6 Erie County early learning classrooms since the program's launch and provided center-wide trainings to 3 childcare centers.



Out of 28 children who were facing expulsion from their early learning program have been serviced, 86% have been maintained in their classroom.



Out of 39% of children referred to early intervention services, 100% are now receiving support services.



Out of 32% of children referred to behavioral health services, 100% are now receiving support services.



left him wheelchair bound. Seth was previously the most active in his ESO group and, post-surgeries, was struggling to stand and step for seconds at a time.

His camp counselors shared, "what was once a fun summer experience turned into an anxiety-filled task. Learning to walk comfortably was daunting for Seth, and he often gave up."

Things shifted rather quickly for him as the ESO campers began to attend their new community drumming circle – Barber Beats Unlimited. With the help of Highmark and Opportunities Unlimited of Erie, Barber National Institute began a six-week drumming circle, which included two public performances and many weeks of rhythm and music.

At the first drumming circle, the music filled Seth's ears and brought him unexpectedly to his feet – and a smile to his face - which his family had longed to see.

His sister, Abby, was in tears as she watched Seth drumming and radiating the energy he had lost. Soon, Seth's anxiety and aches were overcome by joy. As the music-filled weeks went on, Seth was standing and walking for longer periods of time.

"As weeks of camp progressed, Seth's abilities grew beyond the imaginable, beating perceived odds. The magic of music began to work and Seth's dream – our dream- was coming true. Seth was standing; he was walking!" said Abby.

At the Barber Beast on the Bay's adapted course this September, Seth navigated the 1-mile course like a champion, surprising his family at the finish line with a jubilant leap from his wheelchair. Seth ran over 40 feet to the finish line!

It was pure magic.

There's something magical that happens at Barber National Institute when an adult or child reaches what seems to be an unattainable dream. That's the case for Seth Sheldon.

Seth, a returning camper at Barber National Institute's Expanding Social Opportunities (ESO) summer camp, is a shining example of a moment of joy turned into magic. Undeniably, magic is a regular occurrence at Barber National Institute as dreams are reached daily - breaking the perceived limitations of individuals who were thought to never speak, walk, or crack a smile.

Returning to ESO summer camp looked and felt very different for Seth this summer. The young man's spirit, once filled with radiant energy and laughter, dimmed as he was faced with physical obstacles encountered in the months leading up to summer camp. After a slew of emergency medical procedures and surgeries, Seth's aches, often unbearable, frequently

BARNHART TRANSPORTATION DRIVES INCLUSION WITH SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT



Pat enjoys cutting grass at Barnhart Transportation.



Pat (left) meets with Barnhart Transportation supervisor Sueann Wiest (right) to review his list of daily responsibilities.



Job Coach Gina Carter meets with Patrick one last time before he begins working independently.

At Barber National Institute, supported employment is more than just a program – it's a cornerstone of our mission to help individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism build meaningful, self-directed lives. By partnering with local employers, we create pathways to competitive, community-based jobs where people can contribute their skills, gain independence, and increase their confidence.

When Patrick (Pat) first joined Barnhart Transportation through Barber National Institute's supported employment program, he brought with him a desire to learn and a determination to succeed. With guidance from his job coach and the Barnhart team, Pat quickly demonstrated his reliability and enthusiasm.

What makes Pat's story especially powerful is Barnhart Transportation's commitment to inclusion. "We have six core values here, one of those being supporting others. That's how we approached this relationship. Hiring someone with an intellectual disability is something we've wanted to do for a long time. So, it was more about Pat, than it was about us," said Sueann Wiest, Barnhart Transportation senior vice president of sales and marketing. "We wanted Pat to be successful in the role. Instead of expecting Pat to adapt to the job, we adapted the position to align with his strengths."

By focusing on a person's abilities rather than limitations, and by adapting roles to fit individual strengths, businesses can unlock untapped potential and improve their own operations. "For us, this is a win. This was a position that was extremely hard to fill; in fact, we were outsourcing. But through the partnership with Barber, Pat has really opened our eyes to the possibility of this untapped workforce. I would encourage any employer to think outside the box and look at tasks within the organization that you think could be done through a vocational support program," said Sueann.

