



# Sharing the News

Newsletter of the Shared Living Programs of The Polus Center • Spring 2008 • Issue 3

## In the Spirit of Thanksgiving: *A Party to Remember*

**I**n the spirit of Thanksgiving, we want to let you now how much we appreciate that you are part of the Polus Center community”. So read the invitation that went out to all of the Polus Center’s Shared Living households requesting their presence at the Second Annual Thanksgiving Dinner which was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Needham on November 13. The dinner was a smashing success with close to 120 folks coming to eat, dance and have fun. It was a most festive kick off to the holiday season and gave all of us a chance to say thanks to the wonderful people involved in Shared Living.

In addition to a lovely buffet dinner featuring roast turkey and all the fixings, folks enjoyed the tricks of roving magician Eddie Raymond and the beautiful piano playing of Ivy Bourne and Fran Benson. Instant digital photos were taken of everybody and given out as favors. The highlight of the evening, however, was the awesome music provided by “Back Track

and Overdrive”, a rock ‘n roll band fronted by Polus’ own Paul McQuaid, which was referred to the evening of the event as “The Polus Express”. Paul delivered on his promise to have everybody up and dancing. Soon after the band took the stage, people were boogying to their favorite songs. It didn’t take long for a conga line to form, lead by a certain newsletter editor. Kevin Sheehan from Groveland took the stage with his rendition of “Little Pink Houses” and brought the house down.

Thanks to all who came to the dinner and helped us celebrate the season of Thanksgiving. We are truly grateful for the spirit of community that exists within the Polus Center and the love that comes from sharing lives and sharing home.

Happy New Year! ❁

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*Fran Benson entertaining the crowd on the piano.*



*From left to right: Ambrose, Jr., Gloria, Angela, Ambrose, Steve and Gladys enjoying themselves at the Thanksgiving dinner.*



*Althea Henderson gets the bouquet.*

# Dan Ricard's Wall of Fame

There is barely enough room on the living room wall in Dan Ricard's apartment in Worcester to display all of his awards and the framed copies of newspaper articles about him. There's the "Competitive Employee of the Year Award" he received from Regional Support Services in 2000. Hanging next to it is a plaque Dan received for being Advocate of the Year in 1999 and under that is the "Outstanding Associate Achievement Award" from Walmart, his employer.

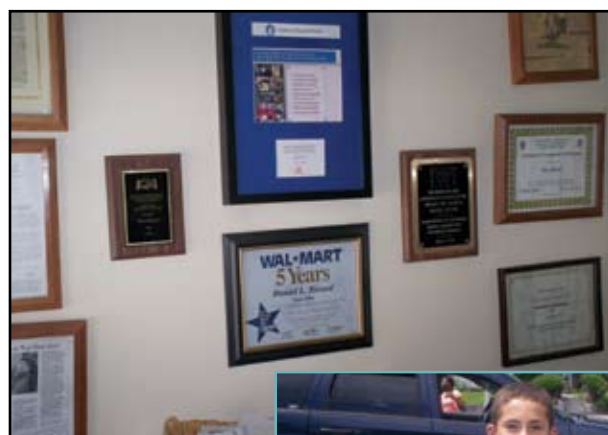
The most space on the wall, however, is reserved for the large and impressive "Heroes Among Us Award" which the Boston Celtics awarded him in 2002. The Celtics chose 40 people that year to be so honored, "members of society who stand tall in their commitment to community". Dan received the award because of his success in raising money for the Children's Miracle Network, which funds special projects at Boston Children's Hospital. Last year, the fund built a new wing, the Walmart wing, for children with chronic illnesses and their parents.

Delmar Sherrill, Community Coordinator at Walmart in West Boylston, where Dan has worked as a greeter for the past eight years, told me, "Dan has raised over \$50,000 for the Children's Miracle Network in the time he has been here. One year, he raised \$11,000!" Dan sells grab bags, flags and bracelets to people entering the store. All of the proceeds go to the Miracle Network. "Dan is great!" says Mr. Sherrill. "Everybody knows him and likes him."

On the night Dan was honored by the Celtics, he was introduced at half time and ushered onto the court to a standing ovation. "It was amazing!" reports Mr. Sherrill. "I asked the guy from the Fleet Center if everybody who got the award received a standing ovation. He told me it hardly ever happened. People were just super impressed with Dan's story."

Dan's story is one of struggle and achievement. Born with cerebral palsy, he uses a wheelchair and has had various health problems over the years. Dan has always fought to be independent and part

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of the community. Ten years ago, he moved from a group setting to an apartment with another person supported by the Polus Center. Now he has his own apartment and is helped with day-to-day activities by Edwin Acevedo, Dan's care provider and good friend. Dan spends a lot of time with Edwin, his wife and four sons, who call him "Uncle Dan". Dan's home is a comfortable one bedroom apartment in the center of Worcester. In addition to Dan's "Wall of Fame", pictures of Dan's family and friends are everywhere, evidence of a life rich in relationships and experience. One of those friendships is with Polus'



Dan and friends at a picnic.

