

B A R B E R

MARCH 2026

SPIRIT

DONOR EDITION



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING! MARCH IS DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH. MORE DETAILS ON PAGE 3.



Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.



Volunteer and donor Robert Brabender, Esq. and his wife Jan attend the opening of the Founder's Room.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

March marks Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, a time when we celebrate the abilities, achievements, and diverse contributions of the adults, children, and families we are privileged to support. It also is a moment to reflect on something essential to our mission: that opportunity does not happen by accident. It happens because a community cares deeply enough to make it possible.

Every day, I am reminded that the programs, therapies, and services that help children and adults reach their full potential exist because of the extraordinary generosity of our donors. Their belief in what is possible fuels our ability to innovate, expand, and ensure that every individual, no matter their challenges, is the star of their story.

Awareness and philanthropy are profoundly interconnected. Awareness sparks understanding. Understanding inspires engagement. And engagement leads to the kind of giving of time, resources, and heart that strengthens our programs and makes dreams come true.

This month, as we highlight the many accomplishments of those we serve, we also honor the donors who make those accomplishments attainable.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in the individuals we support, and for helping us continue Dr. Gertrude Barber's enduring vision: a world where people of all abilities belong and reach their full potential.

John J. Barber
President & Chief Executive Officer



Representatives from the Kids-N-Hope Foundation present a check for \$1,500 to our Philadelphia campus.



Pictured left to right: Kerry, Ryan, and Rebecca plant flowers at our Corry campus.

Our Mission Statement

We are guided by compassion, innovation, and an unshakable belief in human potential. We work every day to help make dreams come true for people of all abilities.

CELEBRATE
*Developmental
Disabilities*
AWARENESS MONTH



Join us this March to celebrate the incredible strengths and talents of those we serve and acknowledge the families, caregivers, and professionals who dedicate themselves to providing support and encouragement.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT: HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY AWARENESS

The roots of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month can be traced back to 1987 when President Ronald Reagan first declared March as a month to raise awareness about including people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life. It also highlights the difficulties that people with disabilities still face in fitting into the communities in which they live.

“The general public can support disability awareness by fostering inclusion, educating themselves on disability rights and advocating for accessibility in their communities,” said Robert Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president. “Simple actions such as using respectful language, listening to the experiences of individuals with disabilities, and challenging stereotypes can make a significant difference.”

Supporting businesses and organizations that prioritize accessibility, attending disability awareness events, and promoting inclusive policies in workplaces and in schools also help create a more equitable society.

“By actively engaging in conversations and standing up for the rights of people with disabilities, everyone can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive world,” said Barber.

TIPS FOR ADVOCACY

- **Educate yourself** – knowledge is the foundation of strong advocacy
- **Use your voice** – share personal stories and real-life examples
- **Engage with legislators** – contact state, local, and national legislators to support policies that protect and enhance the rights of individuals with disabilities
- **Promote accessibility** – advocate for accessible spaces, transportation, and technology
- **Be an ally** – listen and uplift the voices of individuals with disabilities

“ADVOCACY TAKES TIME AND CHANGE DOESN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. KEEP PUSHING FOR PROGRESS EVEN WHEN CHALLENGES ARISE.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS: DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH ART EXHIBIT - Featuring original works from Erie and Warren adult services and Elizabeth Lee Black School students

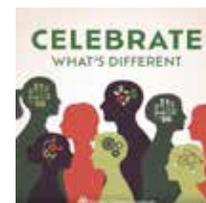
- March 2-March 31
- Monday-Wednesday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Erie Arts & Culture, 419 State Street, Second Floor, Erie (elevator available)

EDUCATIONAL DISPLAY

- March 1-March 31
- Blasco Memorial Library, 160 East Front Street, Main Floor, Erie
- *free commemorative bookmark while supplies last at the circulation desk

CELEBRATE WHAT'S DIFFERENT PODCAST - Why do certain words make a comeback, and why does it matter?

- This episode explores the resurfacing of an old, harmful word – retard- often slipped into jokes, memes, or comments on social media. We explore why certain words make a comeback and why it matters.



Stream on demand and subscribe on Spotify



ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsored by Erie Arts & Culture, Warren Gives, Highmark, and donors to the Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation

This is BNI: Refreshed Vision and Mission Guide Our Future



Our vision and mission statements have always guided the work we do. They are a living commitment to you and those we serve.

In 2025, we began a year-long planning process which included extensive time evaluating and discussing each element of our brand, including our vision and mission statements, guiding philosophy, and corporate values to evaluate how well they reflect who we are today and who we aspire to become.

“This reflection allowed us to identify areas where language could better capture our purpose, inspire action, and align with the evolving needs of the individuals and families we serve,” said Robert Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president. “We have refreshed our vision and mission statements to reflect both our proud legacy and our commitment to the future.”

Our refreshed vision and mission are more than statements; they define who we are, why we exist, what we believe, and what we are working toward. They set a foundation for our culture and guide our decisions. With this renewed clarity, we move forward, together, honoring our legacy and embracing our future.

Both statements have been simplified and include aspirational and powerful word selections. The reference to “people of all abilities” is inclusive and reinforces our founder Dr. Gertrude Barber’s words, “your child is welcome here.” This approach ensures that our words remain relevant as terminology and diagnoses change over time.



Mission, Values, and Vision
Visit barbernationalinstitute.org



Vision Statement: We believe in a world where people of all abilities belong and reach their full potential.

Mission Statement: We are guided by compassion, innovation, and an unshakeable belief in human potential. We work every day to help make dreams come true for people of all abilities.