Speaking with Pat reveals not just the details of his day-to-day responsibilities but also the personal impact of feeling valued and included. Today, Pat is working independently at Barnhart, having successfully completed the supported employment program requirements.

"There's plenty to do to keep me busy. I'm always doing something different. I especially enjoy the repetition of mowing. I like to be outside. It's nice to be able to see something you're accomplishing," said Pat. "Working with the job coach was helpful in the beginning. It was nice to have someone to help me sort through it all. **It's good to get to the point where I am now working independently. I've made friends here.**"

Pat's journey showcases how investing in inclusive employment practices pays off – for individuals, for businesses, and for the community.



October was National Disability Employment Awareness month, an annual recognition of the positive impact of people with disabilities in the American workforce. This yearly event began in 1945 as a weeklong national observance of the contributions of people with physical disabilities. In 1988, Congress designated the commemoration, which then evolved to acknowledge the importance of increasing opportunities for people with disabilities, including those with mental health conditions, and other nonobvious disabilities, in the workforce.

Barber National Institute **FAST FACTS:**

82

supported employment participants

94

supported employment graduates
in 2024

60

business partners

If your business is interested in learning more about supported employment opportunities in our service area, contact Ron Jones, at (814) 453-7661.

Barber National Institute Earns “Select Tier” Status in Performance-Based Contracting

Brian (left) joins his Lifesharing provider Steve Howell (right) in taking their dog for a walk.



Our commitment to high-quality, person-centered services has propelled Barber National Institute into the Select Tier of Pennsylvania’s residential services performance-based contracting model- just one of 23 providers to meet these demanding requirements.

“This recognition was not given- it was earned. Through our collective commitment to excellence, we demonstrated that Barber National Institute meets standards in quality, accountability, and person-centered service,” said Patrick Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president. “The Select Tier reflects our success in meeting rigorous benchmarks and quality initiatives established by the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP). This achievement is a direct result of the dedication, professionalism, and compassion our team brings to our mission every day. It affirms that the work we do is not only making a difference but setting a standard for others across the state.”

Barber National Institute will continue building on this achievement by providing ongoing training and learning opportunities for staff. These initiatives are designed to ensure the organization maintains the high standards required by the Select Tier designation, while supporting continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery.

“We are committed to equipping our team with the knowledge and tools needed to consistently meet these performance benchmarks and deliver exceptional, person-centered services, and support,” said Patrick.



Andrew and Courtney Doyle and daughters Sawyer (left) and Reagan (right) are active in supporting local nonprofits.



Deb Hollibaugh (sitting) and Brittney Heath, direct support professional (standing), show their appreciation outside of their home.

Courtney and Andrew Doyle, chair couple of the 2025 Barber Ball, invite you to step into a night filled with vibrant color, lively music, scrumptious bites, dancing, and festive cheer as we, together, celebrate the colorful impact we make for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and autism throughout Pennsylvania.

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

“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,” said Courtney. “Dr. Barber’s dream of a good life for all children and adults has been brought to reality through the love and dedication of parents, staff, volunteers, advocates, donors, and community and government leaders.”

The Barber Ball is a signature fundraising event for Barber National Institute and this year proceeds will be directed to the \$1M *Strengthening Foundations* home renovation campaign which is investing in adaptations to 92 community homes throughout Pennsylvania.

“We’re proud to stand behind such a meaningful mission and to bring together friends and family in celebration of it,” said Andrew. “As the individuals served by Barber National Institute grow older, the improvements to their homes make it possible for them to remain in their homes and neighborhoods they know and love, surrounded by trusted caregivers and friends. Your attendance at this year’s Barber Ball, or a direct donation, is our heartfelt invitation to join us in making dreams come true.”



A Colorful Christmas BARBER BALL

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2025
\$100 PER PERSON

8 p.m.-Midnight • Doors open at 7 p.m.
Bayfront Convention Center • One Sassafras Pier, Erie
Complimentary Valet Parking • Black Tie Optional

Please Join Us!

NO NEED FOR A
FORMAL INVITATION.

Enjoy lively music from Stiletto Fire, a dance and show band from Detroit, Michigan, and entertainment by DJ Tony B.

