

Oak Hill Newsletter

A Newsletter for Friends of Oak Hill

New Beginnings at Oak Hill: Greg's Story

Greg's story is one of perseverance and hope. At age 57, Greg has been with Oak Hill for nearly 40 years. He began his Oak Hill journey as a student at Oak Hill School in Hartford. Today, Greg lives at our Davis Road group home. Along with four of his five housemates, Greg has lived there since 1986. Always ready to seize the day, the Davis Road gentlemen are immersed in their communities. Through the pandemic, Greg and his housemates prepared thousands of dental kits for local medical offices and the COVID-19 field hospital at Rentschler field!

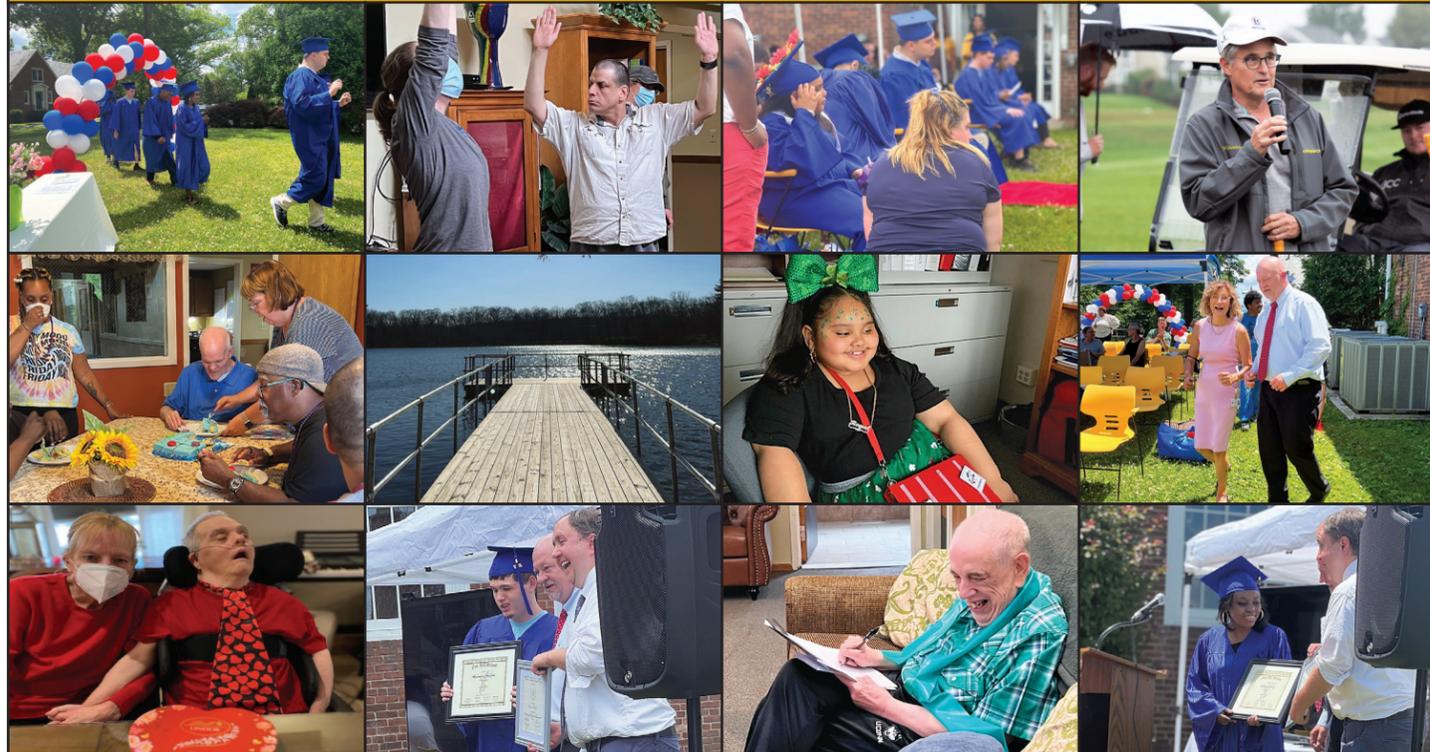
As a child, Greg had limited sight and hearing capabilities, which gradually faded as a result of Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS). CRS occurs in infants whose mothers suffer from a rubella infection during pregnancy. While Greg made peace with his hearing loss a number of years ago, he held onto hope that he would eventually regain his eyesight. For most of this adult life, Greg has lived as a deaf-blind individual. Always the optimist, Greg held onto his glasses, just in case he ever needed them again.