COO, Theresa Kane, who began having monthly dinners with him at Denny's Restaurant in Worcester, long before she knew anything about the Polus Center. They met when they both served on a DMR Training Council Board and have been good friends ever since.

After spending years in segregated day programs, Dan got his first job in the community eight years ago, when he started working at Walmart. What started as a trial job obtained with help from Regional Support Services, an employment agency for people with disabilities, has lead to a permanent part time position. Dan earns well over minimum wage and receives regular increases. Dan likes his job, even when it gets extra busy during the holidays. "This place is like my second home", he told me. Delmar

Sherrill values Dan's commitment to the job and considers him to be a valued employee. Dan is proud of his accomplishments and will either continue to greet shoppers and collecting money for the Children's Miracle Network or someday explore a new career direction. Whatever Dan decides to do, we're sure he will continue to break records and add to his "Wall of Fame".

# Shared Living Alliance – A Tradition of Gathering

Traditions are important in sustaining community. Whether it is a favorite food served at holiday time or rituals developed around celebrating birthdays and other milestones, we all appreciate the traditions that surround us and unite our families, friends and communities.

For the past six years, folks connected to the Shared Living Alliance (SLA), a Polus Center program supporting people in the South Shore and Boston, have developed a tradition of gathering twice a year – in the spring and fall – to share food, make crafts, listen to music and enjoy each other's company. The Shared Living Gatherings typically draw 30 to 40 people and are held in the community room of All Soul's Church in Braintree. Shared Living providers, the people they support, family members and friends all come to the gatherings, as it says on the invitation, "to renew old acquaintances, make new friends, enjoy lunch and most of all, have fun!"

The gatherings started in the fall of 2002 after Wendy Swanson, the Program Director of Shared Living Alliance, asked a group of friends, family members and former co-workers to become inaugural members of SLA's Advisory Board. "Advisory Board members are all people who care about Shared Living. They meet once or twice a year to guide me in my work and to plan the gatherings", according to

Wendy. The nine people who make up the Advisory Board contribute money, time and effort to make these occasions successful. Wendy and her crew did a great job in organizing the event held this past October.

At the Fall Gathering, the spirit of the upcoming holiday season was in the air



Mathew and Robert at the gathering.

as several tables were set up for people to make Christmas decorations and gifts, including birdfeeders. Following the crafts, everybody participated in a "Yankee Swap" gift exchange which was coordinated by Ann Anderson, an Advisory board member. Many popular items were swapped back and forth amid many good natured shouts of dismay and joy. A delicious lunch of hot

soup, bread and cookies was served after the gift swap. By then, everyone was happy to sit and visit with friends and reflect on what makes these gatherings special.

"I just love it", Katy Schrader, another member of the Advisory Board, told me. "There's such a great atmosphere here. I used to work with Wendy and I love getting together with her at these gatherings."

Henry Ajao, a Shared Living provider, told me that his whole family looks forward to the gatherings. "I bring my children and they have a great time. The policy of the Polus Center is to bring people together, like a village. That is what happens here. We all come together like a big family. Everybody cares about everybody else."

Ivy Bourne is already looking forward to the next gathering. "I hope to come back in the spring. I like the people and the food. Didn't you?"

I certainly did. Thanks to Wendy, her Advisory Board and all of the folks who made my first Shared Living Gathering a memorable one. See you in the Spring!

Shared Living Alliance's Advisory Board members:

- Katy Schrader
- Ann Anderson
- Meredith Anderson
- Cora Madrid
- Marge Kearns
- Maureen Ellstrom
- Isabel Ribeiro
- Sandra Washington

## Changes at Polus Center's Shared Living

- **Greater Boston Community Network** has moved! After many years on Washington Street in Dorchester, GBCN has moved its office to 240A Elm St., Suite 23, in Somerville. Althea Henderson, Assistant Program Director for GBCN, is sharing the new office space with Maggie Emery and Tammie Warmus from Polus' International program and with Nick Brightman, Director of Finance and Administration.
- We are happy to welcome **Tyrone Nesmith** as a consultant to the Greater Boston Community Network program. Tyrone has many years of experience supporting people with disabilities, here in Massachusetts and in Georgia. He is supporting two Shared Living families in the greater Boston area.
- **Jan Doody**, Director of Training and Development, is taking on a direct support role with two households in the greater Boston area. She is excited about working directly with folks and learning all the ins and outs of supporting Shared Living families.
- **Laurie Sault**, Program Director of Central Mass. Community Network, has recently been promoted to Shared Living Supervisor. In her expanded role, Laurie will be the emergency contact person for Polus' four Shared Living programs and will offer technical and moral support to the other Program Directors. Congratulations, Laurie!

