

B A R B E R

JULY 2026

SPIRIT

Learning
FOR LIFE



Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.



Adults at our Somerset campus learning their way around the kitchen.



Dr. Emily Smith works with a young child at our acute partial hospitalization program.



1:1 art class at the Main Street Art Center in Union City, Pa.



Learn to Ride Bike Camp 2025.



Celebrating National School Choice Week 2026.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

At Barber National Institute, learning is not limited to a classroom. It happens in therapy rooms, community settings, homes, workplaces, camps, and countless everyday moments where confidence, skills, and independence are built over time.

The stories in this issue of Barber Spirit reflect that belief. You will see how children grow when they are given the right supports early, how adults continue building skills that lead to greater independence and fuller participation in community life, and how our staff continue learning so they can meet changing needs with knowledge, compassion, and excellence. Whether it is a student discovering new ways to communicate, an adult gaining practical skills for daily living, or a team member continuing their education to better serve others, each story reminds us that learning is deeply connected to possibility.

We also know that lifelong learning is never a solitary effort. It is nurtured by families, educators, therapists, direct support professionals, and communities that believe, as we do, in human potential. I hope this issue leaves you encouraged by what is possible when people are supported not only in where they are today, but in who they can become tomorrow. Thank you for being part of that work and for sharing our vision for a world where people of all abilities belong and reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

John J. Barber

John J. Barber
President & Chief Executive Officer

Our Mission: 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.



Original artwork created by Elizabeth Lee Black School students.



Multi-media artworks displayed at the second annual Art Show and Celebration.

A Celebration of CREATIVITY

For two days this spring, Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School gymnasium was transformed into a vibrant and joyful maze of color, texture, and imagination. On April 30 and May 1, nearly 300 pieces of student artwork filled the gymnasium-turned-gallery for the second annual Art Show and Celebration.

Walking through the exhibit, visitors encountered an impressive range of mediums: bold acrylic paintings, intricate drawings, mixed-media explorations, and three-dimensional creations that invited closer inspection. Many pieces were collaborative between entire classrooms, which encouraged students to create not just as individuals, but together.

Every piece on display not only showed how the artist engages with the world but reinforced the idea that creative expression is a powerful tool for self-discovery. This show honored the process as much as the final product.

Families, staff, and community members were invited to visit the space throughout the two-day event, with some even opting to take their favorite piece home as many works were available for purchase.

Regardless of size or complexity, each piece represented a moment of pride. For the students, it was the thrill of seeing their work displayed publicly. For families and educators, it was the joy of witnessing growth. And for the community, it was a chance to celebrate the creativity that thrives within the school's walls.

As the show wrapped up, one thing was clear: this art show uplifts, inspires, and brings people together – one masterpiece at a time.



Green ribbon moments for students at our second annual Art Show and Celebration.



Collaborative painting created by classroom 107.

UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION IN AUTISM: WHY “WHY?” MATTERS MORE THAN “WHAT”



Dr. Laurie Charlot (left) and Heidi McKenrick (right) host a staff training on autism and behavior support.



Dr. Laurie Charlot leads a meaningful discussion on autism and how we respond as caregivers.

About the Speaker

With decades of experience under her belt, Dr. Charlot leads the Becket IDD-Mental Health Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team as its director and is an assistant psychiatry professor at UMass Medical School. Additionally, she is publishing a book titled “Aggressive Behavior of People with Autism and other Intellectual Disabilities,” which has artwork from an individual in our adult day services on the cover.

When Dr. Laurie Charlot, an assistant professor at UMass Medical School and private consultant in intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder, stepped into Barber National Institute, she brought a message that challenged how aggressive behavior in people with autism and intellectual disabilities is often viewed. Her core argument was simple: aggression is not the problem, but rather the symptom.

Standing in front of a room of caregivers and clinicians, she urged our team to think of aggression as a “final common pathway,” much like a fever. “Crisis isn’t a failure – it’s a signal,” she said. “And signals can be understood.”

Fevers signal infection, heat exposure, or a reaction to medication. Likewise, aggression can stem from frustration, sensory overload, trauma, communication barriers, or unmet needs. Treating only the outward behavior, she warned, is like giving Tylenol without asking what caused the fever in the first place.

Dr. Charlot told the room that a caregiver’s goal “isn’t to control behavior – it’s to understand what’s driving it.” She illustrated this point with stories, from a young woman who processed information at different cognitive levels depending on the task, to a group of flamingos whose sudden “wars” turned out to be triggered by the clatter of rolling suitcases on a nearby wooden bridge. The lesson: behavior always has a backstory, even when it’s not immediately obvious.

She emphasized the importance of data as a way to challenge assumptions. Caregivers often develop theories about why someone is struggling, but without data, those theories can be wildly off. Patterns, timing, and context matter, and sometimes the “why” changes from one incident to the next.

Equally important, she urged, is the language staff use. Words like “demand,” “refusal,” and “noncompliance” can frame interactions as power struggles rather than opportunities for cooperation. Dr. Charlot encouraged our team to replace these with more collaborative phrasing, like “request,” “help,” and “support.” These shifts, she emphasized, can reduce escalation and build trust.

Burnout among caregivers is another theme Dr. Charlot touched on. She acknowledged the emotional toll of working with individuals who may lash out because they lack other tools. She reminded teams that the goal isn’t to make life easier for staff but to help individuals build lives with more independence, dignity, and joy.

“You can make a difference,” she assured the crowd. She iterated that responding to behavior doesn’t require trips to the ER or psychiatrist. “Support doesn’t start in the emergency room. It starts with knowing the person in front of you.”

That idea – and many others – truly resonated with the caregivers in the room. Heidi McKenrick, the director of intellectual disability services at Barber National Institute, was particularly grateful for the opportunity to hear from Dr. Charlot.

“It’s important to hear from leaders in the field who have the education and experience in specific topics so that we can learn from them and stay up to date on best practices,” she said. “This work has always been most successful when a team approach is used.”

Ultimately, Dr. Charlot’s message was one of empathy paired with scientific rigor. Aggression is a form of communication, and our job is to listen – not just to the behavior, but to the person behind it.

Lizdel Collado-Monahan, a Pre-K Counts teacher, is a recipient of the Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation's continuing education scholarship. She is pictured here with her 2025-2026 students.



Dr. Gertrude Barber Foundation Scholarship Opens Window of Possibility

For many educators, the idea of returning to school later in their career can feel out of reach. For one Barber National Institute Elizabeth Lee Black School teacher, she once felt that way too.

