



Variety Child LEARNING CENTER

INVESTING IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SINCE 1966

47 Humphrey Drive Syosset New York 11791

516.921.7171 • www.vclc.org

The Family Connection

Summer 2011

Summer Fun for the Whole Family!
Summertime suggestions from our VCLC families



NAME OF PLACE

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

Adventureland	Rte. 110, Broadhollow Rd., Farmingdale, N.Y.	631-694-6868
Atlantis Marine World	431 E. Main St., Riverhead, N.Y.	631-293-0459
Bounce U	101 Carolyn Blvd., Farmingdale, N.Y.	631-777-5867
Bouncers & Slydos	1835 New Highway, Farmingdale, N.Y.	631-752-2324
Bronx Zoo	Southern Blvd., Bronx, N.Y.	718-741-3836
Cedar Beach	Town of Babylon, Babylon, N.Y.	
Cradle of Aviation Museum	Charles Lindberg Blvd., N.Y.	516-572-4111
Eisenhower Park	Merrick/Stewart Aves., East Meadow, N.Y.	516-572-0348
Garvies Point Museum & Preserve	50 Barry Drive, Glen Cove-, N.Y.	516-571-8010
Holtsville Ecological Center Zoo/Park	Buckley Road, Holtsville, N.Y.	631-758-9664
Kiddie Cruise	Pier 40 – W. Houston St., NYC	212-989-9200
L.I. Children's Museum	11 Davis Ave., Garden City, N.Y.	516-224-5800
L.I. Game Farm	Chapman Blvd., Manorville, N.Y.	631-878-6644
Long Island Puppet Theatre	10 Heitz Place, Hicksville, N.Y.	516-932-5469
Monster Mini Golf	410-C Commack Rd., Deer Park, N.Y.	631-940-8900
Nassau Coliseum Carnival	Uniondale (check Coliseum for dates), N.Y.	516-794-9300
N.Y. Aquarium	602 Surf Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.	718-265-3400
Pump It Up	DuPont Street, Plainview, N.Y.	516-572-2300
*check schedule for free admission - special needs children & OT's		
Queens County Farm Museum	73-50 Little Neck Pkwy., Floral Park, N.Y.	718-347-3276
Sesame Place	100 Sesame Rd., Langhorne, P.A. 19047	215-752-7070
Tackapausha Museum	Washington Ave, Seaford, N.Y.	516-571-7443
Wantagh Pool	Wantagh Park, Wantagh, N.Y.	516-571-7460
White Post Farm	250 Old Country Rd., Melville, N.Y.	631-351-9373

VCLC Celebrates 45 Years!



Janice Friedman, CEO & Andrea Rieger, CFO

Everyone loves celebrations. And Variety Child Learning Center (VCLC) does too! 2011 is VCLC's 45th Anniversary. In 45 years, VCLC has grown from six children to more than 500 children and has changed its name three times.

In 1966, Judith Simon Bloch, who believed that early identification and intervention would have a significant impact on children's development and future outcomes, founded Pre-Schooler's Workshop (PSW). The world for children with disabilities and their families was very different then. Landmark federal legislation was passed by Congress in 1975 assuring children with disabilities an education. Prior to that year, there was no public funding.

After 1975, PSW's enrollment increased and the school outgrew its rented space. In 1977, the school moved to its current location, renting half the building from the Syosset School District. When the school district decided to sell the building, Judith Bloch and the Board of Trustees received a grant from Variety, The Children's Charity to buy the building. The name of the school was changed to Variety Pre-Schooler's Workshop (VPSW).

Over the years, new programs and projects were developed. The school became an ap-

proved evaluation center, received a grant to host the Nassau Early Childhood Direction Center and began the Family Center Sunday Respite Program in 1981. Programs and services for children and families rapidly expanded. Speech, occupational and physical therapies were added. Support services for families grew to include counseling, parent groups, parent training and parent education workshops. In 1992, VPSW applied and became an approved Early Intervention site to provide evaluations, center-based, facility-based and home services to young children (birth to 3) with developmental delays. Fee-for-service programs, including the social skills training program and professional development seminars, were introduced.

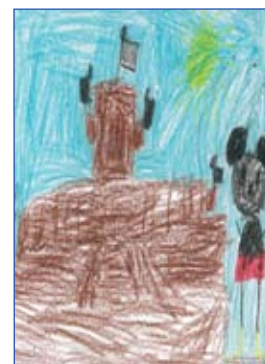
In 1995, VPSW received its first Kresge Challenge Grant to expand the facility. When the second Kresge Challenge Grant was received in 2000, the Board of Trustees voted to change the name of the agency to be more reflective of the array of programs and services provided. Variety Pre-Schooler's Workshop became Variety Child Learning Center (VCLC).