Corporate Values:

- Respect for All People
- Integrity
- Quality and Excellence
- Teamwork
- Compassion
- Informed Decision Making

Guiding Philosophy: We believe all individuals are people of God with feelings, emotions, needs, and capabilities unique to these persons and their heritage. We are guided by the enduring values of faith, hope, and love, which shape our relationships, inspire our work, and sustain our belief in the potential of every individual. We believe that greatness is achieved through continuous learning and a deep commitment to those we serve and to one another. Our staff are the heart of our mission- their dedication, compassion, and skills drive our daily impact. We strive for continued quality improvement and seek to enhance the forward-thinking culture of excellence as our professionals practice at the highest level of expertise.



Tim (left) gets ready to water the garden at his home. He's pictured here with Laura Herbstritt, a Lifesharing provider family member.

NAVIGATING RESOURCES:

A Guide for Families and Individuals

THESE RECOMMENDATIONS CAN HELP FAMILIES MANAGE THIS PROCESS MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Family-Centered Care

Engaging families in the care process is crucial. Providing training and education to help caregivers understand the diagnosis, manage behaviors, and access community resources is essential. As the child approaches adulthood, guidance on supporting employment, independent living skills, and social inclusion is important. Transition planning should start in the elementary years, not at 21.

Support Groups and Peer Networks

Facilitating the creation of family support groups or peer networks can help families share experiences, reduce isolation, and enhance their advocacy abilities.

Respite Care and Mental Health Support

Families often experience high levels of stress. Identifying respite care services and mental health support for family members can help reduce caregiver burnout.

Inclusive Safety Plans

Individuals with disabilities should be included in the safety plans. Promoting an inclusive environment fosters a sense of belonging and security.

Holistic Family Support

Healthy family functioning is important. Practitioners need to support the needs of the entire family, not just the child with a disability. This includes addressing the added demands on time, emotional resources, and financial resources.

For families dealing with the challenges of intellectual and developmental disabilities, Pennsylvania provides a variety of services, and resources. However, the availability, quality, and suitability of these services can differ significantly, making it difficult to find the perfect fit for each family's specific needs.

HERE ARE FIVE GOVERNMENT-BACKED RESOURCES THAT OFFER VALUABLE INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE:

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS)

Learn about state-supported programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities, including Medicaid Waivers and eligibility requirements.

Office of Developmental Programs (ODP)

Access training, policies, and other resources to understand the available services and supports in Pennsylvania.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

Explore federal programs that provide funding and guidance for in-home and community-based services.

Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP)

Gain support from a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities in Pennsylvania.

Social Security Administration (SSA)

Learn about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits for individuals with disabilities.

By working as a team—families, caregivers, practitioners, and community members—we can build a supportive and effective process that ensures success for everyone navigating the system. Let's collaborate, share our experiences, and support each other to create a brighter future for children & adults with disabilities and their families.



Ellen enjoys the Pittsburgh skyline.

ON HER TERMS



Diane returns from a trip to visit family.

Opening *the* Door

Living at Barber National Institute has opened the door for Ellen to lead an independent and vibrant life. With access to a wide range of programs and services that help her grow, make choices, and participate fully in the community, she thrives in an environment designed for her success. Just as important, she is surrounded by a dedicated team of staff who not only support her but truly adore her.

“Ellen’s life is a vibrant tapestry of experiences and connections, thanks to her involvement in community-based programs and activities that keep her engaged and fulfilled,” said Traci Gardner, Barber National Institute regional director in Pittsburgh. “Before living with us, she was far less involved in the community.”

Ellen lives in a community home in Pittsburgh and participates in Special Olympics, Theatre of the Arts, and ice-skating competitions. She contributes as part of a cleaning staff, enjoys “Time of Your Life” vacations, attends camps, and travels out of state for family functions.

“These activities are more than hobbies; they are opportunities for her to connect, grow, and thrive,” said Traci. “In fact, her desire for more meaningful engagement was one of the reasons she left her previous provider. Without these opportunities, she would not feel as fulfilled or happy as she does today. Anywhere she goes, she knows someone from her activities—a clear sign that she is truly part of her community. This sense of belonging is invaluable.”

Ellen’s story reminds us that community engagement is essential for quality of life. It’s about more than activities. It’s about dignity, purpose, and belonging.

“I am happy and I love meeting new friends. I do not like to sit around the house,” said Ellen. “I like to be free.”

For Diane, life at Barber National Institute isn’t just about receiving support but living each day on her own terms. Surrounded by caring professionals who know her well and cheer her on, she’s able to pursue her routines, responsibilities, and interests with remarkable independence.

Diane is an example of how staying engaged can transform lives. A resident of a community home in Erie, she loves going out to eat, shopping, taking trips, staying in hotels, and camping. These activities keep her connected to the world around her and bring joy to her everyday life.

“Before embracing these experiences, Diane’s life was much quieter—she typically stayed at home and watched TV. Without these opportunities, her mobility would have declined; depression could have set in, and negative behaviors might have emerged,” said Amy Amidon, Barber National Institute director of residential services in Erie. “Instead, she thrives. She enjoys ordering her own meals at restaurants, picking out clothes, smiling at strangers, and meeting new people. These simple, yet meaningful interactions give her a sense of independence and happiness.”

Programs that promote community participation are essential because they offer experiences that institutional settings often cannot. Community engagement isn’t just about activities; it’s about dignity, joy, and quality of life.

“I enjoy going to the senior center and relaxing with housemates,” said Diane. “My favorite part is going to dances with my staff.”

Spirit of Dedication



Congratulations, Rebbie on celebrating 20 years of service!

