



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Gala 2021: Celebrating Three Dedicated Volunteers

Our “Joy & Gratitude” Dinner will be held on Sunday, October 3, at a new venue—the **McClinch Family Center at Saint Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull**. Elena and Steve Schlegel and Virginia Dwyer-Aoyama will be recognized for their dedication and service at the dinner. After almost two years, we are excited about gathering together as the Saint Catherine community. This annual dinner is the only fundraising event for the Center. It plays an important role in our celebrating community and providing an opportunity for our family of donors to support our mission.

Elena and Steve Schlegel of New Canaan will receive the Leadership Award in recognition of their commitment to the expansion of Saint Catherine Center. When their daughter Katherine passed away in 2018, the Schlegels asked that contributions in her memory be designated to a special fund for this purpose. In May 2021, they hosted an event to launch the [Building For the Future](#) campaign, which will expand programming and double the footprint of our current facility.

“We’re so excited about this endeavor with Saint Catherine’s,” said Elena, who has volunteered in numerous roles at the Center since 2015. “Taking something this tragic and trying to turn it around and help other people has been a really great thing for our family. And it’s exactly what I know my beautiful Katherine would want us to be doing.”

Virginia Dwyer-Aoyama of Darien will be honored with the Volunteer Service Award for her commitment and dedication to the mission of Saint Catherine's, highlighted by the development and implementation of the Library Program at Saint Catherine Academy.

In 2008, when Virginia was a new member of the Order of Malta, the Order’s Area Chair Jeanie Tisdale asked her if she would consider initiating a library program for Saint Catherine Academy students, and she agreed. Led by a



dedicated group of Malta volunteers, the Library Program is now 13 years old and part of the weekly program. ([See December 2019 enewsletter](#))



“The idea was for the students to experience and enjoy books read out loud and to learn to feel comfortable in a library,” said Virginia. “We hope that what we expose them to at school will give them options for using their free time at home.” During the pandemic, Virginia and Jeanie read to the students on Zoom. They were excited to return for Library in-person last week.

“We are very grateful for the support of our families, friends, and volunteers like Virginia and Elena and Steve,” said Helen Burland, Executive Director. “The dinner is a way to celebrate our work and those who support it.”

“Joy & Gratitude” Dinner
Sunday, October 3, 2021 5 – 9 p.m.
New Venue: McClinch Family Center, Saint Catherine Parish, Trumbull

[Click to RSVP to the dinner, or make a contribution](#)

Glad to Be Back: Another School Year Begins



Our students and staff returned to school with great energy and enthusiasm. The first two weeks have been spent refreshing skills and getting reacquainted. The overall consensus is that “it’s great to be back!”

[View some photos](#)

We welcomed a new teacher, Rosemary Lara, who brings many years of experience in elementary and special education to the position. Most recently, Ms. Lara was a teaching assistant at South School in New Canaan. “I’m excited to form a routine and watch the students get comfortable and respond,” she said. “While it looks different for each of them, I can see that they love to work hard.”

Sr. Cheryl Driscoll has found her students eager to be back. “They are definitely more independent, especially in their academics,” she said. “They remembered



the routine and last year's work." Everyone was glad to see Sr. Maureen Ulatowski, SSND, who has returned to Sr. Cheryl's classroom after a year's hiatus due to the pandemic.

Students in Joanne LaPorta's class have returned with a new level of confidence. Formerly quite shy, Tanisha is now playing games and puzzles with her classmate, Kari. She is also counting and writing numbers. "The students have adjusted quickly to the classroom routine," said Mrs. LaPorta. "It's wonderful to watch the interactions with each other as they make new friends."

"My students have gotten taller!" said Jim Winebrenner about his class. "They're ready to learn and have some fun."

Class goals for the year include improving academic and life skills; getting out into the community again to go grocery shopping and return to vocational sites; and, of course, having fun.

"Our students come in smiling and they leave smiling," said Eric Spencer, Director of Education. "That is evidence to me that they're happy to be back."



A Wonderful Summer with our Adult Community

From ordinary activities, like cooking and gardening, to outings at Silver Sands State Park and mini golf at Norwalk Cove Marina, our adult community had a wonderful summer. Before we get too far into autumn, [here are some photo highlights.](#)



Coming Your Way Soon

Our 2020-21 Annual Report
is in the mail!



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