"I didn't think it was possible to go back to school at my age," said Lizdel Collado-Monahan, Elizabeth Lee Black School preschool teacher. "I'm 59 years old and the thought of taking on a student loan was overwhelming."

After using her GI bill earlier in life, she believed that chapter had closed. But everything changed when she learned about Barber National Institute's employee scholarship program.

"The scholarship opened a window of possibility that I didn't think was available to me," she said. "Being able to avoid taking on a student loan removed a huge worry."

Today, she is preparing to graduate with her master of education in early childhood education—a path she chose after transitioning from special education into PreK Counts, a Pennsylvania subsidized preschool program, and wanting a deeper understanding of how young children learn and grow.

On a personal level, the experience has meant far more than financial support.

"It feels wonderful to have Barber National Institute invest and believe in me," she said. "I feel seen—not just as an employee, but as a person with goals and potential. They recognize that I understand the mission and strive to uphold what makes this such a transformative place."

That sense of support is especially important in a field where challenges continue to grow.

"This field is not for the faint of heart," Lizdel said. "We are all facing increasing developmental, behavioral, and emotional needs in young children. It can be difficult. But support like this makes a real difference. It allows me to access the latest knowledge in early childhood education and knowing Barber National Institute has my back helps me keep going."

That investment doesn't just benefit Lizdel; it extends directly to the students and families she serves.

"Being supported in my own growth allows me to evolve," she said. "It helps me become a more empathetic, innovative, and resilient educator. I can create more inclusive, empowering learning environments, and that's ultimately why I choose to stay in this work."

Moments like these illustrate something broader than professional development. They reflect a culture of retention rooted in support, trust, and long-term investment.

For Lizdel, the impact is clear.

"I want to thank Barber National Institute for supporting my continuing education," she said. "It has meant the world to me."

Make a donation to the employee scholarship fund of the Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation





JUMPING BACK IN

For many families, access to a safe and supportive aquatic environment can be life changing. With the reopening of our newly renovated pool and natatorium in June, we are creating new opportunities for individuals of all abilities to learn essential water safety skills while building confidence and independence.

"The main purpose of a learn-to-swim program isn't to develop Olympic swimmers," explained Mitchell Bosse, Barber National Institute aquatics director. "It's to give individuals a fundamental set of skills that can save their lives."

For individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism, that goal carries even greater urgency. Research shows that they are significantly more vulnerable to accidental drowning, often due to factors like wandering behaviors, sensory attraction to water, or underlying medical conditions.

"We address this head-on," Mitchell shared. "With heightened supervision, carefully controlled environments, and highly trained staff, safety is always our top priority."

The newly renovated pool, part of a \$3 million investment, has been designed specifically to meet those needs. Features like a depth-adjustable floor allow staff to adapt the environment to everyone, whether they are a young child learning basic water safety, an adult using mobility supports, or someone overcoming fear of deep water for the first time.

"Because we can meet each swimmer where they are, we eliminate many of the 'what if' worries families have," Mitchell said. "That's where confidence begins."

But the impact goes far beyond learning to swim. In the pool, participants are building independence, trust, and self-assurance—skills that translate into everyday life.

"The water is a unique classroom," Mitchell explained. "When someone is learning to manage sensory input, follow safety boundaries, or try something challenging again, they are developing patience, resilience, and self-regulation."

Those lessons carry into the classroom, the community, and home life long after the swim ends.

The reopening also signals an important expansion: this is not only a space for individuals served directly by Barber National Institute, but a resource for the broader community. Swim lessons, open swimming opportunities, and water safety education will be available to families across the region.

"We want everyone in our community to have access to safe swim practices," said Mitchell. "Whether they come here or go to another neighborhood pool, these are skills that help people enjoy the water safely for a lifetime."

Just as importantly, the pool is designed to be a place where people feel they belong.

"I hope everyone who comes here finds something they need," Mitchell continued. "Whether that's learning a new skill, building confidence, or simply enjoying time in a space that feels welcoming and supportive."

In that way, the reopening of the pool reflects the broader mission of Barber National Institute: a belief in human potential and a commitment to creating environments where that potential can grow.



LEARN MORE ABOUT BARBER NATIONAL INSTITUTE'S POOL TODAY!



Students from Everett High School in Bedford explore career pathways as an EMT through PA Pathways to Partnership.

PA Pathways to Partnership

Sometimes a new partnership begins with a simple phone call. When the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) launched its new PA Pathways to Partnership grant, Everett High School in Bedford County needed a local provider to help bring the work to life. They reached out to Barber National Institute and our Bedford campus became that partner.

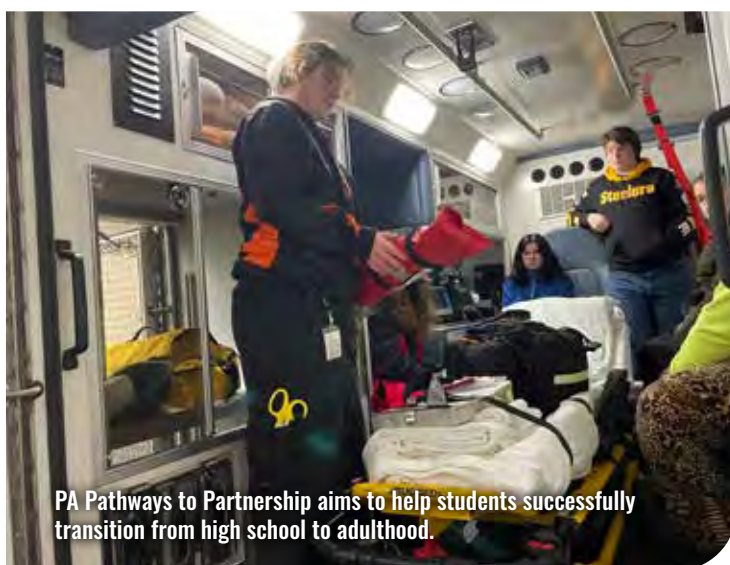
Through the two-year grant, selected schools across Pennsylvania are piloting a stronger vocational transition model for teens with intellectual disabilities—one that connects classroom learning with real-world experience and helps students build the skills they need for life after graduation.

This year, Everett High School was chosen to participate, and Barber National Institute is serving as the local provider through our Bedford campus. Together, with school staff and OVR counselors, we are helping students explore what comes next by offering community-based instruction, hands-on learning, and meaningful connections to resources in their community.