EMPLOYEE MILESTONES

45 YEARS

Susan Thompson
James Zalewski

40 YEARS

Cheryl Fisher
Kathi Gourley
Bonnie Johnson
Kevin Lingenfelter
Michael Palermo

35 YEARS

Jean Gardiner
Traci Gardner

30 YEARS

Cecilia Pumbo
Patricia Pratt
Michelle Roberts
John Ropelewski
Denise Santi

25 YEARS

Bridget Barber
Sylvester Blango
Abu Dabo
Lorraine Eggleston
Thomas Egloff
Renetta Evans
Jonathan Finke
Judith Frazier
Valerie Futrell
Joshua Johnson
Nikolay Melnik
Ernest Muscella
Charles Schwartz
Christine Stoker
Gregory Stubits
Daniel Vrenna
Thomasine Widener

20 YEARS

Larry Blum
Maria Brown
Denise Hilliard
Jill Hosack
Rebecca Klanchar
Jamie Laseck
Pamela Lockwood
Rebbie Samuel
Anthony Sherrill
Holly Swope

As we recognize **Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month**, it is fitting to highlight the team members whose dedication brings our mission to life every day. Among them is Rebbie Samuel, who celebrated an extraordinary milestone this past fall: 20 years of service. For Rebbie, the answer to what has kept her committed for two decades is simple and deeply felt: “Dr. Barber’s mission has kept me committed. I believe in it, and I look forward to continuing to be a part of it.”

When asked how our mission of helping individuals achieve their dreams influences her approach to her work, Rebbie shared that it guides every interaction and decision she makes. Knowing that she plays a role in making dreams come true motivates her to give her very best, day after day.

Although Rebbie is quick to describe herself as someone who prefers to be “behind the scenes,” her impact has been anything but quiet. She has been a steady, dedicated presence through years of change and growth, always focused on supporting the team and ensuring the highest standard of care. She laughs about being nervous during interviews, noting that she’s more accustomed to stepping up during moments like state inspections than being in the spotlight herself, another reflection of her humility and commitment.

As we honor Rebbie’s 20 years of service, we also celebrate the spirit of dedication she embodies and one that reflects the very heart of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Rebbie’s steadfast belief in the mission and her daily work to advance it reminds us that the team behind the programs are what make our work truly exceptional.



Staff gather to celebrate service milestones during a luncheon at our Erie campus.



Cindy Priester, retired, smiles at graduation.



Bridget Barber (left) receives the Gannon University Alumni Award.



Karina (center) is congratulated on her service milestone.



James “Jimmy” Zalewski celebrates 45 years on his decorated forklift.

A Tradition of Giving: **The Frank Varischetti Foundation Supports Barber National Institute**

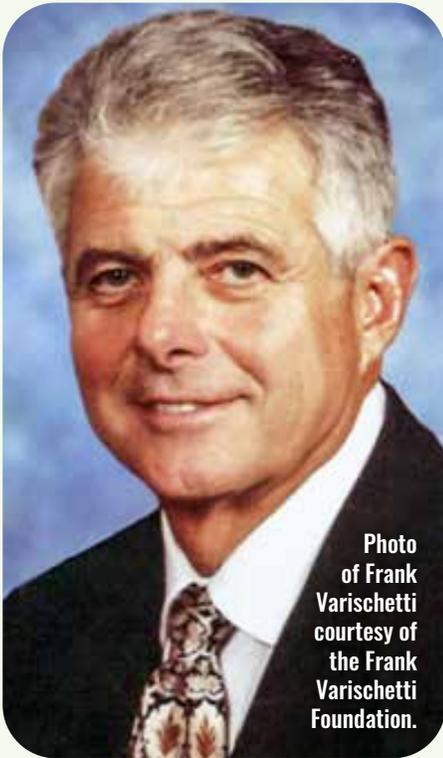


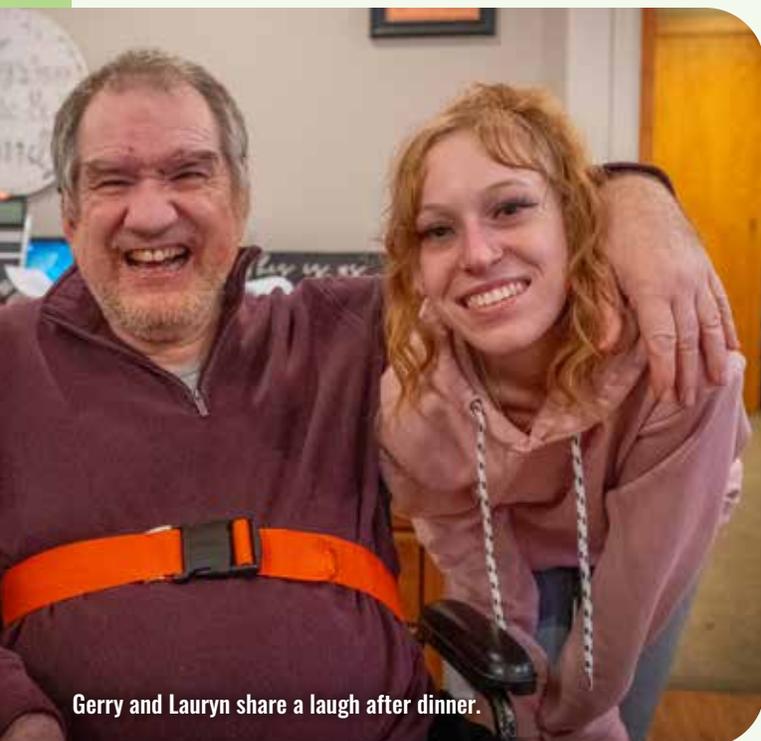
Photo
of Frank
Varischetti
courtesy of
the Frank
Varischetti
Foundation.

This past December, we were honored to be selected as a recipient of **The Frank Varischetti Foundation's** annual Christmas giving initiative.

For decades, the Varischetti family has recognized the impact of Barber National Institute across Pennsylvania. Our programs, services, and mission have long resonated with their family's values. The Foundation, established to honor the enduring legacy of Frank Varischetti, continues his life's work of supporting organizations that make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. When considering how best to direct this year's holiday giving, the Foundation's board saw a natural alignment with our mission and values.

"Community giving lies at the heart of the Foundation's ethos," shared board member Peter C. Varischetti, one of Frank's four sons. "Barber National Institute not only embraces this principle but exemplifies it through its profound and lasting service to others."