Today, VCLC proudly celebrates its 45th Anniversary. VCLC has come a long way since 1966. It is a multi-faceted agency that provides direct services to children and families, is involved in policy making and advocacy and offers professional development to the early childhood and special education communities.

Thank you to our children and families. You are what we are all about. Thank you to our wonderful staff who are truly dedicated and committed to helping each child become the best that they can be. Thank you to the Board

of Trustees for providing us with endless guidance and support. And, thank you to all VCLC supporters for helping us reach this milestone.

Our Kids' Artwork



Family Center Sunday Respite Program Celebrates Its 30th Anniversary



The Family Center Sunday Respite Program celebrated its 30th Anniversary on Sunday, May 22, 2011, with a short ceremony attended by families and staff honoring New York State Senator Carl Marcellino and Mary Fasano, retired program supervisor. The children

gave Senator Marcellino and



con't on pg. 8

The Essence of Learning in a Therapeutic Environment

Judy Tabak, Principal



Last week, Paul, a kindergarten youngster, came into my office with his teacher. He looked very sad and with tears in his eyes told me that he was very upset because in September he was going to a new school and wouldn't see his teachers and friends from Variety any more. Paul has been at Variety for 4 years. He did not always have the words to say what upset him.

At Variety, we pride ourselves on providing a therapeutic environment in which children learn to express their needs and develop trusting relationships with their teachers. We know that building this relationship is a process that takes time. Emotions of children are strongly influenced by the responsiveness of the caregiver and when children's emotions are reflected by the caregiver, a child's sense of trust or well being is strengthened. We, as educators, have the opportunity to provide affective, meaningful experiences in which a child can work out problematic situations that may interfere with his/her relationships and learning.

The therapeutic classroom, together with a caring teacher, can be the perfect setting for promoting the social-emotional development of young children. One of the ways in which we help our children is to design an environment that supports positive learning experiences.

Visuals, e.g., pictorial schedule of the day, are essential in helping a child to know what is coming next. Simple familiar transitional songs are a kind and gentle way to reduce anxiety and prepare children for the next activity. At Variety we always emphasize what the child needs to do rather than what not to do. Validating feelings, e.g., "I like your smile," or "I think this makes you happy," accompanied by a visual gives a clear, better understood message. And also, to always consider a "setting event." For example, if a child is tired or hungry we can help to meet the child's need. A quiet area to take a rest or offering something to eat, even if it's not scheduled, can just make a child feel better.

School is the child's main experience in life, after his home. The centerpiece of our program is the collaboration between home and school. As partners, we have the opportunity to work together so that students like Paul feel safe in all environments and feel the unconditional support that allows them to express their fears, as well as their joy. Paul was so fortunate to have a teacher/therapist who creatively utilized Paul's strong visual abilities to draw out his feelings and write down his words and thus, opened the doors of communication so that Paul could better understand his emotions, express his feelings and continue to learn to problem solve.

To quote Maya Angelou, *"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."* And when Paul moves on to his new school, we hope he will take all that he learned at Variety with him.



Each Friday, children love to visit my office and make an "announcement" wishing children and staff a 'nice weekend'. Last week, Melanie, Alicia and Elizabeth made a surprise announcement and sang "God Bless America." They were incredible!

Our Kids's Artwork



45 Years of Partnerships with Families

Joan Weinstein
Director, Family Services

45 years ago, it was revolutionary for professionals to consider listening to parents and involving them in their children's education. Judy Bloch, Founder and former CEO of VCLC, understood early on that parents know their children best and should play an integral role in developing a plan to work with their children.

It was Judy Bloch's vision to involve parents and hire staff who would be comfortable working with children in full view that led to our current Open School policy. In this program, parents can walk into the building, without an appointment, and observe their child from outside the classroom through one-way mirrors. This offers parents a priceless opportunity to have a comprehensive picture of their child in their school world. Social workers often observe outside of the classroom with parents to consider how some of the classroom strategies and techniques can be adapted at home.

Variety's concept of joining the ideas, goals and efforts of par-

ents and staff (home and school) has been the guiding principle of the VCLC program and has shaped the practice that continues to this day. Each family is assigned a social worker who is available to help families understand their child's special needs, realize their strengths and to work on both school and home goals.