## Contact Information

Please visit our website, [www.poluscenter.org](http://www.poluscenter.org) for up to date information about Polus' Shared Living and International programs. Don't forget to check out the photos from Polus events on the website!

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# Kevin Sheehan – Rock Star

Kevin Sheehan pulls out his cell phone, flips it open and scrolls through his contacts. In spite of having a physical disability that affects both of his arms and hands, Kevin is adept at using his phone and is even more adept at driving tractors, but more about that later. “Ah, here he is”, Kevin says, looking at his phone. “Rocky Hallerin, John Mellencamp’s road manager. He called me last week about scoring some tickets to John’s concert in December.”

John Mellencamp? The John Mellencamp? The mega rock star? Yes – him.

Kevin told me the story of how he became a fan – and friend – of the singer that Kevin calls “a thoughtful lyricist and audacious icon.”

Kevin’s sister, India, introduced Kevin to the music of John Cougar Mellencamp about 10 years ago. Kevin wore out his first CD, “American Fool” and went on to collect all of Mellencamp’s CDs. “The more I bought, the more I knew him,”

Kevin told me. There was something about the artist’s style, his energy and his down home attitude that turned Kevin into a mega fan.

One night, Kevin was watching TV and a commercial came on for a Mellencamp CD/DVD set. “I went nuts!” Kevin told me. “It’s him! It’s Johnny boy! I sent in for the deal and they asked for my email address. The next thing I knew, Rocky, the road manager emailed me and we started talking.”

Rocky and Kevin’s relationship grew and when Kevin’s mother got him tickets to a Mellencamp show at Great Woods in Mansfield, Mass. in 2001, Rocky arranged



Kevin Sheehan on stage (above) and at the 2007 summer shindig (left).

for a backstage pass. Kevin got to meet John, who took an instant liking to Kevin. “We’re a lot alike, me and John. We both grew up on farms, we’re both fighters and we can both sing.”

Kevin grins at this. He is actually a great singer and never misses a chance to get up on stage – whether it’s at a dance party, a jam session or karaoke night. His favorite song is “Little Pink Houses” by John Cougar Mellencamp.

In all, Kevin has been to four John Mellencamp concerts. This past December, he and three friends drove up to Manchester, N.H. to see him at the Verizon Center. Kevin’s tickets were waiting for him and the show was fantastic. Unfortunately, the band had to hit the road right after the concert, so Kevin didn’t get to go backstage, but there’s always next time. Kevin has an open

invitation to see John whenever the band plays New England.

Kevin has been living with Collette Scott and her two children in Groveland for the past seven years. Their Shared Living experience has led to many opportunities for Kevin. He operates the family’s tractor and takes care of the mowing and plowing. “He’s also great at moving brush,” Collette told me. “He loves to work outside and he’s a big help.” Kevin showed me a picture of himself moving a load of logs with a Bobcat, a backhoe that he uses at his cousin’s landscaping business. Kevin also works at Tendercrop Farm, his family’s farm in Newbury. Kevin is a natural at operating farm equipment and has a large collection of John Deere paraphernalia.

Kevin’s dream is to one day sing on stage with Mellencamp. That would be super exciting, not just for Kevin, but for all of his friends and family who admire him for his courage, spirit and great voice. Rock on! ❁

## Upcoming Events

### March 6 – April 2

QUEST Accreditation for Polus Center’s Shared Living programs.

### Tuesday | May 13

10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.: Provider Forum for North Shore Shared Living in Amesbury. Topic will be “Understanding and Responding to Behavior”.

### Thursday | May 15

10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.: Provider Forum for Central Mass. Community Network in Worcester. Topic: “Understanding and Responding to Behavior”.

### Saturday | May 17

11:00 a.m. – 12:00: Provider Forum for Shared Living Alliance in Braintree. Topic: “The Art of Belonging”. *Details to follow for all Provider Forums!*

### Saturday | August 9

12:00 – 4:00 p.m.: The Polus Center’s 2nd Annual Summer Shindig at Salisbury Beach State Park, Salisbury, MA. Mark your calendars! This day at the beach will feature great food and a live band! All family members are welcome!

### Friday | June 13

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. First Aid & CPR (2-year certificates), CMCN office, 255 Park Ave. Worcester.



## Correction

Due to an editing error, in the Fall 2007 issue of Sharing the News, the name of Holly Palmer was omitted from the caption of the front page picture about the Summer Shindig. Holly is the woman wearing red on the far right.