Frank Varischetti was known for living by the motto: "Dream big, work hard, and have fun." His philosophy continues to shape the Foundation's philanthropic priorities today. Much like Frank, an innovator who turned ideas into action, the Foundation supports initiatives that produce direct, positive change in communities. One powerful example of this spirit was the Foundation's decision to help establish a trauma center at their local hospital, a project they knew would have far-reaching impact and reflected Frank's deep compassion and generosity.



Gerry and Lauryn share a laugh after dinner.

The Foundation hopes its contribution will enhance the lives of the children, adults, and families we serve every day. "Given the many outstanding programs provided by Barber National Institute, we are confident that our donation will have a meaningful benefit," said board member Nick Varischetti, Peter's brother.

When asked what made us stand out among the many causes they support, the Foundation emphasized the breadth and quality of our services. They recognized our long-standing dedication to compassion, service, and the belief that every individual deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Varischetti brothers also offered a message to other donors: "We hope others will recognize the importance of supporting individuals with disabilities and behavioral health needs, ensuring they have the resources and opportunities necessary to prosper in all aspects of life."

We extend our deepest gratitude to The Frank Varischetti Foundation for their generosity, their trust in our mission, and their continued commitment to strengthening communities.



The Presque Isle Downs & Casino team drops off donated food items to the Elizabeth Lee Black School.

PRESQUE ISLE DOWNS & CASINO HELPS STUDENTS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

According to Feeding America, approximately 22 percent of Erie County’s children are food insecure –that’s 1 in 8 children. Some of the Barber National Institute’s Elizabeth Lee Black School (ELBS) families often face significant financial challenges due to the high cost of specialized care, adaptive equipment, and ongoing medical care. In addition to these expenses, many children require special diets or medically prescribed foods that are more expensive and harder to obtain. These circumstances place heavy financial burdens on families.

School-level income data reports that 75 percent of enrolled ELBS students meet or exceed federal poverty guidelines. While ELBS participates in the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) to provide school meals and snacks during the school day, CACFP does not fund meals during weekends, holidays, or other critical out-of-school times. This leaves a significant gap for students and their families.

“Our school backpack program ensures that students have access to shelf-stable food bags to take home on long weekends or holiday breaks, tailored when needed to their specific dietary or medical requirements, easing the load on families,” said Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey, Barber

National Institute executive vice president. “This program reinforces our commitment to supporting the whole child and empowering families.”

For 18 years, Presque Isle Downs & Casino in Erie has been involved directly and indirectly with ELBS since their opening in February 2007. Casino team members participate in the Read Across America program and hold positions on the ELBS advisory board. The casino team members began quietly collecting food items to support the ELBS food pantry approximately two years ago. Through this effort, the casino provides shelf-stable food that helps ensure students have access to meals even when school is not in session.

“Our commitment goes beyond a one-time donation. Our annual food collection reflects a deep understanding of our community’s needs and our desire to make a sustained, meaningful impact,” said Gary Hendricks, Presque Isle Downs & Casino vice president and general manager. “This partnership reflects our genuine desire to help.”

Presque Isle Downs & Casino’s continued commitment to ELBS is a powerful example of how sustained community partnerships can create lasting change. “The impact is felt far beyond the classroom,” concludes Dr. Barber-Carey.



Elizabeth Lee Black School administrators Chris Boyd (left) and Cindy Priester (center) present the Presque Isle Downs & Casino team with an original piece of student artwork.



Presque Isle Downs & Casino team members unload their van full of food donations.



Support the Elizabeth Lee Black School Food Pantry



Key Bank representatives present a \$35,000 check to the Elizabeth Lee Black School's Pre-K Counts program.

KeyBank: A 200-Year Commitment to Education, Inclusion, and Community

For two centuries, KeyBank has built its legacy on more than financial services. As the institution just celebrated its 200-year anniversary, its longstanding commitment to community investment and inclusive growth remains a central part of its identity, both nationally and locally through its support of organizations like Barber National Institute.

Education is a cornerstone to KeyBank's giving strategy. The bank believes access to quality education is foundational to individual success and community stability. That commitment was demonstrated in 2025 through KeyBank's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) contribution to Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School, totaling more than \$35,000.

"This generous EITC contribution from KeyBank helps us open doors for our students to receive high-quality preschool education and a strong start to learning," said Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey, Barber National Institute executive vice president. "When children have access to high-quality preschool, it builds confidence and foundational skills that follow them into kindergarten and beyond."

KeyBank's philanthropic philosophy is rooted in the belief that strong communities drive lasting success. Across the country, the bank prioritizes partnerships that promote economic opportunity, accessibility, and well-being, with a particular focus on health and human services. That commitment aligns closely with our mission, making the partnership a natural fit.

"At KeyBank, community involvement isn't a one-time action. It's an ongoing responsibility," shared Victor Laurenza, Jr., KeyBank, market president for western Pennsylvania. That philosophy is reflected in the bank's hands-on support of organizations that address real, local needs while creating pathways for individuals to thrive.

KeyBank's dedication to inclusion extends beyond philanthropy and into its workplace culture. In recognition of its efforts, the bank was recently honored for the ninth consecutive year as a Leading Disability Employer by the National Organization on Disability. This recognition highlights KeyBank's emphasis on accessibility, employee resource groups, and partnerships with organizations that support people with disabilities, both inside and outside the workplace.

As KeyBank marked 200 years of service, its relationship with us exemplifies the power of intentional philanthropy. By supporting education, championing inclusion, and investing in community-based organizations, KeyBank demonstrates how thoughtful philanthropy can help communities grow stronger together.



Learn More about EITC at BarberInstitute.org

JOIN US FOR A FUN AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY WALK



Walkers pose for a fun group shot.