As we have listened to children and their parents over the years, our collaborative efforts have enabled us to meet your needs. The social workers have made themselves available during the day and on Wednesday evenings because of our belief in the importance of engaging all family members. We know that while all families are unique in their own way, often when there is a worry about a member of the family, it impacts on everyone. And talking to an experienced and trained person who also knows your child can be very helpful. Social workers work closely with families. This may include parent counseling, parent training and/or parent coaching to help strengthen families as well as help develop strategies to help your children.

We have provided parent groups during the day and evening, which initially we called Mother's Groups, but as times have changed, and Dads became more involved we now have "parent groups." This is a unique opportunity to exchange information and ideas with other parents.

Other events sponsored by the Social Work department include Grandparents Day, Sibling Day, Fathers' Night, Daddy & Me and an array of workshops that have developed as parents have made their needs known. We thank our parents for their trust and for their enthusiastic partnership with us.

SAVE THE DATE

Sibling Day
July 21, 2011



Fathers' Night



Our enthusiastic and talented physical education teacher, Lauren LoMonaco, met with VCLC Fathers on Wednesday, April 27th, to talk about some of the activities she teaches our children and to give ideas for home fun. A lively discussion followed and the fathers shared ideas and suggestions with each other. VCLC holds "Fathers' Night" twice a year; in the fall and in the spring. Hope to see you at the next meeting in October 2011!

Grandparents' Day



Parent Organization's Events

Joan Padron
Family Services

As we look back on the 2010-2011 year's past events at VCLC, we are filled with pride at the success of the activities and fund raising that the Parent Organization accomplished.

We began our school year once again with a very successful gift and wrapping paper fundraiser which so many of our families and staff took part. As the winter months arrived, we had an exciting Book Fair where every child was able to attend and purchase a book. Many parents and staff also participated in this fun event!

Photo Day at VCLC is also another busy day. All children were able to have their photos taken and parents ordered pictures of their child as well as a class photo if they wished.

Many of the moms once again helped to make



Comedy Night so special by using their creative and artistic abilities to wrap gift baskets that were spectacular and were raffled off at this beautiful event.

This year, we also did another fundraiser from Yankee Candles. Candles, as well as other gift items, including plants and flowers, were able to be ordered. This new event was a great success!

As the school year was coming to an end, we



were once again honored by our parents with a beautiful and delicious luncheon for all staff. Our devoted Parent Organization members worked endlessly to make this day so very special for all of us.

There aren't enough words to thank this wonderful and dedicated group of parents who gave so generously of themselves each and every day to help make Variety Child Learning Center the extraor-

dinary school that it is. All of the profits from these fundraisers this past year will fund something that will benefit all of the children. The Parent Organization will make their decision from a VCLC Wish List!

As the fall returns, we look forward to working together with those parents whose children will be returning to Variety as well as welcoming new families.

With heartfelt gratitude, we thank all those parents who helped to make the 2010-2011 year so wonderful. A very special thank you to a few parents who throughout the year worked tirelessly on every event and gave of themselves so graciously. They are: Michelle Brandeis, Angela DeRogatis, Janet DiGiovanni, Laura DiTalia, Victoria Hayes, Anna Marie Manasseri, Kim Nemeth, Amy Panza, Keri Primack, Georgia Protan, Tricia Schettino, Harry Weisman and Michelle Zettler. We couldn't have done it without you!!!!

Servicios Para la Familia

Nellie Pugliese



El grupo para padres bilingües en español ha sido un éxito gracias a la participación y el interés de todos los padres que se hicieron presentes en las reuniones. El grupo no solamente facilito la comunicación entre el hogar y la escuela sino que también facilito la com-

prensión y el entendimiento entre los miembros.

En las reuniones de grupo se presentaron temas de interés común, se ofrecieron talleres educativos y se promovió un ambiente terapéutico de ayuda mutua.

Basado en el testimonio de los padres, el grupo



les dio la posibilidad de conectarse con otros padres, compartir experiencias y aprender estrategias nuevas para ayudar a sus hijos. A través del programa de Leer

es Fundamental, con la valiosa colaboración de Maria Ariss, leímos libros en español y comprendimos la importancia de transmitir nuestro lenguaje. En nombre de Joan Weinstein, coordinadora del programa de servicios para la familia queremos agradecer a todos aquellos que han hecho que este grupo sea posible. Para más información o si desea participar en el grupo llamar a la extensión 2159. Que usted y su familia disfruten del verano.



