



## In Memory—and Celebration—of Rabbi Max Wall (1915-2009)

from Executive Director Todd Centybear

THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S Big Night event was "Care Like No One is Watching." Rabbi Max Wall, who died on May 12, 2009, epitomized this credo better than anyone I know.

Rabbi Wall cast a special influence over those he came in contact with. My professional life at HowardCenter was shaped by the engaging way he bettered this community by deeply caring for everyone in it. HowardCenter was fortunate that one of his labors was improving the mental health of our friends, families, and neighbors.

In all my personal interactions with him, I don't ever recall getting a definitive response to a particular agency problem I was struggling to solve. Instead, more often than not, he posed questions which led me to finding an answer to a larger enigma I had yet to discover. He was the community's therapist.

When Rabbi Wall retired from Ohavi Zedek in 1987, he chose to offer his services as a volunteer in the mental health field. He served on HowardCenter's Board of Trustees between 1988–1992 and was an honorary member from 1995 until his death. While on the Board, he chaired its Psychiatric Disabilities Committee and

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Thanks to the Benefits Alliance for being the Presenting Sponsor of our Big Night. Left to right, back: Beth Esmond, Scott Esmond, Chris Phelan (Benefits Alliance), Jen Phelan; middle: Gillian Pieper (Benefits Alliance), Karen Pike, Ann Yandow; front: Patricia McGoldrick and John Gutman (both from Benefits Alliance).

## Care Like No One Is Watching

IN HER ADDRESS TO BIG NIGHT guests, actor and author Kathryn Blume described HowardCenter as an "antidote" to the message of doom and gloom that we hear all too often from the media. Admittedly, there are elements of truth lurking beneath the doom and gloom narrative. "But it isn't the whole truth," says Blume. She adds, "And we know that, in part, thanks to HowardCenter."

Blume praised HowardCenter for embodying a different kind of truth: "a truth based on social currency which involves investing in the people who need the most help, and providing the tools and resources they need to make their lives functional and whole." However, she acknowledged that often the dividends "earned" by investing in people are difficult to measure, which may give rise to the question: Can I make any kind of difference at all? Blume answered that question by relating an old fable about a sparrow who hears that the sky

is going to fall. And so he lies down on his back and holds his legs up in the air. The king's soldier comes along and says, "What are you doing little sparrow?"

The sparrow says, "The sky is going to fall, and I'm holding it up."

"With those skinny little legs?"

"Well," says the sparrow, "someone's got to try."

Again, Blume praised the folks at HowardCenter for performing "those sparrow-like acts of foolish courage, of quiet compassion, or fierce advocacy—not because it's going to work, necessarily. They do them because it's right. They take action because someone has to try, and because taking action is what keeps their spirits and their hearts alive."

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**“HowardCenter provides a much needed service to a population presenting a milieu of concerns and challenges.”**

—Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Programs



## HowardCenter Board Member Appears on “Oprah”

**H**AL COLSTON, CHAIRPERSON OF the Governance Committee of HowardCenter’s Board of Trustees, recently appeared on the “Oprah” show. Colston was one of several guests featured in the “Heroes in Hard Times” segment that aired on May 19. Colston was recognized for his work in establishing the Good News Garage—a non-profit organization that receives donations of old cars, repairs them, and then sells them for a nominal fee to families who are in need of reliable transportation. Although Colston is no longer associated with the Garage, he says that since the program’s inception in 1996, more than 3,500 people have benefited.

After leaving the Good News Garage team in 2004, Colston went on to create NeighborKeepers, a non-profit organization which provides a circle of support to impoverished single mothers and their families.

Colston first joined HowardCenter’s Board in 2002. He then left the board to become HowardCenter’s first Diversity Coordinator, a position he held for about two years. He left the staff position to create the non-profit organization NeighborKeepers. In 2007 he stepped back onto HowardCenter’s Board where he now serves as the Chair of the Governance Committee. Without much fanfare, and with little or no expectation of recognition, Colston has brought to his work a spirit of caring and connection that has strengthened our community. ■



In the tournament were (from left) Rick Salmonsens, Jay Welenc, Walter Reed II, and Doug Richardson, all from Stericycle Biosystems.