Get ready to move at your own pace, meet new friends, and celebrate wellness with Barber National Institute at the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community in Pittsburgh and in Erie. Whether you walk, roll, stroll, or use mobility supports, everyone is welcome. The route is smooth and easy to navigate, perfect for all mobility types, including wheelchairs,

walkers, canes, and power chairs. Join as an individual walker on the Barber National Institute Shamrocks team or form your own team of family and friends.

Fundraising is optional-but Fun!

This event is free and open to all. But, for those walkers who'd like to support Creative Connections, the adult and student art program at Barber National Institute, raising \$30 or more qualifies you for an official Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community t-shirt. Learn more about Creative Connections on page 14.

**DEADLINE TO REGISTER:
MONDAY, MAY 11, 2026**



PITTSBURGH



ERIE

What to Expect:

Two distance options - one-mile or three-mile walking event designed for adults and children of all abilities

- A fun, supportive atmosphere
- Great opportunities to socialize and connect
- Light refreshments at the start and finish line

When:

PITTSBURGH - Saturday, May 30, 7:45 a.m. check-in/registration, 9 a.m. (3-mile walk begins), 9:10 a.m. (1-mile walk begins)

ERIE - Saturday, June 6, 7:45 a.m. check-in/registration, 9 a.m. (3-mile walk begins), 9:10 a.m. (1-mile walk begins)

Where:

PITTSBURGH - Point State Park (601 Commonwealth Place, Pittsburgh, PA, 15222)

ERIE - Penn State Behrend (Erie Parking Lot, 4701 College Drive, Erie, PA 16563)



**Walk For A
Healthy Community**

HIGHMARK | Bright Blue Futures

Palmiero Toyota team members support many community organizations including Barber National Institute.



PALMIERO TOYOTA *Leads with Heart*

Shared values often create the strongest partnerships. That's why partners like Palmiero Toyota, a Meadville, Pennsylvania, family-run Toyota franchise, stand out. Their support is rooted in a clear belief: people deserve opportunities to go where they want to go.

During our conversation, Palmiero Toyota leaders shared how Toyota's longstanding principles shape the way they show up in the community. One message, delivered years ago by Toyota leader Akio Toyoda, has stayed with them: "Try to be the best in town... do the best in your market that you can do." For Palmiero Toyota, that commitment is grounded in a pillar that deeply aligns with our own values: respect for all people.

That shared value helped spark Palmiero Toyota's connection to Barber Beast on the Bay in 2025, where they became the presenting sponsor of the adapted course for adults with disabilities. The adapted course is designed so individuals of all abilities can experience the thrill of an obstacle course challenge, the pride of completion, and the joy of being fully included. Palmiero Toyota explained that what resonated most was helping create opportunities for people to do something they may have once believed wasn't possible.

"The adapted course was absolutely fantastic," shared owner Allison Palmiero Brady, noting that providing access to experiences that feel out of reach for some people is exactly the kind of impact they want to support. The partnership became

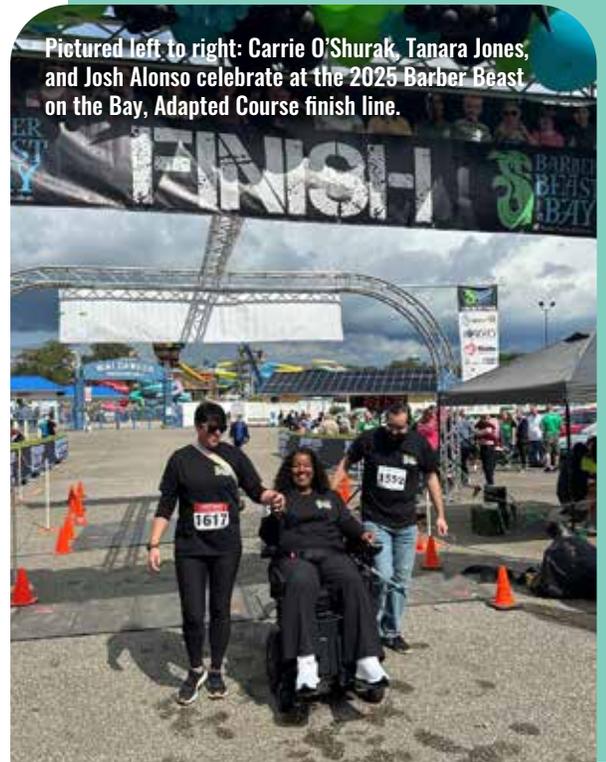
even more meaningful because Palmiero Toyota saw a direct connection to their own team and a team member that is a wheelchair user—recognizing how inclusion strengthens workplaces and communities alike. "I thought it was so special that we got to do the course with her. She was the star."

Beyond event sponsorship, Palmiero Toyota's broader giving model is built to be community-led. Their annual Give Back program sets aside funding each year, invites local charities to share how they would use the support, and then allows customers and community members to vote on where the funds go. As they described it, it's a circle, neighbors supporting neighbors, with the dealership helping amplify what the community cares about most.

And perhaps their philosophy is best captured by the sign hanging in Allison's office: "**You have to believe it to see it.**" At Barber National Institute, we see that belief in action through partners like Palmiero Toyota, helping make inclusion visible, possible, and lasting for the adults, children, and families we serve.



Pictured left to right: Carrie O'Shurak, Tanara Jones, and Josh Alonso celebrate at the 2025 Barber Beast on the Bay, Adapted Course finish line.



New & Reimagined! **Adapted Obstacle Course Event Coming this September**

For 12 years, Barber Beast on the Bay united our community in support of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Now, that legacy continues with a reimagined adapted course – a better, more dynamic event that celebrates the courage, inclusion, and achievement for participants with a disability.

We invite you to be a part of this next chapter. Customized sponsorship packages are available at all levels offering visibility, community engagement, and meaningful alignment with a cause that inspires.

Save-the-date!
Sept. 12, 2026



Don't miss your opportunity to be part of this inaugural event!