Greg uses tactile sign language to communicate with program staff, friends, and loved ones. When you meet Greg for the first time, he will touch the top of your head to see how tall you are. Shaking your hand in greeting, Greg will likely check your left ring finger for a ring. Touch is Greg's anchor to the world. He is known for his warmth, meaningful connections to the people in his life, and concern for others. If you accidentally mis-sign a word, Greg will patiently show you the correct way and help you laugh it off.

In late 2021, much to his surprise, Greg was informed by his doctor that he was eligible for a cochlear implant, a device implanted on one's cochlea to restore hearing capabilities. Greg was shocked and delighted; Cochlear implants are not frequently offered to adults. The surgery was performed in January. At the appointment to turn on the implant, Greg was surrounded by some of the most important people in his life, including his legal guardian, former teacher, and dearest friend, Kathy Morgan, and the dedicated Davis Road staff who have been with Greg since 1986, Program Director Marybeth Delaney and Residential Program Worker Wes Rog. They held Greg's hands as the implant was activated. The first sound Greg heard was classical music. The second, his name. For the first time in nearly a lifetime, Greg heard his name as Kathy signed it into his palm. Bound by 30 years of love and affection, Greg shared one of the most special moments of his life with Marybeth, Wes, and Kathy, without whom this couldn't be possible. They were Greg's biggest advocates and cheerleaders as he underwent this emotional and transformative experience. After years of silence, Greg is connecting with the world around him in new, magnificent ways. At Oak Hill, it is never too late to start again.



Oak Hill Moments & Memories



Parent-Donor Spotlight: Gary and Debbie Horn Why Does the Horn Family Donate to Oak Hill?

When their son David was a freshman in high school, Gary and Debbie Horn experienced the difficulty that so many parents face to get the supportive services their child needs. They had a choice: Accept what their school district was willing to provide for David, or fight for what they knew their son truly needed. David was struggling with some behavioral concerns, and the best their home district would provide was two hours of home schooling a week. The Horns knew that this was not the support David needed to be successful. "As parents, we had to advocate. It's a full-time job," said Gary. The Horns fought tooth and nail to ensure their son got the education he needed. Enter Oak Hill School.

David studied at the Oak Hill New Britain classroom for several years until he reached the milestone every parent dreams about: Graduation! Hearing David's name called and watching him accept his certificate was one of the most special moments of their lives. During his time with Oak Hill School, David developed meaningful relationships with his teachers, especially his occupational therapist, affectionately called "Mrs. P." Gary describes David's Oak Hill experience as a "breath of fresh air." Gary could tell that "Oak Hill liked and valued David." Oak Hill believes that every student, no matter the obstacles, can grow, learn, and thrive. Our educators value our students for exactly who they are.

Since graduation, David lives in the community and spends quality time with his parents every day, going on long car rides and having Saturday night sleepovers at their family home. We are inspired by the Horns' story and their strong family bond! Although David is no longer an active member of the Oak Hill Community, the Horn Family gives because "Oak Hill was there during a very difficult time" in their lives. Their continued contributions allow us to provide the same experience David had to others. Oak Hill is eternally grateful to the Horn family for their generosity and for the wonderful time David spent with us. As a treasured alumnus, David is always welcome back to Oak Hill.

To make an impact like the Horn Family, please contact Director of Annual Giving Michael Hoffer at 860-576-3772 or Michael.Hoffer@OakHillCT.org.