## IEHA Support “Over” Par

**O**N MAY 29, MORE THAN 100 GOLFERS participated in the VertMont Chapter of the International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA) annual HowardCenter Charity Classic golf tournament at Basin Harbor Club. Now in its 14th year, the tournament benefits HowardCenter Child, Youth, and Family Services. The sponsors of this year’s event include as major sponsor Climate Systems, Inc. and corporate sponsors Allston Supply, Angelica Textile Services, Foley Distributing, L/R Pest Elimination, Myers Container Services, Secur-

Shred, Stericycle Biosystems, Swish/Kenco, and White River Paper Co. Hole Sponsors were Alpha Electric, Amalgamated Culture Works, O’Dell, and Go Jo.

On June 12, the VertMont Chapter of the IEHA presented the CYFS Outdoor Challenge Program with a check for \$6,548. During the last 14 years, the IEHA has donated over \$90,000 to HowardCenter Child, Youth, and Family Services. ■

## St. Albans Center Relicensed

**I**N A RECENT RELICENSING VISIT BY the Alcohol and Drug Programs of the Vermont Department of Health (ADAP) program, HowardCenter’s St. Albans site received commendations in several areas, including assessment and referral; case management; outpatient treatment; accessibility, health, and safety; and general program standards. The site offers substance abuse counseling and treatment for residents in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. The ADAP report contained high praise for the dedicated and committed staff and noted that the agency “provides a much needed service to a population presenting a wide milieu of concerns and challenges.” ■

## Workplace Safety Award

**H**OWARDCENTER WAS RECENTLY recognized by Governor Jim Douglas as one of 16 Vermont employers working to keep employees safe on the job. HowardCenter received a certificate of recognition for its advocacy of workplace safety programs and policies. ■

**“Planning a vacation [is] really a metaphor for having normal dreams and people helping you achieve them.”**

—Larry Bissonnette, *HowardCenter* artist

## **Communication Creates Community: A New Documentary Featuring Larry Bissonnette**



**In Sri Lanka, Larry Bissonnette relaxes while a film crew gets set up.**

**T**HIS SUMMER, LARRY BISSONNETTE, an artist who receives services through HowardCenter, is traveling to Asia and Europe to participate in the filming of a documentary about autism in which he is featured. He is accompanied by Pascal Cheng, a HowardCenter Education and Communication Specialist within Developmental Services. In May, the pair left for Syracuse University in New York, where Larry presented a workshop at a conference. Since then, they have visited Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Tokyo, Japan. On June 8, they left for a conference in Helsinki, Finland, where Larry gave another presentation. Traveling with them is Tracy Thresher, a fellow Vermonter who also has autism and is in the film.

The trip is designed to provide education and advocacy for communication technologies available to individuals with autism. At each location, Larry and Tracy have spent time with other individuals with autism who face communication challenges and communicate by typing on a special computer. In Tokyo, they met with a young man named Naoki, an artist with autism. In Japan, individuals with autism who do not communicate verbally are generally segregated

from the mainstream of society. Naoki was excited about communicating with others who have autism and was interested in learning how to advocate for the right to be more included in Japanese society.

At Tokyo University, Larry, Tracy, and Naoki gave a presentation at a conference on autism. The workshop—peppered with Larry’s humorous comments—was very well received. When asked about his daily life, Larry replied, “Nearly every day I go to my art studio, have gourmet

### **Facilitated Communication**

According to Pascal Cheng, facilitated communication entails communicating by typing on a keyboard or pointing at letters, images, or other symbols to represent messages. Facilitated communication involves a combination of physical and emotional support to an individual who has difficulties with speech and with unassisted typing.

coffee, and keep in shape with bowling. In my apparently now film-star life, I travel and eat sushi.” He also commented about “loosening my tensions with ice cold Budweiser.”