FINDING PURPOSE AND BELONGING THROUGH COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT



Jeffrey is a proud member of the team at The Cork in Erie.

For Jeffrey, work is more than a paycheck; it's a place to learn, contribute, and belong. After spending time in a small group employment setting at Barber National Institute, Jeffrey was ready for something more. That opportunity came at The Cork in Erie, where he now works as a prep cook, building skills and confidence in a fast-paced kitchen environment.

Jeffrey's days are busy and purposeful. He pans ingredients, chops lettuce, prepares sauces, and uses the knife skills he's worked hard to master. "I like using my knife skills," he shared, proudly explaining what he's learned about safety and proper technique. Working in the kitchen keeps him engaged, especially during the busy lunch hours, when the energy is high and everyone is moving. Just as important as the work itself is the environment. "They're really nice," Jeffrey said of his coworkers. "Everybody."

Supported by our vocational training program, Jeffrey made the transition from center-based work into a community-based work setting with confidence. Job coaches provide guidance when needed, helping with organization, routines, and task support, while giving Jeffrey the space to work independently. Over time, support has naturally faded as his independence has grown.

Red Letter Hospitality Marketing Director Anné DiPillo sees firsthand the impact of inclusive employment, not just for Jeffrey, but for the entire team. "It has been an absolute game changer for our business," she said. "Having Jeffrey here isn't just about support, he helps us every day." She explained that his work is essential to daily operations. "If you've had a cheeseburger at The Cork, Jeffrey pressed it. If we didn't have Jeffrey, we wouldn't have burgers."

Beyond productivity, what stands out most is connection. "He's part of our team," Anné said. "We make memories together, build friendships, and learn from each other." The Cork's commitment to inclusion also extends beyond employment, welcoming Barber National Institute Camp Connections campers into the restaurant to see what's possible. For many, it's their first time inside a commercial kitchen and a powerful reminder that community employment is achievable.



Jeffrey prepares sauces for the busy lunch hour at The Cork.



Red Letter Hospitality Marketing Director Anné DiPillo says Jeffrey presses every cheeseburger at the restaurant.

During **Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month**, Jeffrey's story reflects what supported employment makes possible: meaningful work, real inclusion, and the chance for individuals to contribute in ways that matter.



Learn more about Vocational Training

Generations of Commitment: The Hilbert Family's Connection to Barber National Institute



Martha Hilbert's involvement at Barber National Institute spans generations.

When Martha Hilbert (Wurst) talks about Barber National Institute, she does so with the ease of someone who has been part of its story for a very long time. Her family's involvement spans generations, beginning when her parents were searching for opportunities for her sister Nancy after high school. They wanted her to stay close to home while still building skills and independence; options that simply didn't exist widely at the time.

"They discovered the Barber Center, and it was perfect," Martha recalls. Nancy began in the workshop program, later working at the Boston Store cafeteria and eventually at Erie Insurance. Martha still remembers how warmly Nancy was treated at every step. "She loved it. She had good relationships wherever she went. And my parents were involved right alongside her."

That early connection led Martha into her own decades of involvement supporting events, volunteering, and eventually serving on the board. She remembers the years of spaghetti dinners, and garden parties filling the school gym and cafeteria with supporters long before modern fundraising galas. "Parents were deeply involved then," she says. "There wasn't funding for much, so everyone pitched in."

Her board service came during a time of significant growth and change, including the ambitious Project 2000 expansion. "It was a big step," Martha says. "A major commitment. But it was needed. Families wanted a school they could be proud of." She saw firsthand how the Institute pushed to keep improving and creating better spaces, better programs, and always forward-thinking.

That commitment to innovation is still what impresses her today. She points to advances in assistive technology and the ways children can now communicate

using tools unthinkable even a decade ago. "The Barber Center is always moving," she says. "They're never content to stay where they are."

Martha and her late husband Bill have supported a range of initiatives over the years, including the recent renovation of the Barber National Institute pool. Despite her humility, Martha understands the quiet power of leading by example. While she prefers to give anonymously, she recognizes moments when her support can encourage others to say "yes" to a project that strengthens the community. Her recent contribution to the renovation the pool, soon to reopen with modern accessibility and safety features, and our home renovation campaign, are two examples. "If it encourages someone else to support something important, then it's worth it."

Her philanthropy extends well beyond Barber National Institute to her parish at Saint George Catholic Church, to Cathedral Prep and Mercyhurst High Schools, and the local soup kitchen. But when she reflects on the connection that has endured the longest, it always comes back to how Barber National Institute supported Nancy and so many others like her.

"They helped her become independent," Martha says simply. "And they've done that for so many families. That's why it has always mattered to us."

In her 80s, Martha remains characteristically humble about her impact. But her steady presence—and the legacy of her family's decades of involvement—is a reminder that even the quietest generosity can change countless lives.

BARBER NATIONAL INSTITUTE'S SERVICE FUND AWARDS \$80,000

Barber National Institute team members continue to carry forward a strong tradition of giving through a staff sponsored service fund, awarding more than \$80,000 to charitable organizations across Pennsylvania this year. The funds were entirely donated by participating team members, with recipient charities nominated by the donors themselves, demonstrating the collective commitment and generosity of our team.

"The service fund reflects our core belief that meaningful impact starts from within. Rooted in our mission and corporate values, the fund empowers us to support causes we care deeply

about, extending compassion beyond our walls and into the communities where we live and serve," said Joe Geppert, Barber National Institute service fund president. "Our team members don't just support individuals and families through their work; they actively invest in a broader community."

That spirit of giving traces back to Dr. Gertrude A. Barber, whose legacy emphasized service, connection, and responsibility to others. The service fund honors that legacy by encouraging team members to turn shared values into meaningful action.



Charities supported this year span a wide range of causes, reflecting the diverse passions and priorities of staff—from human services and education to animal rescue and local fire departments. By placing nomination decisions directly in the hands of staff, the fund ensures contributions are personal, purposeful, and aligned with local needs.