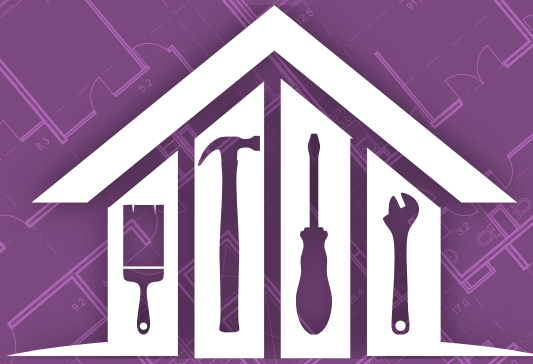
Over the course of the program, up to 12 students in learning support classrooms will take part in a series of sessions held twice a month. One session may begin in the classroom with a lesson on a transition topic; the next may bring that lesson into the community through tours, meet-and-greets, and other experiences that make learning more concrete.

The work also includes creating lesson plans, coordinating with community partners, and opening doors to opportunities students may not otherwise encounter. For selected students, the program will continue into the summer with at least two paid work experiences.

At its heart, PA Pathways to Partnership is about collaboration. Teachers, transition coordinators, OVR counselors, and our Bedford campus are working together to help students move toward adulthood with more support, more exposure, and more confidence in what is possible.



PA Pathways to Partnership aims to help students successfully transition from high school to adulthood.



Strengthening Foundations



At Barber National Institute, we are guided by compassion, innovation, and an unshakeable belief in human potential. This belief guides our work in 55 community homes, where adults with intellectual disabilities and autism are connected to their neighborhoods, routines, relationships, and independence.

As they age and their needs change, that commitment means making sure their homes can continue to support them safely and comfortably for years to come.

Last year we launched **Phase 1** of our **Strengthening Foundations: Home Renovation Campaign**, a multi-phase effort to improve accessibility, safety, and long-term livability across our community homes. Many of these homes are more than 25 years old, and many residents are aging, often with increasingly complex medical or mobility needs. Renovations include projects such as accessible bathrooms and kitchens, widened doorways, lift systems, flooring improvements, and other adaptations that allow individuals to remain in their home.

With an initial \$200,000 in donor support, we completed renovations at six homes in Erie.

Now, **Phase 2** will expand these improvements to additional homes where needs remain urgent. Because public funding does not cover major capital improvements, continued community support is essential.

Whether you are giving for the first time or renewing your commitment to our mission in Phase 2 of this campaign, you are helping continue work that is already underway and proven to matter.

Among the many causes you could support, few offer the lasting impact of ensuring someone's home remains a safe and stable place to thrive.

On Erie Gives Day, August 11, your support helps ensure these homes continue to meet the needs of the people who rely on them—today and in the years ahead.



Nancy Darker, 65, enjoys the bright lighting and new cabinets in her community home's renovated kitchen – made possible by donors of the Strengthening Foundations Home Renovation campaign.

Erie Gives Day - August 11, 2026

Will you help us Strengthen Foundations this Erie Gives Day?

Erie Gives is an inspiring community-spirited event like no other! Thousands of donors from across the country - and globe - give to hundreds of local nonprofits during Erie Gives. To date, Erie Gives has raised over \$77 M for local nonprofits, thanks to the support of sponsors and donors like you!

Erie Gives is Tuesday, August 11 from midnight to midnight! Gifts made to Barber National Institute on Erie Gives Day will receive a pro-rated match which makes your gift have even more impact.

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



**HELP CONTINUE WORK ALREADY UNDERWAY.
GIVE TO PHASE 2 ON ERIE GIVES DAY, AUGUST 11.**

Books to Buildings

HOW PHILANTHROPY ENHANCES EDUCATION

By Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey, Executive Vice President and Edward W. Ahart II, Chief Advancement Officer

Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School has long been a place where students with complex needs are supported by dedicated educators and specialized classrooms. But fewer people may know how the school actually came to carry the name Elizabeth Lee Black. The answer is simple yet powerful. It is a story rooted in love, inspiration, and tremendous generosity.

Dr. Gertrude A. Barber, as a school psychologist, personally knew Sam and Irene Black and their daughter Elizabeth Lee who had muscular dystrophy. Elizabeth Lee was a bright, young lady who faced many challenges with her disability, but she responded with courage, perseverance, strength, and resilience. She attended St. Andrews Elementary School in Erie, a 2-story building without an elevator. But that did not deter her. One of her classmates, Tom Ridge, who later became the governor of Pennsylvania, would carry her from floor to floor. Sadly, Elizabeth Lee became ill and passed away at a young age.

When we began fundraising for Project 2000, a campaign to build our current school space and expand our campus, Dr. Barber said that she would approach Sam and Irene and see if they would want to make a transformational gift to name our school after Elizabeth Lee. Sam and Irene were incredibly moved by the notion, and in honor of their daughter, committed a historic \$1,000,000 philanthropic contribution. From that day forward, we became the Elizabeth Lee Black School.

The term "philanthropy" has origin roots of its own. It is defined as "an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes" and is traced all the way back to the ancient Greek phrase for "love of humanity".

That said, not all philanthropy, or philanthropists, need to have a building named after them. Just \$5 can make a difference in a student's life. It can help offset the supplies for a classroom. It can help a teacher get advanced certification to better serve our students.

It all matters.



Elizabeth Lee Black, front row left, pictured with her classmates.

Why do we share this now?

As we begin to approach Barber National Institute's 75th anniversary in 2027, we are remaining true to our mission, and true to our founder, Dr. Barber. At her core, Dr. Barber was a philanthropist - one who defined humanity and dedicated her life to serving others.

Join us by becoming a philanthropist and making a difference in the lives of the students and children we proudly serve. Stay tuned...there is much more to come.



**Learn more about giving to
Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Foundation**



Governor Tom Ridge, Elizabeth's classmate, back row left, helped Elizabeth climb the stairs at St. Andrew's Elementary School.



Senior leaders gather for a professional development experience at the Manufacturer's and Business Association in Erie, Pa. this past May

Investing in Leadership from Within

At Barber National Institute, investing in people does not stop once someone is hired. It continues through the opportunities, support, and development that help staff grow in their careers and lead others well. Programs like *This is Leadership* and the *Jumpstart* supervisor series reflect that commitment by strengthening our leaders and emerging leaders who shape the everyday experience of our workforce.