According to Cheng, Larry is thoroughly enjoying the experience and is handling the long days of filming very well. At a meeting with Tokyo University students, Larry was asked about his impressions of Tokyo. He responded by typing out, “pretty populated, glad... getting palatial treatment at all restaurants... both streets and buildings speak to a vibrancy and energy in people that is inspiring but overwhelming on the senses.” When students asked him about his hopes and dreams, Larry’s sense of humor was apparent in his answer, “Planning a vacation to Japan.” He then added, “Planning a vacation really was a metaphor for having normal dreams and people helping you achieve them.”

During their travels Larry and Tracy have had to adjust to the local culture and customs. But these accommodations haven’t dampened Larry’s appreciation of his experience. He describes his impressions as “Plenty of lovely people makes me look at going to places like Japan as building new lines of communication between people of meaningfully lasting temperaments.” The emphasis of the trip has been on the interaction between people, and Cheng claims that Larry and Tracy have progressed in their abilities to communicate with others because of this experience. The excitement and meaningfulness of the project has instilled in them a desire to be spokespeople for disability rights issues.

Their travels are being chronicled by Academy-Award-winning film director Gerardine Wurzburg and co-producer Douglas Biklen, Dean of the College of Education at Syracuse University. Wurzburg and Biklen envision the film as being a positive portrayal of autism around the world. The projected release date for the film is January, 2010. ■

“Every act of healing makes us all a little more whole.”

—Kathryn Blume, *Featured Speaker, Big Night 2009*



John and Melissa Cronin; Karen O'Neill, Board President.

# Big Night, Big Thanks

Thank you one and all for your contributions to our annual Big Night event. The support we receive from the community is a key element of our success.

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Julie Simpson  
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## Additional thanks to:

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Gus Rosendale and  
Stephanie Gorin from  
WPTZ-TV, CH 5



Master of Ceremonies, Barry Stone (at right, top); Auctioneer, Afi Ahmadi (at right, bottom).



Stars of the video shown at Big Night, “Client Stories: Success Continued”: (from left) Steven, Megan, Sherri, Amanda and her two daughters, Amy, and Guy.



Steve and Marna Tulin (top); Peter and Candy McCarthy (above); Gretchen Morse and Robin Hayden (far left); Burlington Mayor Bob Kiss and Jackie Majoros (left).



## Celebrating Hope *continued from page 1*



“The cool part” added Blume, “is that all the programs HowardCenter offers and the passionate, committed people who run them do make a difference.” She continued, “The people of HowardCenter keep the sky from falling in the lives of many, many individuals and families, and they give hope where none existed before. They care where nobody else does . . . Because every act of healing makes us all a little more whole.”

In closing, Blume acknowledged that the contributions and support of the guests attending Big Night were making a difference, too. “You’re giving because you know that by giving, by raising your little limbs in the air, you are helping to hold up someone’s sky.” ■

For the full text of Kathryn Blume’s Big Night address, visit [www.howardcenter.org](http://www.howardcenter.org).



Left to right: David Conard, Bob Hallowell, Todd Centybear, Ann Hallowell, Jeff Bradley, and Jessie Bradley.



Left to right: Representing Major Sponsor W.B. Mason: Tom Juiffre, Nichole Juiffre, Shauna Burke, Seth Burke, Bryan Van Alstine, Steve Martellaro, Brian Connor, and Kerry Connor.



Left to right, back: Susan Crockenberg, Bunky Bernstein, Lynne Bond, Owen Clay; front: Vince Crockenberg, Carol Clay, Carol Hanley, and David Watts.

All Big Night photography: [www.carolynbates.com](http://www.carolynbates.com).

"I wanted to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem."

—David Turner, Member, HowardCenter Community Advocacy Network



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## Community Advocacy Network: Giving Clients a Voice

The last issue of CenterScope featured the Family Advisory Council, one of HowardCenter's standing committees, created to encourage feedback from community members who receive services through HowardCenter. In this issue, we will highlight the Community Advocacy Network.

THE COMMUNITY ADVOCACY NETWORK (CAN) was established 14 years ago to encourage feedback from clients—and their family members—who receive mental health services through HowardCenter. Membership in the group is open to clients within the Community Support Program (CSP), family members, and HowardCenter staff.