Join Our Team!

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS: COMMUNITY-BASED ART EXPERIENCES

We believe advocacy starts with being heard. Our art and music programs create practical, everyday ways for people to share what matters to them. Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is a reminder that inclusion is not abstract; it happens when people lead with their own voices and choices. Creative expression gives people the chance to tell their own story, build meaningful connections, and take part in community life in ways that matter to them.

Artist Ja'Leesa Williams worked with two groups of adults in Erie introducing them to embroidery, stitching, and machine sewing. "What stood out most to me was the way each student brought their personality into the work. Some were quiet and focused, while others shared stories and laughter as they sewed," said Ja'Leesa. "The sewing room became a space of encouragement, patience, and pride. Every stitch was more than a task; it was a celebration of ability and creativity."

Breaking tasks into small, manageable steps, Ja'Leesa used hands on demonstrations and encouraged peer collaboration which helped build confidence and community. "During our embroidery project, participants worked in pairs to create shapes that we eventually pieced together. Watching them encourage each other, problem solve, and celebrate each other's work was something special."

For more than 20 years, muralist Steve Mik has focused on large-scale public art, because he believes art is most powerful when it is accessible. "Public art can meet people where they are, to reflect shared stories, to create moments of connection in everyday spaces" – like the hallway at our Elizabeth Lee Black School where a student-created mural was installed this past December.

"Every student is different, but I focused on identifying shared abilities and designing activities that everyone could successfully participate in," Steve shared. "By meeting students where they are, the sessions became accessible, supportive, and engaging for the entire group."

Reflecting on the role of Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation donors, Steve added, "Donors made it possible for students to take part in a creative experience that will endure for generations. They made this experience, designed specifically around the student's abilities, truly invaluable, and one I hope will have a lasting impact on their lives."

The impact continues at our Warren campus, where artist, educator, and art therapist Kristine Peterson provided an opportunity for adults to explore visual expression. "Art is the visual evidence of exploration and expression at both personal and community levels," said Kristine. "An extraordinary number of visual renderings of excitement, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anger, joy, and gratitude were produced."



Kristine provided the adults with minimal guidance and shares that the artists overcame their discomfort to communicate and visually express their negative emotions. She adapted her teaching style by increasing the amount of self-directed art supplies available for use with each project. "It was important to offer modified use(s) of art media (such as larger grips on drawing supplies and paint brushes) while also continuing to offer more technically advanced art media,



Artist Kristine Peterson holds up an original artwork created by an adult in Warren.



Artist Ja'Leesa Williams assists an adult in Erie with the sewing machine.



Wesley Family Services leads a music program for adults in Pittsburgh.



with no modification, to allow the students to demonstrate high-level or growing competencies with art media and techniques.”

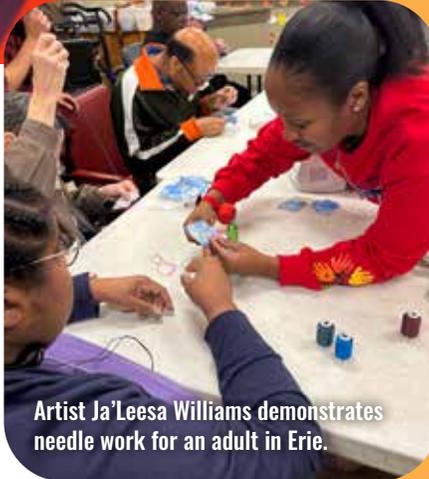
She makes no assumptions about student artist abilities or skill levels but does assume that the student artists are the experts on themselves as humans and as artists. “Let us be as open as the artists were while creating the art. Emotions are equitable, uniting us through common humanity.”

As textile art has provided creative outlets in Warren. Music, long missed since COVID – has only recently begun to rebuild momentum through a collaboration with Wesley Family Services in Pittsburgh.

“Do not enter this space with narrow expectations,” said Katie Harrill, Wesley Family Services creative arts program specialist and music therapist. “Adults with intellectual disabilities are expressive, humorous, deeply creative, and capable of far more than people expect.”

Suprises come not only through connection, but through music itself, from nursery rhymes filled with nostalgia to spirited chants of “Here We Go Steelers,” and even high-energy movement sessions set to “Crazy Train.”

“Creative expression is not age-dependent, it is human,” Katie shared. “Art and music are essential tools for connection, self-expression, and well-being across the lifespan. As music therapists, we are privileged to create inclusive spaces where individuals are not defined by limitations, but celebrated for their identities, voices, and contributions. Inclusion, at its core, is about access, and access to creativity is transformative.”



Artist Ja'Leesa Williams demonstrates needle work for an adult in Erie.



Artist Steve Mik encourages an Elizabeth Lee Black School student to make his shape for the mural.

UPCOMING EVENT

Creative Connections:

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month Art Exhibit - Free and open to the public exhibit featuring original works from Erie and Warren adult services and Elizabeth Lee Black School students

March 2-March 31

Erie Arts & Culture, 419 State Street, Second Floor, Erie (elevator available)

Open Monday through Wednesday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



SUPPORT CREATIVE CONNECTIONS ART PROGRAMS

SPONSORED BY



Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation



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We truly appreciate every contribution made to Barber National Institute.

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Pamela McCormick (left), Ladies Only Luncheon Chairwoman, and Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey (right) present Heather Amy with the *Get Your Glow On* prize at the 2025 Ladies Only Luncheon.

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Courtney Barber(left) and Alexandra Pribonic at the 2025 Ladies Only Luncheon.



