

# Quest's News

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## Back to School: Quest's New Education Programs



**A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held for the opening of QuestKids Academy in August. The new school currently serves seven students with four teachers and four interns.**

For the last year, 5-year-old Noah has attended QuestKids in Orlando, where he has worked on forming sentences, making eye contact and learning to make friends – common challenges experienced by children with Autism Spectrum Disorders like himself.

"It's like night and day," said Noah's mother, Ashley, about his progress in the program. "There are so many things he's improved on since he started at QuestKids: his language skills, behavior, social skills."

### The Impact of Autism

Noah is not alone. According to the Autism Society of America, more than 1.5 million children in the U.S. battling autism. And with the number of diagnoses on the rise, state educators are finding it difficult to deal with the complex needs of this growing population. Parents are looking for more than the

basics; they want quality education coupled with intensive behavioral therapy – something that public schools can't offer.

"We tried public school, and that didn't really work for Noah," Ashley said. "We needed more."

### How You Helped Noah

With your support, Quest responded to the dreams of parents like Ashley and opened the QuestKids Academy in August. As a natural extension of the QuestKids program, the private school is one of the only facilities in the area to offer a comprehensive education package for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other developmental delays. Along with a state-approved curriculum and group learning, the academy also offers individualized therapy, something that Ashley especially values.

"Noah will have all the right resources and will still have that one-on-one time to work on what he really needs."

### Jacob's Struggle

Lisa, the mother of a 7-year-old child with autism, shares a similar story. Her son, Jacob, also attended a public school in Tampa where they live but realized it wasn't the best fit.

"In two years at a public school Jacob still had no true skills, he couldn't follow or understand basic classroom routines," Lisa said. "He was your basic wild child at his worst and an introverted wanderer at best."

Then, two years ago, Lisa enrolled her son in the Florida Autism Center of Excellence (FACE), a public charter school specializing in education programs for children ages 3 to 22 with moderate to severe autism. She describes Jacob's development while at FACE as "simply amazing," adding that he is now able to sit at his desk, raise his hand and communicate his wants and needs – things that he had struggled with before.

*(story continued on back)*

# From the president

What does it mean to have a developmental disability?

Developmental disabilities are lifelong conditions that affect social, physical and cognitive areas, such as self-care, language or learning. Like anyone else, people with disabilities have a wide range of skills, talents, abilities and needs. Some people may not grasp concepts as quickly as others or express themselves as clearly. Some may have limited ability to care for their physical needs or have limited mobility. Some struggle to find opportunities for independent living and economic self-sufficiency.

So, this begs the question: *Where can families impacted by disability go for help?* The answer is Quest.

*Who helps children with developmental delays learn to speak, so they can finally say the words "I love you"?* We do.

*Who opens the doors to independence by providing job opportunities and residential options that cater to their needs and abilities?* We do.

*But, who makes these services possible?* **You do.**

In part, your contributions have helped to sustain the operations of Quest, helping us fulfill our residential, vocational, recreation and children's programs. You have helped us keep operating costs low and expand our services.

That's not to say that we're immune to the challenges being felt around the country. We know we will face greater financial obstacles in the coming year, and the magnitude of that impact remains uncertain for now. What I am sure of is that we will continue to advocate for people with disabilities, because the bottom line is that those 1,000 lives we touch each day at Quest is why we're here.

And we couldn't do this without you.

*Katie*

## Celebrating 40 Years of Summer

When 12-year-old Jordan arrived at Quest's Camp Thunderbird this summer, his mother, Esmelia, left for her own vacation worried.

"It was the first time I've been on vacation without him," she said, "and his first time at camp, away from me."

She had a right to be worried. During Jordan's first day, he threw objects on the floor, refused to join his group to eat or play, and spent his time jumping on tables. As a child with special needs, these behavioral challenges would have kept him away from a traditional camp, but Camp Thunderbird Director Jarek Muchowski called on Quest's team of behavioral therapy experts to work with Jordan.

Within days, Jordan's behavior transformed. He participated in evening programs, joined in camp activities like swimming and canoeing, and became a favorite of the camp staff.

"By the end, counselors were crying because he was leaving," Jarek said. "Everybody wants Jordan to come back next year!"

Jordan's family has since noticed the positive changes from the summer carried over into his home life, too. His story is one of many summer successes that camp has witnessed over its many decades.

This past summer, Camp Thunderbird celebrated its 40th year of happy campers. Since 1969, the camp has provided a real summer camp experience for people with special needs ages 5 to 80, while increasing their self-confidence and creating lasting friendships. Many families who have a member with a disability face overwhelming expenses and struggle to pay for even the bare essentials, let alone activities like camp. Supporters like you have kept it affordable for first-time campers like Jordan, and have made camp a possibility for many other children and adults in the future.