"That investment is critical because team members are at the heart of everything we do. Every day, they help individuals and families navigate challenges, reach goals, and build meaningful lives," said Deron Lehman, chief human resources officer at Barber National Institute. "If staff are going to succeed in that work, they need leaders who know how to support them well. By investing in leadership development, we are helping supervisors build stronger communication, better problem-solving skills, and healthier teams across the organization."

Deron continues to say the programs are not just about attracting talent but supporting and developing talent already here. "Through these programs, staff can strengthen their skills, prepare for future leadership opportunities if that is the path they want, and see that growth is possible within Barber National Institute. In that way, leadership development becomes part of the long-term promise we make to our workforce."

Staff feedback played a central role in the decision to invest in leadership development at this level. Supervisors shared that they wanted more support, and team members voiced a need for leaders to have stronger tools to help them succeed. That input gave us a clearer view of where gaps existed and where added development could make the greatest impact.

At Barber National Institute, strong leadership starts with relationships and accountability. It means communicating honestly, setting clear expectations, solving problems thoughtfully, and helping others grow. *This is Leadership* and *Jumpstart* are designed to give supervisors practical tools they can use every day, while reinforcing a broader idea: leadership is not only about managing tasks and operations. It is also about helping people succeed.

That matters deeply for retention, engagement, and culture. In many ways, staff experience an organization through their supervisor. While people may stay or leave for many reasons, ineffective leadership can make even meaningful work harder to sustain.

When supervisors know how to communicate well, coach through challenges, and help their teams grow, staff are more likely to feel connected, valued, and engaged. Over time,

those interactions shape a culture where people are motivated to succeed together in support of the individuals and families we serve.

"The impact extends directly to mission delivery. When supervisors support their teams effectively, staff are better positioned to provide consistent, high-quality care. Strong leadership creates stability, strengthens relationships, and improves the experience of the individuals and families who depend on us," said Deron. "In that sense, leadership development is not separate from the mission. It is one of the ways we carry the mission forward."

Looking ahead, programs like *This is Leadership* and *Jumpstart* position Barber National Institute for the future by helping build the next generation of leaders while supporting those already in place. They reflect a broader investment in learning and development across the organization—one that extends beyond orientation and compliance training to include meaningful growth opportunities at every level. By continuing to invest in our team, we are strengthening the workforce, improving staff experience, and helping ensure individuals and families continue to receive the best possible support.



Learn more about career opportunities at Barber National Institute

Adults at our Somerset campus are strengthening their literacy and math skills for work, life, and independence.



LITERACY AND MATH SKILLS OPEN NEW DOORS

It didn't start with a formal program. It started with observations: struggling to read words during a game, hesitating with money at a register, or feeling unsure in everyday situations. At our Somerset campus, these observations led to the integration of math and literacy skills in everyday life.

The new adult literacy and math class, offered in partnership with Goodwill Industries and held at a classroom in the CareerLinks building, was created to address a need that was easy to spot in everyday moments.

"I started noticing when we were playing games that some individuals were having difficulty with reading," Jennifer Miller, Barber National Institute's community support professional shared. "There also were challenges with understanding the value of money or knowing how much to give a cashier."

Those observations led to a connection with a free community-based program designed to support adult learners. Today, participants from Barber National Institute attend weekly sessions tailored specifically to their needs, with individualized

instruction and ongoing assessments that help guide progress.

The impact has been immediate and meaningful.

Participants who had never used a computer before are now learning basic digital skills—turning on a laptop, using a mouse, and navigating simple tasks. Others are improving their writing, strengthening reading comprehension, and building confidence through repetition and support.

But the growth goes beyond academics.

"I've also seen improvements in their socialization and their comfort with people in the community," Jennifer said. "They're more willing to engage, ask questions, and participate."

The class is designed to be flexible and responsive. When a concept isn't landing, instructors break it down, explain it differently, or adjust the approach entirely. Barber National Institute staff stay actively involved, communicating with instructors to ensure each participant's learning aligns with their individual goals and service plans.

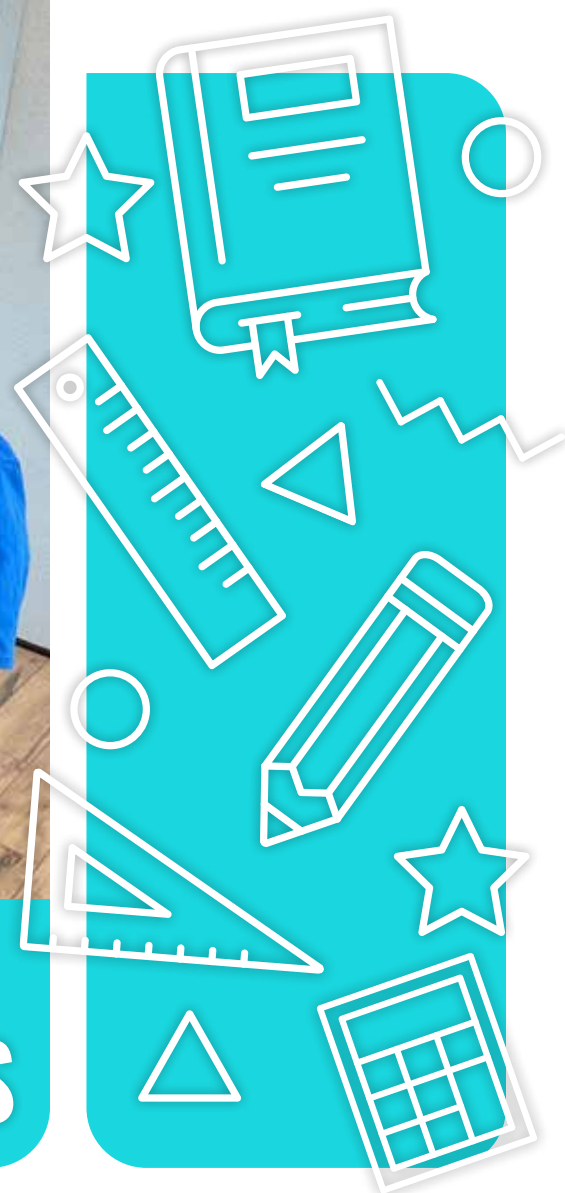
For many participants, the experience opens new doors.