Carmen Thibodeau, a HowardCenter Board Member whose son has been receiving services through HowardCenter for many years, serves as co-chair with David Turner. The fact that clients attend the meetings was an incentive for Thibodeau to become involved in the group. She says, "It's interesting to hear what clients have to say. It helps Howard to provide better services."

The structured agendas for each meeting may be overshadowed by the specific concerns of clients. In general, the meetings provide a forum for clients to talk about the health services that they receive. As an example, Thibodeau describes a client's concerns regarding the care he received at a medical facility. As a member of CAN, Thibodeau is able to advocate on behalf of HowardCenter clients and bring their concerns to the attention of other area health providers.

With the recent discussion about the impact of state budget cuts on social services, clients are worried about losing the services they receive through HowardCenter—services that help to keep them "on track." Thibodeau tries to calm their concerns, and often HowardCenter staff attend the meetings to answer specific questions about the budget or larger issues.



WWW.CAROLYNBATES.COM

Carmen Thibodeau.

Middlebury College graduate David Turner began attending meetings about 12 years ago. He credits CAN with providing support, helping him to connect with other people, and educating him about mental health. His experience has helped him to change his role from that of a mental health patient to that of a mental health advocate. Turner says, "I wanted to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem. CAN has helped me to change that."

Although the meetings are often informal, CAN has specific goals and responsibilities, including working to improve client satisfaction and treatment outcomes. Time is spent during meetings educating members about patient care plans, consumer and family involvement, and case management. The group uses annual consumer satisfaction surveys and family satisfaction surveys to assess its effectiveness.

In addition, CAN annually advises HowardCenter on its performance in areas of program management, evaluation of services, local system of care plan, resource allocation, service planning and implementation, agency policy and grievance resolution. ■

*CSP services provide community counseling and support for adults with a diagnosis of mental illness.*

### Our Mission

HowardCenter improves the well-being of children, adults, families, and communities.

Child, Youth & Family Services

Developmental Services

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services

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**“Our supporters have really convinced us to keep going, because it is a necessary thing we are doing.”**

—Kathy Connolly, HowardCenter Board member and Co-chair of the EHR Campaign

## Electronic Health Records Provide Highest Quality of Care

Of the approximately 1,200 individuals who work for HowardCenter, the majority work with clients and may spend more than 40% of their time on mandated state and federal paperwork, much of it duplicative. Recently, HowardCenter began the necessary groundwork to convert to an Electronic Health Records (EHR) system in order to provide the best and most up-to-date client care possible.

Last year, HowardCenter embarked on a \$1,000,000 campaign to cover project costs. Early on, the campaign received a \$300,000 challenge grant from the Vermont Foundation for Children and Families. According to Gail Rosenberg, staff campaign coordinator, “We are thrilled to announce that we have met the match and are 60% toward reaching our goal.”

Two recent gifts warrant special mention. First, \$44.67 in coins was collected by individuals HowardCenter supports through its Developmental Services programs. An enthusiastic group ran a bottle-return fundraising drive to help meet the challenge grant. Then, an individual donor made a contribution of \$5,165.67—the precise amount needed to achieve the match by June 3, so it could be announced at the Big Night event.

Kathy Connolly and Rick Blount, campaign co-chairs, noted that the tough economic times have proved challenging to the campaign, but that community support has compelled HowardCenter to keep moving forward. The campaign has benefited from the support of individuals, businesses, and foundations that understand that this is a project about people, for people. “We’ve had such an outpouring of support from people who know how important it is to provide the highest level of care to HowardCenter’s clients,” said Connolly. “Our supporters have really convinced us to keep going because it is a necessary thing we are doing.”

An Electronic Health Records System allows confidential information to be more secure; promotes operational efficiency; decreases billing errors; saves money, time, and environmental resources; and allows more focus on accountability. The electronic system is necessary to ensure that clinical staff can focus on client care—and reduce time spent on duplicative paper work.

HowardCenter selected Askesis Development Group (ADG), based in Pittsburgh, as its EHR provider. ADG offers a comprehensive package geared to behavioral health providers that safeguards this confidential information. HowardCenter is pleased to note that it is the first mental health center in Vermont to receive a Certificate of Approval for an EHR project from the state.