Take your pick from delicious hors d'oeuvres, tasty desserts, soft drinks, and two cocktails per person. Cash bar available. The Convention Center is cashless.



Specialized overnight packages are available for Christmas Ball guests. Contact the Sheraton Erie Bayfront Hotel (814) 454-2005 by Dec. 6 for reservations.



BARBER BALL
RESERVATIONS
& SPONSORSHIP
OPPORTUNITIES

VISIT BARBERINSTITUTE.ORG/BALL

THANK YOU 2025 SPONSORS

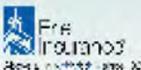
DIAMOND

JOHN & SUE (UPPER) DE
BOBERT BOGDES & LINDSEY DE
PAUL & JILL (UPPER) DE
GARY & HELEN (UPPER) DE
STEVE & TERESA (UPPER) DE
JOSHUA & KIM (UPPER) DE
in memory of the DeBarts of Barber

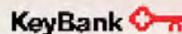
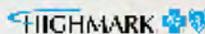
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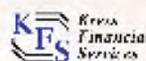
GOLD



PAUL & BILL
GOLDSTEIN



EMERALD



GARNET

PETER S
AUSTIN



MARTIN
LEBEU



TIMOTHY
LIEBMAN



MARY TIA POWER &
RYAN MUSATTO

DR. & MRS.
THOMAS A. WETZMAN

AS OF 10.30.2025

Brown Side of Autism

Two brothers telling their truth from the inside out



Brothers Daniel (left) and David (right) Gillespie stop for a photo at Barber National Institute.

Two brothers- David (28) and Daniel (25) – began an original blog, *Brown Side of Autism*, in June 2025 to “tell our truth from the inside out”.

“We didn’t always have the words for what we are feeling. Growing up autistic and Black wasn’t something people explained to us. It was something we lived. Something we navigated. Something we survived,” said David. “This blog isn’t here to ‘raise awareness’ in the way most people expect. We’re not here to check boxes or play into stereotypes. This is about real stories –the kind you don’t see on TV or read in pamphlets. The kind that sits in your chest long after the moment is over.”

Taking inspiration from a childhood where they felt they were treated differently in school and social groups, the brothers took to their corner of the internet to share stories to help others feel seen and give voice to having autism.

In a September post, Daniel writes, “Autism isn’t a bad thing. Instead of asking, ‘How we prevent autism?’ the question should be, ‘How can we make life better for autistic people who are already here?’ That’s where progress lies. Prevention frames us as a problem. Support, inclusion, and respect frame us as people.”

The name of the blog, *Brown Side of Autism*, shows a side of autism that is not highlighted by mainstream media. “We wanted to focus on autism from a Black perspective. One of the things that we wanted to talk about is when people say, ‘you don’t look autistic’. Autism doesn’t have a specific look or behaviors,” continued Daniel. “When people hear autism, they usually picture a white child. Rarely someone who looks like me or my brother.”

The brothers use the safe space of their blog and their identity as Black men with autism to write about their true selves. “Everything I write is my true self. By writing my daily life experiences, I’m giving a voice to the voiceless. I know there is another 28-year-old man or woman with autism reading my words. That inspires me,” said David. “There’s no better way to tell my story. By having this platform, it allows me to be more vulnerable, open, and honest. God made no mistakes with us. My autism isn’t brokenness. It’s part of my design.”

By sharing their candid stories and experiences, the blog challenges myths and invites readers to see autism through a more accurate, inclusive lens.

Brown Side of Autism is the brothers' space to talk about the moments they were misunderstood, the times they were deeply loved, the days they felt broken, and what it means to exist at the intersection of race, disability, and resilience.

“Autism is diverse. Autism is different,” concludes Daniel.



Contributed Photo: David (left), Daniel (right) and mother Ebony

Subscribe & Follow
**BROWN SIDE
OF AUTISM**



EDITOR'S NOTE: Daniel attended Barber National Institute's inclusive preschool and early intervention programs through the Elizabeth Lee Black School. The brothers' journey is a testament to resilience and community support, illustrating that with the right encouragement, individuals with autism can thrive and shine in their own extraordinary ways. Both men live and work in Erie, PA.