Laughter for Children's Sake - Evening of Comedy

On Friday, March 18th, over 350 VCLC families and friends gathered together at the Crest Hollow Country Club in Woodbury for our annual Comedy Night fundraiser, which raised approximately \$85,000! This year, in addition to a fantastic comedy show, we welcomed three moving speakers who spoke to the audience about their experiences at VCLC. VCLC dad Kevin Bell read a heartfelt and original poem entitled "The Little Window." VCLC mom Karren Fortunet spoke eloquently about the importance of the work being done at the school, and VCLC alumna Shelly Ourian gave everyone in attendance a powerful reminder about the life-changing importance of early intervention and why we do the work we do. It was a fun filled evening featuring top-of-the-line comedians, dinner, and fabulous raffles prizes. All funds raised directly benefit programs for our children.



Save the date: Next year's event will be on Friday, March 23rd!

For more information about this annual event, and details on how to get involved in the future, please contact Jackie Duodu at ext. 2259.

Youth Action Council Hosts Car Wash

On May 21st, Variety's Youth Action Council (YAC), a partnership between Variety and young leaders of tomorrow who are interested in community involvement, hosted a car wash to raise money for programs and services. The event was a large success due to the enthusiasm of the volunteers and the support of the Variety Community. The car wash raised over \$800.

Members of the Council are high school students. Eligible high school students, with an interest in service, are invited to apply. The first members were brought on board last year. These dedicated students are committed to the goals of raising awareness about children with disabilities and enriching the lives of Variety's students and their families.

Thank you to our Youth Action Council and all those who came out to support the car wash!

For more information about the YAC, contact Angela Hamel at 921-7171, ext. 2179 or at ahamel@vclc.org.



VCLC Vacation Recreation Program

The goal of the VCLC Vacation Recreation Program is to provide the children with a fun, stress-free experience while building important adjustment, play and social skills while they are on break from school. This has certainly been achieved.

During the program, children are able to choose preferred activities during structured playtimes. They participate in computer time, music activities, sensory activities, arts and crafts and indoor and outdoor play in the gyms and playgrounds. During our last summer session, they enjoyed time splashing under the sprinklers. Our skilled and experienced teachers and assistants have provided a nurturing environment and developed a program that is a great success. **We look forward to our next Vacation Recreation Program on June 28th & 29th and August 17th & 31st!**

For more information about the VCLC Vacation Recreation Program, please contact Jackie Blatt at 921-7171, ext. 2185.

What's Happening Around Variety?



Claire brings Tango, the therapy dog, for his weekly visit!



"Daddy & Me"



Children celebrate Halloween with a costume parade!



Some friends came to entertain students with live music!



Board member Alice Rouse celebrates Chinese New Year with students who make her a traditional hat to say 'thanks'!



Kisha's class releases butterflies!



Sunday Respite 30th Anniversary *cont. from pg. 2*

Mary hand-made cards. Andrea Rieger, CFO, presented Senator Marcellino with a plaque thanking him for his years of support. The Senator, through Legislative Item Grants, secured funds to enable the program to offer extra programs for the children and families. Janice Friedman, CEO, presented Mary Fasano, who was the program supervisor for over 20 years, with a plaque thanking her for her dedication to the children and families who attended the respite program.

In addition to the brief ceremony and reception, children were treated to a special day in honor of the 30th Anniversary. They enjoyed a carnival complete with games, prizes and an inflatable bouncer.

The Family Center Sunday Respite Program began in 1981 based on the concept that young children with disabilities need structured recreational and social experiences and families need respite and time to be able to take care of their needs as well as those of their other children. The program is funded by OPWDD (Office of People with Developmental Disabilities, formerly known as OMRDD, Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities). Rebecca Esquilin Cortes and Sheryl Sobel are the program supervisors and are assisted by Kristen Schuhlein, behavior specialist. There are 54 leaders, assistant teachers and specialists.

Today, there are 16 sessions each year, 8 for the Fall and 8 in the Spring, between September and June. Typically, there are approximately 100-125 young children with disabilities, 3 to 10 years of age, along with some of their siblings enrolled in each 8 week session. The children with disabilities must meet OPWDD eligibility standards. There is a nominal fee for siblings.

Applications for enrollment in the Family Center Sunday Respite Program are available now. For eligibility requirements, please contact Rebecca Esquilin Cortes at resquilin@vclc.org or (516) 921-7171, Ext. 2190, or Sheryl Sobel at ssobel@vclc.org or Ext. 2181. For an application or more information, please contact Antonella Mennuti at Ext. 2104 or at amennuti@vclc.org.



Take a look at some of the impressive bulletin boards our classes have decorated.