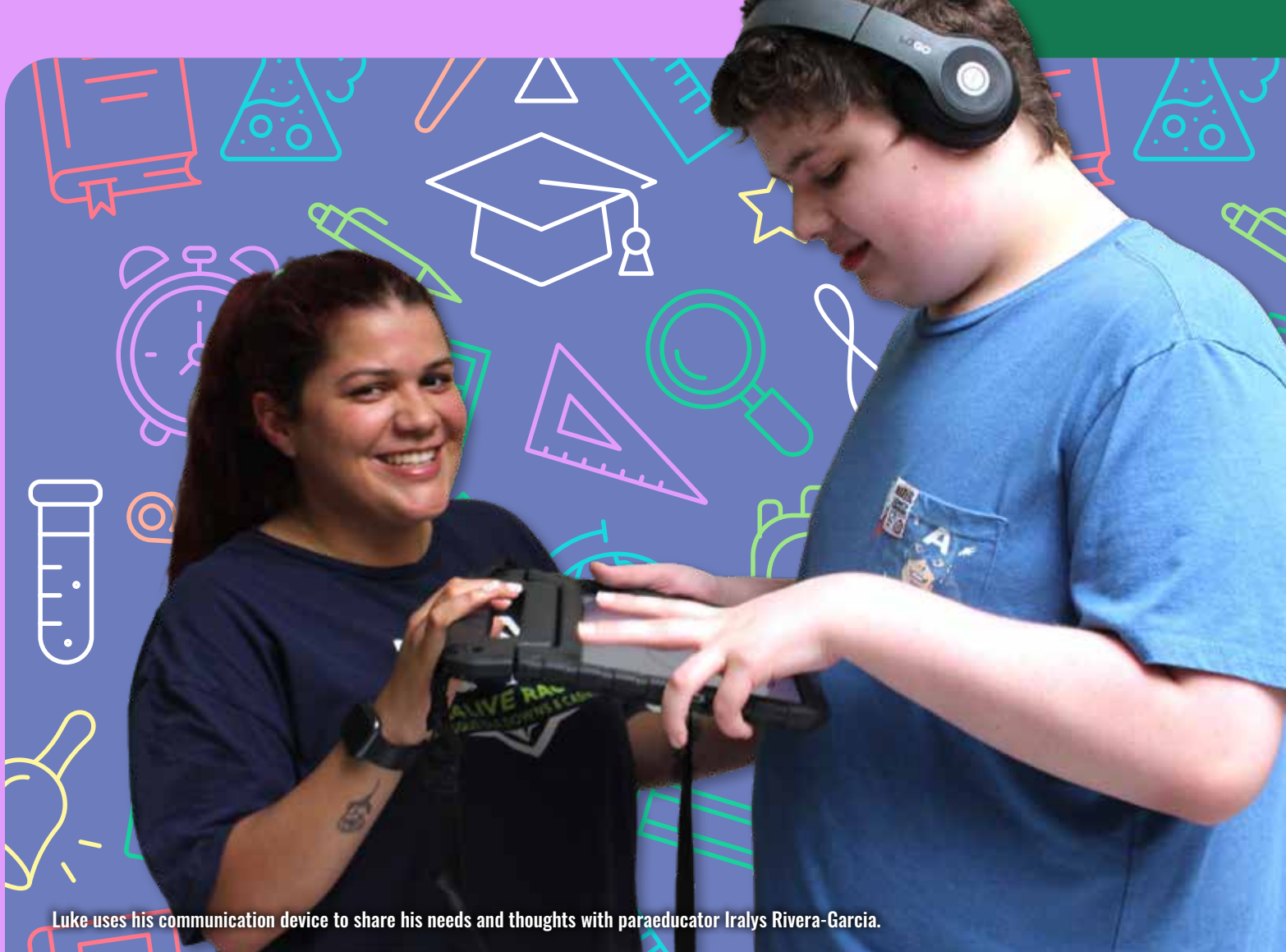
One moment that stood out was a visit with Pennsylvania CareerLink staff, where participants were encouraged to ask questions and engage in conversation. What began as a structured activity quickly became something more natural.

"They started with prepared questions," Jennifer recalled, "but then they became genuinely interested and began asking their own, wanting to learn more about the people they were meeting."

Looking ahead, the hope is simple but meaningful: continued growth, greater independence, and stronger connections to the community.

"I hope they keep learning and become more comfortable with others," Jennifer said. "And that they continue to build relationships, not just in this program, but beyond it."





Luke uses his communication device to share his needs and thoughts with paraeducator Iralys Rivera-Garcia.



Luke's surrounded by educators who support and understand him.



Luke gives mom, Jennifer Triana, a hug.



From IEP's to Independence

An Individualized Education Program (IEP), is often seen as a technical document — a set of goals, supports, and requirements that guide a student's education. But at Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School, an IEP is a roadmap for helping each student build the skills, confidence, and independence needed for life beyond school. Rather than beginning with compliance alone, the Elizabeth Lee Black School team starts with a deeper question: What does this student need to be successful in the real world?

For students like Luke (13), that approach has made all the difference.

When Luke first came to the Elizabeth Lee Black School, his family was searching for a place where his needs could be fully understood and supported. Today, his progress is evident, not only in the classroom, but at home.

That perspective shapes every goal. Communication is taught through authentic interactions like requesting help, solving problems, and speaking up for oneself. Independence is built through daily routines and structured choices. Social engagement, self-regulation, and pre-vocational skills are introduced early and reinforced over time.

The aim is not simply for a student to master a task in a classroom, but to use that skill in everyday life: at home, in the community, and eventually in the workplace when appropriate.

As students grow, their IEPs grow with them. A child may begin with highly structured supports and adult guidance, then gradually move toward greater independence as prompting fades and expectations expand. Skills that start as foundational, such as basic communication or following routines, can evolve into more applied goals like job readiness, self-management, and community participation. This gradual release approach helps students build competence step by step; while also giving families and staff a clearer picture of what progress really looks like over time.

That progress depends on partnership. Teachers make sure goals are measurable, meaningful, and embedded in daily instruction. Therapists connect speech, occupational, behavioral, and other supports to functional outcomes. Families bring essential insight into a student's strengths, routines, culture, and priorities for the future. Together, they shape an IEP that reflects the whole child, not just school performance.

"Communication with the team has been phenomenal," said Luke's mother, Jennifer Triana. "They make suggestions, and we use them at home. We're reinforcing the same techniques. There's a whole wraparound of support for Luke and our family."

Luke's progress offers a clear example of what that kind of planning can make possible. Over time, he has become more engaged in the school day, more willing to participate in group activities, and more successful in moving from one location to another without problem behaviors. Staff also have seen growth in his ability to regulate his responses, with calmer communication and gentler interactions with materials and the people around him. One especially meaningful milestone came through a long desensitization process with the nursing team. By practicing visits to the nursing area and gradually becoming comfortable sitting in the bloodwork space, Luke was eventually able to give consent and participate more willingly in bloodwork. It was a small moment on the surface, but an important sign of growing trust, self-regulation, and independence.