“What’s been especially encouraging is the generous support from the Vermont Foundation for Children and Families, the HowardCenter Board, and the agency’s staff leaders,” says Blount. “Donors notice when those who know the agency best are supportive. It gives others the confidence to follow suit.”

Special thanks go to a fundraising committee of community leaders, including co-chairs Rick Blount and Kathy Connolly, Lesli Blount, Joe Boutin, Kevin Dwyer, Joyce Hagan, Jim Leddy, Roxanne Leopold, Jan Marinelli, Sarah Muyskens, and Marna Tulin, and supported by HowardCenter staff member Gail Rosenberg. ■

*For more information about the campaign or how to donate, please contact Gail Rosenberg at 488-6912 or [gailr@howardcenter.org](mailto:gailr@howardcenter.org).*



**On May 29, Burlington’s Contois Auditorium came alive with the annual “Evening of the Arts,” a festival of music, poetry readings, and artwork showcasing the talents of individuals who receive services through HowardCenter’s Westview House. Above is a detail of a watercolor, one of the many paintings on display.**

### **Rabbi Max Wall** *continued from page 1*

advocated for HowardCenter while building relationships with the medical center and the UVM Department of Psychiatry. He also served on the Board of the Vermont Association of Mental Health, and both the Vermont and National Alliances for the Mentally Ill. Rabbi Wall served as Chaplain to the Vermont State Hospital and Brandon Training School.

Through his service on HowardCenter’s Board, Rabbi Wall met Roch Thibodeau, a family member of an individual with mental illness. Together they became a dynamic duo of advocates. In their honor, HowardCenter created the Thibodeau-Wall Award for Community Service. It has become our tradition to award this honor at Big Night celebrations but only when a person of distinction shows such outstanding caring, often when no one is watching. We confess however, Rabbi, we couldn’t help but notice all that you did. ■



Early Childhood Program staff, left to right, back: Jill Greene, Emily Lenilko, Samantha Eayrs, Gail Rafferty (Director); front: Jaclyn Strano, Ashley Sargent, Gina Barrera, Daniela Caserta (Assistant Director).  
Missing from photo: Liz Mitchell and Diana Peach.

## Support and Collaboration: Key Elements in Early Childhood Programs

HOWARDCENTER'S EARLY CHILDHOOD Program offers consultation, support, and training to parents and early childhood professionals with children in their care who are experiencing emotional and behavioral difficulty. An additional feature at HowardCenter's Pine Forest Children's Community, a childcare center for children ages six weeks to six years, is the therapeutic supported childcare which offers assistance to children and families that have unique mental health needs.

According to Early Childhood Program Director Gail Rafferty, "Embedding services in childcare provides a sense of security and safety for families who had been losing childcare due to their children's problems. Parents are staying employed because they don't have to leave work to care for a child who is acting out at childcare or needs more attention than what the childcare provider can offer." This type of

support also eases the burden on childcare teachers. Pine Forest Children's Community is staffed with clinicians who assist the classroom teachers. Teachers can consult with the on-site clinicians to discuss mental health needs, and they can be supported as they offer outreach to families.

In addition, HowardCenter collaborates with two other private non-profit childcare providers, Trinity Children's Center and Burlington Children's Space, to provide a part-time clinician and a full-time program interventionist support person at each of those sites.

Looking forward, HowardCenter's Early Childhood Program will enhance its collaboration with the State of Vermont's Children's Integrated Services (CIS) within Chittenden County. The focus of CIS is to provide a seamless system of care for families with young chil-

dren (from birth to age six) who require medical, developmental, and mental health services. HowardCenter's Early Childhood Program will provide the mental health component; the Family Infant and Toddler Program will offer developmental services; and Healthy Babies, Kids, and Families will provide maternal-child health support services. In addition, families may receive in-home parenting support, supportive counseling for children and adult family members, and behavioral consultation and support.

By participating in the coordination and integration of local services, HowardCenter's Early Childhood Program is working to ensure that young children and their families within Chittenden County have access to the widest possible array of early intervention services. ■

For more information, contact Gail Rafferty at 488-6672 or email her at [gailra@howardcenter.org](mailto:gailra@howardcenter.org).