Connecting through Cooking

Jessica Barley (left), Paula Blough (center), and Kelli Wood (right) bake pumpkin pies at cooking club.



There's something universal about food: the way it sparks conversation, evokes memories, and brings people together. For the members of the adult cooking club at Barber National Institute's Somerset adult day services, they are preparing more than meals, they are connecting, collaborating, and sharing in the joy of creating something delicious.

Jennifer Miller, direct support professional in Somerset, leads the club. "For the cooking club, the adults tell me about different recipes they would like to prepare. We then make a list of what ingredients we need before heading to the store together," said Jennifer. "When we plan what we are making, the adults get to

help with the decision and agree on the menu. When we go and get the groceries, they are interacting with the community, budgeting for what we need, locating items in the store, and checking them off the list."

When cooking or baking, lessons on proper handwashing, setting the table, kitchen cleanliness, appliance safety, and food preparation are on the menu. "This helps them become more independent. They go home and tell their families and friends about what they made, and this makes them feel good about themselves. Some of them live alone so this helps them so that they do not have to rely solely on prepackaged frozen foods."

After praying over the meal together, the adults enjoy conversation together.



Founder's Day Celebrates DR. GERTRUDE BARBER'S LEGACY



Bedford



Bridgeville



Corry



Erie



Somerset



Warren



Philadelphia

Employees, adults, and children across Barber National Institute's campuses celebrated the legacy of our late founder, Dr. Gertrude Barber, on Thursday, Sept. 18 and Friday, Sept. 19. We marked this occasion in celebration of her birthday which was Sept. 16. Our Barber team celebrated with music, games, art, sweet treats, and friendship.

"Dr. Barber showed what's possible when one person dares to believe in others –and that legacy lives on in all we do," said Robert Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president.

Beautiful Appliances, Beautiful Impact

Inside the Elizabeth Lee Black School's adapted kitchen where students learn independence using Drew Barrymore's BEAUTIFUL® appliances



John whips up a tasty treat using the mixer.



Trevor uses the air fryer to make french fries.



Using the mixer in the kitchen.



Using the air fryer in the kitchen.

Beautiful®

You can help us bring this story to national attention! We know that social media has the power to reach people who care- including celebrity Drew Barrymore. We're asking for readers to join us in tagging @DrewBarrymore, @DrewBarrymoreShow, and using the hashtags like #BeautifulImpact and #DrewBarrymoreShow when sharing this article or posting about the adapted kitchen. Every comment, like, and share increases the chance that Drew and her producers will see how much this story matters.

Together we can shine a national spotlight on the incredible Elizabeth Lee Black School students and the "BEAUTIFUL" kitchen that's changing lives.

One of the Elizabeth Lee Black School's most groundbreaking initiatives is an adaptive kitchen, a fully accessible culinary learning space, filled almost exclusively with small appliances from the Beautiful® by Drew line.

While these appliances were formulated by Drew Barrymore to fit the ergonomic needs of a woman, they also feature adaptations that accommodate the student's varying abilities.

"Many of these appliances yield a large topple free base, allowing students to pull on them without moving the appliance or injuring themselves. All touchpoints are highlighted in gold, guiding them to learn appliance safety," said Cindy Priester, Barber National Institute director of children and youth. "The appliances are easy to use with simple instruction aiding student's comprehension. And the ergonomic handles fit comfortably in the student's hand regardless of their fine motor skills."

This forward-thinking space opened earlier this year with funding from the Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust and proceeds from Barber National Institute's 2024 Ladies Only Luncheon. The space is designed to equip students with critical life skills such as safe food handling, proper hygiene, and hands-on cooking techniques.

"It's not just a kitchen - it's a gateway to independence, confidence, and community inclusion. Imagine students learning to sort kitchen utensils, master basic appliances, and prepare nutritious meals -all while cultivating a lifelong curiosity and love of cooking," said Cindy. "The learning curriculum was implemented with the goal of transitioning skills to home. The first sessions begin with foundation skills not limited to- filling a cup of water to drink, identifying items in the kitchen, and proper hygiene techniques. These skills eventually grew into preparing simple meals. Over the last school year, the success of students in the kitchen has been incredible- and we have found this to be one of our most successful programs to date."