For his family, the changes have been profound.

"He's thriving," his mother said. "We're seeing things we haven't seen before; he's using full sentences, using his communication device, doing artwork, and bringing home schoolwork. He's writing his name, adding, even identifying where he lives. We didn't know he could do those things."

That growth has extended well beyond the classroom.

"He knows how to communicate what he wants now. He can express his feelings. He's asking for things and noticing when something needs to be fixed. He's so much more independent," she said. "Before we were guessing. Now he can tell us what he wants, even something as simple as lunch."

For Jennifer and her husband Chris, the difference between Luke's experience at the Elizabeth Lee Black School and his previous school has been undeniable. "The progress is indescribable compared to where we were before," Chris said. "Barber National Institute opened the doors to everything for him. When we saw the artwork he made, we cried. We never knew he had that in him."

Their advice to other families is simple: "Don't give up. Explore every option to help your child."





Camp Connections' Talent Show in 2025.



These two campers made their own dessert – and a new friendship – at The Cork in Erie, Pa.

Keeping Growth Going All Summer Long

Summer can be a welcome break from the school-year routine, but it also can be a time when important skills begin to fade. Research shows that more than half of students experience summer learning loss year after year, and on average, those students lose nearly 40 percent of the progress they made during the school year. For students with disabilities, the risk can be even greater, particularly when it comes to communication, regulation, and social development. That is why summer learning matters — not as an extension of school in the traditional sense, but to keep progress active, meaningful, and connected to daily life.

At Barber National Institute, Camp Connections, a camp for children with autism spectrum disorder, is designed with that goal in mind. Rather than allowing social and communication skills to sit idle over the summer, the program gives campers daily opportunities to practice them in a supportive and engaging setting. Campers are surrounded by peers with similar needs, which helps them stay connected, confident, and involved. Through a structured social skills curriculum, group activities, and community field trips, campers continue to build the tools they need, so when school begins again, they are not starting over. They are continuing forward.

“Part of what makes camp so valuable is that it offers a different kind of learning environment. Without the pressure of grades or traditional academic expectations, campers can take safe risks, explore friendships, and practice communication in a more natural way,” said Holly Swope, Barber National Institute’s Camp Connections site supervisor. “At Camp Connections, those social opportunities are not left to chance. Staff intentionally build each

activity around treatment plan goals, weaving communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and independence into games, group projects, and outings. The result is a participatory environment.”

For many campers, consistency and structure are essential, even in the summer. Camp Connections balances that need with the flexibility and fun families hope for in a seasonal program. Daily activity schedules are posted in each classroom, so campers know what to expect, helping them feel safe and prepared. At the same time, staff create room for spontaneity and teach campers how to handle change in positive ways.

“Families often report that camp is the highlight of the year for their child and that the return to school in the fall feels smoother. After staying engaged in a full day of activities and peer interaction throughout the summer, students often come back feeling more socially prepared and emotionally regulated,” said Holly.

Programs like Camp Connections, along with extended school year services at the Elizabeth Lee Black School for students who need continued support, reflect our belief that learning and growth do not stop when the calendar changes. Social confidence can be built on a field trip, communication can be practiced during a group game, and independence can grow in daily small routines. By creating opportunities for campers to stay engaged, supported, and connected, we are helping ensure that progress made during the school year is not lost in the summer, but strengthened for the months ahead.



Always a popular obstacle –
steer that ship!

SEPT. 12, 2026 - WALDAMEER PARK

LAKE ERIE ODYSSEY: AN EPIC JOURNEY AWAITS

Roller coasters cresting under a sunny sky, winding pathways, and the hum of anticipation in the air. This is a typical summer day in Waldameer Park, but on September 12, it will be transformed into something entirely new: Lake Erie Odyssey.

This vibrant obstacle course is designed to celebrate strength, choice, and the joy of possibility. Created by Barber National Institute, Lake Erie Odyssey is a reimagining of what adventure can look like for teens and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Participants will make their way through Waldameer's iconic grounds to take on different obstacles designed to meet them where they are. As they push, pull, tug, or carry their way through the course, participants can choose the challenge that feels right for them or skip an obstacle completely. Nothing is mandatory, and all obstacles can be completed by those who are ambulatory or using a wheelchair, walker, etc.

Along the way, volunteers will be there offering encouragement, support, and kindness through each obstacle. All participants also are encouraged to bring an able-bodied Course Buddy to accompany them throughout the park.

At Lake Erie Odyssey, the fun doesn't end at the last obstacle. It culminates inside Waldameer's Rainbow Gardens, where the finish line opens into a full-blown celebration, complete with food trucks, music, dancing, and a cold beer for those 21 and over.

Thanks to underwriting from Wabtec, participation is free – removing barriers so the focus stays on experience, not cost. Registration is open now, with a July 31 deadline to guarantee a participant shirt in the right size. Families, friends, and supporters are also encouraged to join, cheer, volunteer, or simply witness the joy unfolding across the park, free of charge.

In a world that often underestimates those with disabilities, Lake Erie Odyssey is a day built entirely around celebrating what people can do. After all, every hero deserves an epic journey.



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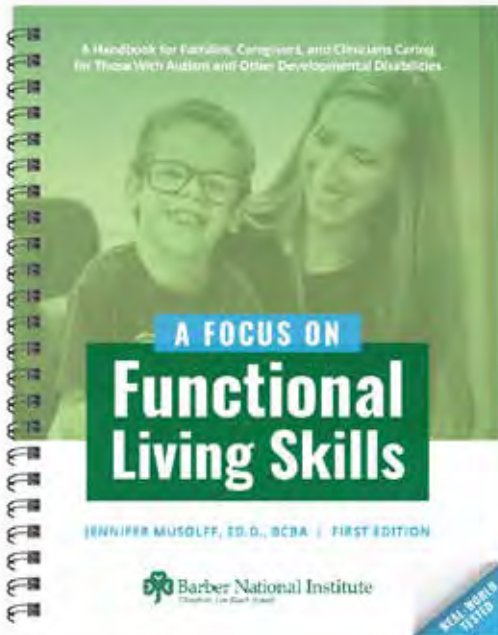


Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.