Donor Dollars at Work: The Staff Appreciation Committee

Thanks to the continued efforts of our very supportive donors, the Staff Appreciation Committee has been very busy over the past few months! Traveling near and far, the "Surprise Squad" goes to each of our programs to make surprise visits. Supported by the Staff Appreciation Fund, the Surprise Squad helps our staff feel appreciated for their hard work and dedication to the people we serve. How does it work? Surprise Squad leaders perform some "reconnaissance" to learn exactly what gifts will make the staff feel special and valued. The Squad then purchases the gifts and heads over to the program (Shhhh! It's a secret they're coming). The Surprise Squad is one of Oak Hill's latest initiatives to retain and attract talented staff to our programs.

At our Newington group home, our Surprise Squad surprised the staff with a new Keurig machine and other caffeinated goodies!

Over at the Orange Silver Manor group home, the staff love to grill. Embracing the spirit of togetherness, the Squad showered the group home staff with a bunch of grilling essentials. Enjoy your cookout, Silver Manor!



Where will the Surprise Squad go next? Follow Oak Hill on Facebook (@CIBOakHill) and Instagram (@oakhillct) to keep up with the Squad and our other Staff Appreciation initiatives.

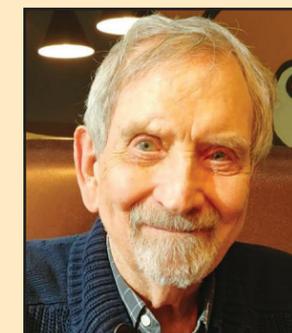
To learn more about how you can make an impact to the Oak Hill Staff Appreciation Fund, contact Senior Director of Development Brittany Horowitz at 860-769-3830 or Brittany.Horowitz@OakHillCT.org.



In Memoriam:

Lars Guldager

Lars became the Connecticut Institute for the Blind (now Oak Hill)'s Executive Director in 1976 and served until his retirement in 2001. Lars transformed Oak Hill's approach to care by supporting the deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities and developing Oak Hill's Community Programs division, which ensured people could live in their communities with dignity. Lars was known to all as someone who brought people together and created the culture of care and support that Oak Hill is known for today.



Steven Birdsall

Steven was a cherished resident of the Georgetown group home, which he called home for 20 years. He was known as someone who loved the "thrill of attention," playing Connect Four and the piano, enjoying meals with his sisters and brother-in-law, and saying his favorite word, "Pu."

William (Bill) Lister

Bill was a resident of the Norwich group home and will be missed by staff, residents, and his pet guinea pig, Sammy. Many others feel his loss and miss him, including his family, day program, and special recreation friends. He loved to get coffee and take out, go through his calendars, and color.

Barbara Bretts

Barbara was a resident of the Middlebury group home since October 1999 when she departed Southbury Training School. Barbara was feisty, strong-willed, and a spit fire with an incredible personality. Many of the people who knew Barb would talk about her love of candy, Elvis, and Richard Gere.

David Freeman III

Dave was a dedicated Residential Program worker at the Litchfield Road group home since 1999. He will be greatly missed by all those who worked with him over the years. Dave was also an ordained minister.

Marcia Watson

Marcia was an esteemed member of the Oak Hill Community for many years, working in a variety of our programs over the course of her career including Camp Harkness, several group homes, and our Blind Services program.

Martha Freedman

Martha was a treasured resident of our Hotchkiss group home. In her time there, she participated in the Special Olympics and loved to run. She is dearly missed by her staff, fellow residents, and family.

Christine Carangelo

Christine worked at our New Hartford classroom where she was known for her bright and patient personality. She positively impacted the lives of so many of her students. Christine loved the beach, vacations with her family, and country music (to name a few!).

Michael Coscia

Michael was a longtime resident of our Silver Manor group home. He will be missed dearly by his staff and fellow residents!

Anne O'Rourke Ryan

Anne was a participant at Easterseals Camp Hemlocks for many years. During her years as a camper, she made some of her dearest friends. Anne loved to crochet and watch Christmas movies. She was also a graduate of Southern CT State University.

Gary Garozzo

Gary was a longtime resident of our Watertown group home. He was known for his love of music (especially The Beatles), long car rides, and apple pie. He will be greatly missed by his program staff and fellow residents.