In addition to offering life-changing experiences, Camp Thunderbird also gives parents like Esmelia a break from the demands of 24-hour caregiving, knowing their loved ones are receiving the attention that they deserve.

"It was nice to be able to be at ease by myself, and not have to worry about Jordan's care," she said. "I didn't have to worry about whether he was okay. I knew he was."



Twelve-year-old Jordan enjoys swimming during his first summer at Quest's Camp Thunderbird, which celebrated its 40th year of fun this season with more than 350 campers.

# Living Well, Aging Well with a Lifelong Disability

Edgar Walters is anything but ordinary.

He loves playing Nintendo Wii, going on day trips, eating at Red Lobster and spending time in his garden. He has many friends and is popular among his social circle.

“Edgar has a way of drawing your attention and his smile can warm anyone up on the coldest of days,” said Zohara McCall, one of his social service case managers at Quest. “[Because of that,] he has a lot of close friends.”

Newly 80 years old, Edgar is part of a group of senior citizens who are proving time and time again that you’re never too old to lead a fun and full life. And that’s not the only stereotype he’s shattering.

## Aging with a Disability

Born with a developmental disability, Edgar grew up in a time when people with disabilities were the shadows of society, and were regarded by some as household burdens that led short, dependent lives. In particular, mental retardation – the disability that Edgar lives with – was seen as a condition of childhood. Living past the age of 80 wasn’t something people thought about.

But for the first time in history, people with intellectual disabilities are living normal life spans. While better healthcare is a contributing factor, improved quality of life also attributes to this new reality. The institutions and limited freedoms of yesterday have been replaced with inclusion and wider acceptance. Organizations like Quest are leading this charge, working toward the day when all people can live life without limits, regardless of ability.

## Life at Quest

Edgar has never let his disability stop him from enjoying life to the fullest. After living with his father until he was 30 years old, Edgar resided in several state institutions



**Edgar celebrated his 80th birthday in May with a party thrown by his Quest family at Laurel Hill, where he lives. “Despite his age, he’s young at heart,” Zohara said of Edgar.**

before coming to Quest in the 1980s. Since living at Laurel Hill, his current Quest home, Edgar receives individualized care and has the ability to choose his activities. Three years ago, he was even given the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream to take a trip to the Bahamas with one of his friends from Quest.

Not only has Edgar outlived his stereotype, but he is living proof that adults with developmental disabilities can achieve their goals when given the right support from organizations like Quest.

## A One-of-a-Kind Celebration

When Edgar turned 80 in May, his Quest family threw him a party at his home. Complete with black and gold decorations, a large photo cake and loads of friends, the evening turned into a one-of-a-kind celebration.

It’s only fitting for the one-of-a-kind person that is Edgar.

## WineQuest Raises More Than \$220,000!

The 13th annual WineQuest event series this May and June raised more than \$220,000 for Quest. On behalf of the entire Quest team and board of directors, we would like to thank all of the attendees, event partners, auction donors, ticket ambassadors, staff, volunteers and other participants for making this year’s event another success. Because of your support, people with disabilities in our local community will achieve their dreams of going to school, having a job, living on their own and enjoying summer camp. People like you make it possible for Quest to help more than 1,000 people each day reach these goals.

We look forward to seeing all of you again – along with many new faces – at the 14th annual WineQuest in the summer of 2010!



**About 600 guests attended this year’s WineQuest, including Quest Board Chair Eric Jackson with wife Stephanie, and Board Member James Gallagher with wife Jean.**

# Quest Expands Services with new QuestKids Academy and FACE

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But when the school's management company decided it would no longer run the program for undisclosed reasons, Lisa was worried. She feared the school would close and became concerned about Jacob's future.

## Quest Steps In

She wouldn't have to be concerned for long. In July, Quest was awarded the contract to manage the charter of FACE, enabling the organization to expand its service offerings in the greater Tampa area to serve more people.

Lisa is excited about Quest's budding relationship with FACE, which currently serves about 70 students, because of Quest's level of commitment to people with disabilities. Specialized education programs like QuestKids Academy and FACE understand the complexity of autism and similar disorders, and work with every child as an individual, she said, which will help improve their quality of life and lead them closer towards independence as they get older.

"For our family, we have peace of mind each day when we hand him over to his teacher that he is at the right school for him. That's what's important."



**Five-year-old Noah (right) and 5-year-old Brandon (middle) work with their QuestKids therapist on language skills. Both QuestKids Academy and FACE work with students on education, language, social and communication skills.**

**Join Quest in our mission to empower people with disabilities.**



**One gift has the power to change a life.**

To learn what impact your gift can make, visit <http://www.questinc.org/gift.htm>, or call Millie Erichsen at 407.218.4365.



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