BARBER BEAST CROSSES FINISH LINE



For more than a decade, athletes, thrill-seekers and everyday people from all corners of the globe flocked to the beaches of Presque Isle State Park on the second Saturday in September with one goal in mind: Beat the Beast. Now, after 12 years of putting participants through the ringer, Barber Beast on the Bay has closed the book on its final chapter.

What began in 2013 with around 750 participants and multiple courses of varying length quickly evolved into a staple for the Erie community as the region's largest obstacle course race. This year – for the Final Obstacle – the Beast welcomed a record-breaking 1,556 participants to the 10-mile course.

Runners from four countries and 28 states raced to the finish beginning at Presque Isle's Beach 11 on Saturday, Sept. 6. While they had to contend with the usual 10 miles of swamp, sand and trails, there were also a few surprises spread over the peninsula.



In addition to the 30 natural and manmade obstacles, multiple bonus obstacles from past events were sprinkled on the route to the finish line and offered an extra challenge to those with energy to spare. After each completed obstacle, participants were spurred forward by volunteers, a handful of community Cheer Zones, and numerous spectators that scattered the beach.

After reaching the finish line, athletes were awarded a commemorative medal, cold beer, and more as they celebrated beating the Beast one last time. The 10-mile course concluded shortly before 3 p.m. when the final participant crossed the finish line to exuberant cheers, applause and a few tears.



Inside Waldameer, the adapted course also had a record-breaking year with over 116 adults and children with physical and intellectual disabilities in attendance to take on their own challenge. Participants took on 18 obstacles over one-and-a-half miles of fun before joining up with 10-mile participants as they crossed the finish line together.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OVER THE PAST 12 YEARS! WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR THE ENTHUSIASM AND GENEROSITY OF OUR PARTICIPANTS, SPONSORS, AND VOLUNTEERS.

BARBER BEAST ON THE BAY

FUN FACTS

10,930 PEOPLE HAVE BEAT THE BEAST OVER THE LAST 12 YEARS



Participants in **10 COUNTRIES** have beat the Beast – Austria, Canada, China, Algeria, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Panama, and the United States



Participants have registered from **41 STATES**, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

The only states to never have a participant are Iowa, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Vermont

Thanks to our participants and sponsors, the Beast has raised nearly

\$1 MILLION

for the children and adults of Barber National Institute



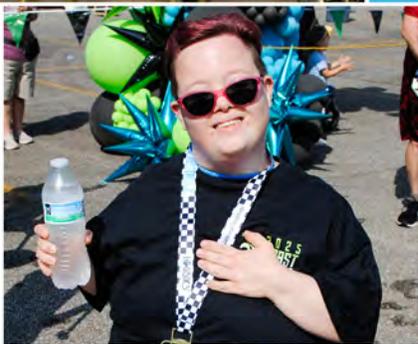
"THIS EVENT IS AMAZING. I'VE PLANNED FUNDRAISERS FOR A LONG TIME AND HAVE ALWAYS ADMIRED THIS ONE. IT'S FLAWLESS."



"I'M VERY SAD THIS WAS THE LAST BEAST, I MOVED TO ERIE 4 YRS AGO AND JOINED A TEAM TO MEET PEOPLE. DOING THIS RACE IN MEMORY OF NOAH AS PART OF THE LITTLE ENGINES THAT CAN MEANS SO MUCH TO ME."



"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SUCH AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE. FAVORITE RACE, RUN, EXERCISE I'VE EVER DONE."



"THIS IS A UNIQUE EVENT THAT PEOPLE LOOK FORWARD TO AND LOVE. THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL THE WORK OF DOING IT FOR ALL THESE YEARS. IT WILL BE MISSED."



"I LOVED IT! MY GROUP HAS A GREAT TIME, EVERYTHING WAS EXTREMELY WELL ORGANIZED, THE WAVE POOL AT THE END WAS A NICE TOUCH, IT WAS AWESOME HOW THE LOCAL UNIVERSITIES GOT INVOLVED, THE COURSE LAYOUT WAS AWESOME BECAUSE YOU GOT TO EXPERIENCE EVERYTHING THAT PRESQUE ISLE HAS TO OFFER."