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2024-2025 GIFTS



GIFTS RECEIVED JULY 1, 2024 - DECEMBER 31, 2025

Strengthening Foundations
 HOME RENOVATION CAMPAIGN

FAST FACTS

BY THE END OF 2025:

11 KITCHENS REMODELED

8 BATHROOMS SCHEDULED TO BE REMODELED

FOR 2026:

NEW FLOORING AT A GROUP HOME

7 MORE FLOOR REMODELS SCHEDULED

2 BATHROOMS CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

5 BATHROOMS SCHEDULED TO BE REMODELED

5 KITCHENS SCHEDULED TO BE REMODELED

AVG. COST TO RENOVATE A KITCHEN IN A COMMUNITY HOME IS ABOUT **\$18,000 EACH**

AVG. COST TO RENOVATE A BATHROOM IN A COMMUNITY HOME IS ABOUT **\$12,000 EACH**

You're helping preserve the places where lives are lived and memories are made.
GIVE TODAY TO OUR STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONS CAMPAIGN



HOW HAVE OUR DONORS HELPED?

Here are a few ways!



Parent Autism Support Group

Parents connect on a variety of topics and community resources

Artist In Residence

Professional teaching artists work with adults in the day programs to create original artwork



Camp Scholarships

Fun, recreational experiences for children and adults

Strengthening Foundations

\$1M in renovations and adaptations to community homes

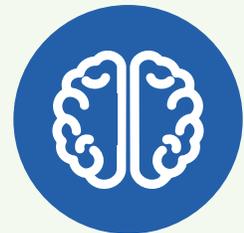


Communication and Teaching Technology

Incorporating state-of-the-art tools to enhance students' learning and help develop future-ready skills

Sensory Experience Development Project

A transformative effort to create inclusive, interactive spaces that stimulate and support the senses in safe, meaningful ways



DONOR ADVISED AND DESIGNATED

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2024-2025 GIFTS

We truly appreciate every contribution made to Barber National Institute. Please note that every effort was made to ensure accuracy in the listing of our generous supporters. We apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions. Please contact the Advancement Office at (814) 969-8027 if you have any questions or concerns.

CLUBS/ORGANIZATIONS

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Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Center Employee Service Fund
Greek Ladies Philoptochos Society
Gridley Chapter No. 324, O.E.S.
Knights of Columbus #13427
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Modern Employees Community Fund
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Pulaski Club
Slovak National Club
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Zukor Club

2024-2025 GIFTS



Tim Barnhart, center, receives the Person of the Year award at the 2025 Shillelagh Golf Tournament. He is pictured here with members of his family and members of the Barber family.

EITC EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT TAX CREDIT

A donation to the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program is a commitment to the future. Businesses participating in the EITC Program funded scholarships for children to attend quality preschool programs, as well as provided technology and adaptive equipment for students in out school.



Representatives from MacDonald Illig Attorneys present the Elizabeth Lee Black School's Pre-K Counts program with an Education Improvement Tax Credit donation. Pictured left to right are Bob Barber, Jim Walczak, Esq., Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey, Russ Warner, Esq., and Patrick Barber.

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UPMC Health Plan

2024-2025 GIFTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE EITC PROGRAM CONTACT DR. MAUREEN BARBER-CAREY, (814) 878-5960 OR MAUREENBC@BARBERNI.ORG



An exterior photo of the new Children's Behavioral Health Center at 1319 Sassafras in Erie.

PENNSYLVANIA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TAX CREDIT 2025

Gifts given through the Pennsylvania Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit directly supported the establishment of Barber Behavioral Health's Children's Behavioral Health Center in Erie, PA.

Erie Community Foundation
 Erie Insurance
 Erie Strayer Company
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 Northwest Bank
 UPMC Health Plan



Our founder, Dr. Gertude Barber.

THE LEGACY SOCIETY

THE DR. GERTRUDE A. BARBER LEGACY SOCIETY RECOGNIZES THOSE GENEROUS DONORS WHO HAVE MADE A PLANNED GIFT, SUCH AS A BEQUEST IN A WILL OR TRUST.

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To learn more about becoming a member of the Legacy Society or planned giving options, call (814) 969-8027.

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Welcome EDWARD AHART



Edward Ahart II, MPA, has been named Chief Advancement Officer. Ed's upbringing in New Jersey instilled in him a keen sense of service that aligns with our mission. His early career involved roles as a direct support professional in residential services, after-school programs, and recreation therapy for various organizations and specialized schools throughout New Jersey. Ed's first opportunity in an Advancement role came as Assistant Director of Development at The Arc of Monmouth.

That person-centered perspective stayed with him throughout his career. Most recently, Ed served as the Chief Development Officer at Kean University

Foundation where he built partnerships with donors to provide real-world experiential learning opportunities for students, established scholarships, supported faculty and research initiatives, and formed various academic partnerships in the community through philanthropy. With more than 12 years of philanthropic and advancement leadership, Ed will strengthen our ability to expand our mission thoughtfully, ensuring we have partnerships with donors, financial resources, and vision for long-term growth. He earned a Master of Arts in public administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University and a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology from Stockton University. Welcome Ed!

✉ EdwardAhart@barberni.org

☎ Mobile: (609) 457-3166

BARBER SPIRIT

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UPCOMING EVENTS

SHILLELAGH GOLF TOURNAMENT

June 18, 2026, Whispering Woods Golf Course

WARREN GIVES DAY

May 13, 2026

HIGHMARK WALK FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

May 30 (Pittsburgh) Point Park University

June 6 (Erie) Penn State Behrend

DISABILITY RESOURCE FAIR

May 30, 2026

ERIE GIVES DAY

August 11, 2026

ADAPTED OBSTACLE COURSE

September 12, 2026, Waldameer & Water World

LADIES ONLY LUNCHEON

November 21, 2026, Kahkwa Club

BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL

Dec. 12, 2026, Bayfront Convention Center

ADULT SERVICES CHRISTMAS DANCE

Dec. 13, 2026, Bayfront Convention Center



LEARN MORE &
SAVE-THE-DATES!

BarberInstitute.org/Events



Barber National Institute