A Focus on Functional Living Skills:

A Handbook for Caregivers and Clinicians Caring for those with Autism or Developmental Disabilities



Explore and Purchase

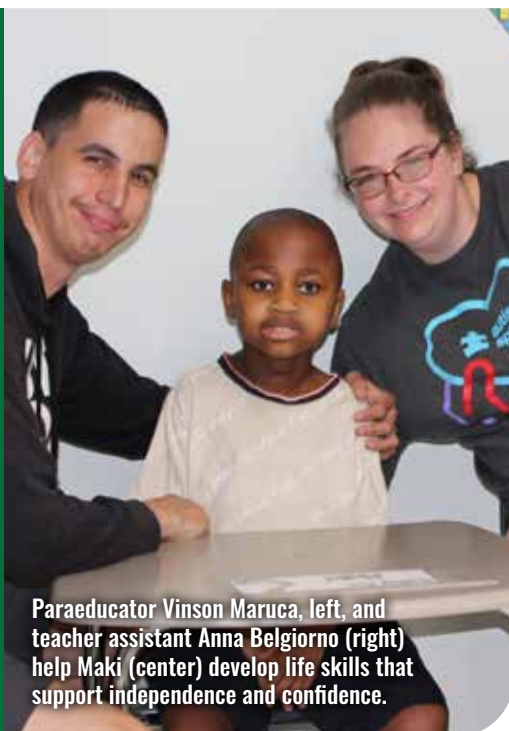
Teaching functional living skills to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities can feel overwhelming, especially when endless advice, programs, and methods pull you in different directions.

As families, we all share the hope that our sons and daughters will thrive, grow, and reach their fullest potential. One of the essential foundations for independence and well-being is the ability to master everyday tasks- these are known as functional living skills or activities of daily living. Many children learn these skills through observation and imitation. However, some children with disabilities often require specific, intense instruction to develop these skills.

A Focus on Functional Living Skills: A Handbook for Families, Caregivers, and Clinicians Caring for Those with Autism or Other Developmental Disabilities cuts through the noise with a clear, practical, and time-tested approach developed by Barber National Institute and written by Jennifer Musolff, Ed.D., BCBA, a behavior analyst at the Elizabeth Lee Black School. You will discover what functional living skills truly mean, why they matter, and how you can teach them in ways that are tailored to your son's or daughter's unique strengths, interests, and needs. The strategies and examples provided are drawn from real-life experiences and proven approaches.

Teaching functional living skills should be a collaborative process involving parents or caregivers and your school's team of teachers, therapists, and behavior analysts. This will ensure that your child is taught these skills consistently and efficiently both at home and school.

"As parents of a non-verbal autistic child, our child's path has been turbulent at times. These techniques are critical to helping him live as independently as possible," said Nick and Amanda H. "We believe that every parent with a child with developmental delays would find this handbook helpful in teaching daily living skills."



Paraeducator Vinson Maruca, left, and teacher assistant Anna Belgiorino (right) help Maki (center) develop life skills that support independence and confidence.



Paraeducator Jeremy Napierkowski (standing) has seen Robert make tremendous progress communicating.



Networking at Engage 360 is an important component to building strong teams.



New team members attend Engage 360, a new approach to onboarding at Barber National Institute.

ENGAGE 360: Reimagining the First Steps of the Staff Journey

At Barber National Institute, onboarding is being rethought as something far more meaningful than a single day of new staff orientation. Through Engage 360, we are building a more intentional staff experience from the moment a new team member joins through their first 90 days and beyond. The goal is simple: help people feel prepared, connected, and confident so they can focus on what matters most—supporting individuals and families.

“That shift reflects a broader understanding of what strong onboarding can do. When new staff feel welcomed and clear about expectations in their first days and weeks, they are more likely to succeed, stay engaged, and begin building meaningful relationships in their roles,” said Deron Lehman, chief human resources officer at Barber National Institute. “That investment strengthens not only the employee experience, but also the consistency and quality of support provided across the organization.”

Engage 360 is designed to move us away from treating onboarding as a one-time event. While orientation and required training remain important, the model recognizes that new staff also need hands-on learning, practical support, and a clear connection between what they are taught and what they will do each day at their work sites. By strengthening that bridge between classroom instruction and real-world practice, the program helps staff understand not only their responsibilities, but also why their work matters.

The initiative also reflects our commitment to being an employer of choice. That commitment is not just about attracting

talented people. It is about helping them thrive once they arrive. Engage 360 gives team members the knowledge, tools, and support they need to grow over time while reinforcing the idea that learning should continue throughout a person’s career. At Barber National Institute, staff development is directly connected to mission fulfillment: when employees grow, the people and families served benefit too.

“That matters for retention as much as for readiness. Team members who feel supported early are more confident in their work and more likely to remain with us. For us, retention is not only a workforce issue,” continued Deron. “It is also a quality-of-service issue. Consistent staffing helps build trust with individuals and families and allows direct support professionals to develop a deeper understanding of each person’s needs, preferences, and goals over time.”

From the beginning, Engage 360 also serves as a culture-building tool. It introduces new staff to our mission, values, and core commitments while setting expectations around accountability, collaboration, growth, and person-centered service delivery. In that way, onboarding becomes more than a process. It becomes an early expression of who we are and how we work.

And this is only the beginning. As we continue gathering feedback and learning

what works best, Engage 360 will keep evolving. Orientation and onboarding are simply the first stages of a broader effort that also will include continuous learning, leadership development, and talent continuity planning. Taken together, the initiative represents an ongoing investment in people—one that starts on day one and continues well beyond it.

Learning and Development Specialist Jared Schaaf leads Engage 360 at our main campus.



Learn more about careers at Barber National Institute

Building the Future of Special Education



Student Kamar (left) works on schoolwork with the help of a Cathedral Prep volunteer (right).



Physical therapist Barb Gleason and student Angelina work on building balance and strength using adapted walking equipment.



Occupational therapist Hannah Spiess (left) plants seasonal vegetables with Micah (right) that he will harvest this fall.



Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey (left) and John Barber (back) and teacher Julie Moore (right) congratulate student Angelina (center) on her graduation.



John has learned to independently use the mixer in the adapted kitchen at the Elizabeth Lee Black School.



Student Julianni (left) proudly shows his original artwork to Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey (right) at the Art Show and Celebration.



Paraeducator Marcorshaniq Davidson (left) and Jeremy (right) play ring toss during gym class.

Across the country, schools are struggling to find enough special education teachers, paraeducators, and therapists.

In its 2025 update, the Learning Policy Institute reported that more than 411,000 teaching positions nationwide were either unfilled or staffed by educators not fully certified for their assignments, with special education remaining one of the hardest-hit areas. Experts point to a shrinking pipeline of new educators and high rates of attrition as key drivers of the crisis.

At Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School, these roles are central to serving students with complex learning, behavioral, and therapeutic needs. Special education teachers, paraeducators, and therapists help create the consistency, expertise, and trust that students and families depend on every day.

As Barber National Institute Executive Vice President Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey explained, our reputation is built on strong outcomes and relationships. "School districts continue to place students at the Elizabeth Lee Black School because they know the school does great work with children who have significant challenges. Families, too, are drawn to the school's team-based approach, where parents are treated as full partners, and their input is valued through both the good times and the difficult ones."

That kind of quality does not happen by accident. In response to workforce pressures, we've taken a close look at both recruitment and retention.

"We have conducted a market analysis to compare our wages and benefits with peer school districts. That work led to wage adjustments for teachers, paraeducators, and therapists," said Dr. Barber-Carey. "Since then, we've seen an increase in applications for teacher and paraeducator positions. The school also has created practical retention supports, including summer work opportunities in residential services for 10-month hourly staff who want to continue earning income during school breaks."

Through partnerships with Mercyhurst University, we are investing in the long-term staff pipeline. Mercyhurst students in graduate education programs gain hands-on classroom experience at the Elizabeth Lee Black School while receiving tuition support and stipends. A new collaboration with Mercyhurst's neurodivergence program introduces students to careers across education and behavioral services through tours, shadowing, and internships. "We also have expanded walk-in interview days, credit-hour internships, facility tours, and career fair outreach across Erie, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia," said Deron Lehman, Barber National Institute's chief human resources officer. "This fiscal year alone, we have attended 22 recruiting events. Through Career Street and other local partnerships, middle and high school students are not only learning about the field but seeing firsthand what a career at Barber National Institute could look like."

A unique partnership with Gannon University is helping to address the growing demand for certified special education teachers. Gannon's School of Education was recently awarded a \$100,000 grant to prepare 15 educators through an intensive, streamlined program designed to create an efficient pathway to certification. Dr. Barber-Carey called the partnership "a wonderful step forward," noting that the collaboration will help more educators pursue this meaningful work while gaining the skills needed to support each learner's unique journey.

In a field facing national strain, our response is grounded in something simple but powerful: if students need exceptional support, we must invest in the people who provide it. By strengthening pay, building partnerships, opening doors to students and interns, and creating meaningful pathways into the profession, we are not waiting for the shortage to solve itself. We are building the workforce needed to serve children well now and in the future.



Learn more about teaching opportunities at Barber National Institute



Zainab Alafrawy,
a student at the
Elizabeth Lee
Black School,
enjoys an adapted
swing with
teacher, Lizdel
Collado-Monahan.



Dr. Gertrude A. Barber
Foundation

Making dreams come true.

Ladies Only Luncheon

Through movement, Barber National Institute's Elizabeth Lee Black School students practice balance, coordination, strength, communication, problem-solving, and social interaction. Climbing, reaching, swinging, pushing, pulling, and moving from one activity to another all help build gross motor skills that support confidence and independence far beyond the playground.

That is why proceeds from the 2026 Ladies Only Luncheon will benefit ongoing improvements to our adaptive playground designed to create a safer, more inclusive outdoor space where every child can participate in meaningful play.

The annual luncheon, planned for Saturday, November 21, 2026, at the Kahkwa Club in Erie, has long supported projects that directly benefit students at the Elizabeth Lee Black School. This year's focus continues that tradition by improving our playground where movement, exploration, and learning can happen side by side.

"For children with disabilities, access to active play is especially important. Outdoor gross motor play helps students strengthen muscles, improve coordination, practice motor planning, and develop body awareness," said Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey, Barber National Institute executive vice president. "Just as importantly, it gives children opportunities to make choices, take safe risks, wait for a turn, communicate with peers, and experience the joy of doing something for themselves."

AI generated image of an inclusive and adapted play space.



This year, we are proud to introduce our newest initiative— Play Without Limits.

At the Elizabeth Lee Black School, we are committed to supporting every student regardless of the challenges they face. Research shows that early access to physical activity helps children maintain a healthy weight, stabilize mood, and support physical and behavioral development. That's why we are enhancing our playground to create a safe, inclusive space where every child can play, explore, and thrive.

This project will include:

- Accessible pathways for confident, independent movement
- Barrier-free play areas for inclusive, side-by-side play
- Engaging play zones that spark movement and imagination
- Sensory-friendly spaces for calming, self-paced play
- Nature-inspired features that foster connection and curiosity



AI generated image of inclusive and adapted swings.



By supporting the Ladies Only Luncheon, guests and sponsors will help build a space where students can move, explore, learn, and grow in ways that are both purposeful and joyful. It is another reminder that learning happens everywhere.

Support the Ladies Only Luncheon

AROUND

Barber National Institute

Congratulations, Lacey on your graduation!



Mike Martin (center) is surrounded by friends and family during his recognition as the Shillelagh Person of the Year.



Production work in Warren.

Barber National Institute celebrated the completion of a \$3M pool and natatorium renovation with a ribbon cutting ceremony on its main campus in Erie, Pa.



Celebrating 2026 Project Search graduation.

Patrick Barber welcomed nine interns from various educational disciplines and universities. Back (left to right): Logan McFadden, Jacob Bennefield, Doug Meehl, Patrick Barber, Amelia Daubenspeck, Evan Bilger, Collin Noel. Front (left to right): Sydney Wilson, Kimberlyn Zazado, Alexa Ong



Somerset teams up for a car wash.



2026 Pre-K and Happy Hearts graduation.

Students thank The Honey Baked Ham Company and Jeff Balogh, manager of the Erie Store, for their recent donation to the Elizabeth Lee Black School. This thoughtful - and delicious - gift of more than 500 pounds of ham will be greatly appreciated by both students and their families!



Adults enjoy fishing in Girard, Pa.



BARBER SPIRIT

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BarberInstitute.org/Events

Upcoming Events

ERIE GIVES DAY

August 11, 2026

LAKE ERIE ODYSSEY

September 12, 2026, Waldameer Park

FOUNDER'S DAY

September 17, 2026

LADIES ONLY LUNCHEON

November 21, 2026, Kahkwa Club

BARBER CHRISTMAS BALL

December 12, 2026, Bayfront Convention Center

ADULT SERVICES CHRISTMAS DANCE

December 13, 2026, Bayfront Convention Center



Barber National Institute