"TRULY GOING TO MISS THIS RACE. FOUND THIS RACE ON FACEBOOK IN 2024 AND FELL IN LOVE WITH IT. THIS RACE TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT MYSELF. I'M TRULY GRATEFUL FOR MY EXPERIENCE ON THIS COURSE AND WILL MISS IT VERY MUCH."



"MY SISTER AND I DISCUSSED HOW OFTEN PEOPLE CAN SEEM SO DIFFERENT AND DIVIDED, BUT YOU PUT THEM ALL IN RUNNING GEAR ON AN OBSTACLE COURSE AND WE ALL HAVE AT LEAST ONE THING IN COMMON - BEATING THE BEAST!"

Around BARBER NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Team Milestones of Service



Our staff are the heart of our mission- their dedication, compassion, and expertise drive our daily impact. Recently, we marked incredible milestones in service to Barber National Institute, adults, children, and families across Pennsylvania.

Congratulations!

Bonnie Johnson, paraeducator in the Elizabeth Lee Black School, who works in an off-site classroom at



General McLane Elementary School, celebrated 40 years of service in September.

Cheryl Fisher, administrative assistant in the Elizabeth Lee Black School, also celebrated 40 years of service in September.



James "Jimmy" Zalewski, direct support professional in Erie adult day services, celebrated 45 years of service in August.



Bundling Firewood SPARKS EMPLOYMENT

Just down the road from Barber National Institute's Bedford Adult Day Services, is family-owned Friendship Village Campground & RV Park with sprawling acres of greenspace and scenic ponds.

"Friendship Village is a favorite outdoor excursion for the adults in Bedford," said Kayla Karns, Barber National Institute operations supervisor in Bedford. "Our casual walks have led to a great employment opportunity for our adults."

Through Barber National Institute's light production and assembly program, the adults bundle firewood for sale in the camp store and earn compensation for each completed bundle.

"The individuals stack and wrap 12 to 15 pieces of firewood on a tool and then wrap the stack together with plastic," said Kayla. "Before we started bundling the wood, it was just put into a building and then the customer had to hand pick pieces which made it tedious for the customer."

Kayla concludes, "Not only are they earning a paycheck, but this is also a moment of pride seeing their finished product when possibly camping with family and friends – knowing they had a hand in the process."



Bridget Barber, Barber National Institute vice president of strategic initiatives and external affairs, was honored as one of the Distinguished Alumni who represent the very best of Gannon University and Villa Maria College.



Michelle Schrimper from PNC Grow Up Great stopped by the Elizabeth Lee Black School with teacher survival kits for our Pre-K educators.



When in doubt, dance it out! Adults in Erie's adult day services freestyled their favorite moves.



Barber Beats Unlimited led a community drumming circle and played their hearts out at UPMC's grand opening of their Neighborhood Center in Erie.



During national Direct Support Professional Recognition Week in September, adults showed their appreciation for their staff's dedication and support in making their dreams come true.



Color us happy! Adults in Girard's adult day services tie-dyed their own tote bags. What a fun way to make some wearable art!



Adults in Club Erie volunteered at a local community garden this summer. They were guests at a fall harvest and garden party hosted by the Bayfront Eastside Task Force.

BARBER SPIRIT

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LEARN MORE & SAVE-THE-DATES!

BARBERINSTITUTE.ORG/EVENTS

Many sponsorship levels are available to support these fundraisers and the mission of the Barber National Institute. For more information, contact:

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Upcoming Events

BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL

Saturday, December 13, 2025 • Bayfront Convention Center

ADULT SERVICES CHRISTMAS DANCE

(funded in part by donors to the Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation)

Sunday, December 14, 2025 • Bayfront Convention Center

SHILLELAGH GOLF TOURNAMENT

June 18, 2026 • Whispering Woods Golf Course

ERIE GIVES DAY

Tuesday, August 11, 2026

LADIES ONLY LUNCHEON

Saturday, November 21, 2026 • Kahkwa Club



Barber National Institute

Making dreams come true.