

# The Marsh Messenger

• Summer 2009 • [www.marshfoundation.org](http://www.marshfoundation.org)

*Serving children and families since 1922*

## Marsh School Holds Celebration, Starts Summer

The Marsh Foundation School held its annual spring celebration on Friday, May 22. The day included piano recitals, a musical production of *The Wizard of Oz*, an awards program and a luncheon. In addition, open houses were held in the newly renovated greenhouse and Clymer Hall.

Many of the youths' friends and families, as well as community members, joined in the celebration. More than 30 students were honored for their accomplishments throughout the year and four were honored for receiving their high school diploma or GED.

Once again The Marsh School is conducting a six week summer school. The theme for the summer is "Reach for the Stars," as the instructional staff encourage the students to work hard toward making their dreams come true. Summer School instructors include Val Dunn, Karla Hoying, Suzanne Hall, Audrey McClure and Becky Salisbury.



Activities coordinator Sherry Grone has joined the summer school team in order to provide the students with a period of gardening activities in addition to the traditional math, reading, music and art classes. Summer school runs Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to noon. This summer's session concludes July 9.

**Photo captions (clockwise):** A student is congratulated by Trustee Gerald Thatcher for receiving her high school diploma. A student receives his academic awards from school principal Roger Salisbury. Activities coordinator, Sherry Grone, gives a tour of the newly renovated greenhouse.

**For more School News, see page 2.**



**THE MARSH**  
FOUNDATION

### Inside

- Letter from the Executive Secretary/Treasurer **Page 2**
- Meet a Marsh Foundation Trustee **Page 4**
- Photo Book **Page 5**
- A Day in the Life ... **Page 7**

### News Bits

- The Marsh Foundation sold t-shirts featuring the organization's new logo and mission statement as a fundraiser for this year's Relay for Life. There are still shirts available in sizes large and extra-large at the cost of \$10 each. All profits will go toward the Relay for Life. If you are interested, contact Tim Dull at 419.238.1695 ext. 360.

### Leadership

- **The Marsh Foundation Board of Trustees:**
  - Paul Purmort
  - Don Sutton
  - Gerald Thatcher
- **The Marsh Foundation Executive Team:**
  - Kim Mullins
  - Roger Salisbury
  - Jeff Grothouse

The Marsh Foundation  
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## From the executive's desk ...

The Marsh Foundation Campus comes alive in the months of April and May with grass growing, trees blossoming and flowers blooming. This is a beautiful, special campus in the spring.

This spring, we had an open house for the newly renovated and constructed greenhouse. Over the past six months the old ailing structure was demolished and replaced with a new, state-of-the-art greenhouse. Several of the Master Gardeners, The Marsh Foundation staff, alumni and Board of Trustees were present for the event. A plaque honoring the Trustee's dedication and support of the greenhouse and gardening program was presented during the grand opening.

The senior students graduated on May 22, and along with the graduation festivities we included an open house for Clymer Hall. The Clymer Hall project began in February 2008. Youth and family teachers moved back into their home after the school year concluded in June.

The exterior repairs of Clymer Hall were completed early in the project and included the repair of the slate roof, replacement and resetting of slate shingles, exterior brick repair tuck point and cleaning of the brick, exterior brick water coating seal, chimney repair – replaced deteriorating brick and tuck point, new copper gutters and valleys.



Jeffrey Grothouse

*"The 2009 American Cancer Society Relay for Life has completed its first year on The Marsh Foundation campus.... This was a special way for The Marsh to give back to the community."*

*—Jeffrey Grothouse*

The kitchen and bathrooms were completely renovated with new stools, bathtubs, showers and cabinetry.

Improvements and replacements to the electrical and plumbing systems throughout the home have been completed. All bedrooms and closets have been repainted and the doors repaired. The wood floors have been sanded, sealed and restored to original perfection.

The woodworking was stripped and refinished as well.

The interior walls were painted from top to bottom in colors suggested by a local interior decorator. Ceilings have been replaced, and new light fixtures are found throughout the home.

All furniture is new, with the exception of the youth's beds, which have been refinished. The heating and cooling system was replaced a few years ago, and all exposed pipes are now enclosed and tastefully painted and decorated. All windows on the campus were replaced and the new window coverings were installed. A new security system and fire alarm system has been installed and upgraded. The finishing touch will be the new landscaping surrounding the facility installed this summer.

The landscaping of every group home and rental home surrounding our campus will be freshly mulched and bushes trimmed. This project usually lasts as long as two weeks, but when complete it highlights the edges of our beautiful campus.

The 2009 American Cancer Society Relay for Life completed its first year on the Marsh Foundation Campus. This was a very successful weekend for the Relay and a special way for The Marsh to give back to the Van Wert community and share our beautiful campus.

*Jeffrey Grothouse*

Executive Secretary & Treasurer

## Youth Participate in Summer Activities

Outdoor Specialist Jay Lomack has returned to The Marsh for his eighth year, leading the students during a week-long session of Camp Lomack. Under Jay's direction, the students enjoy a camp experience without leaving the friendly confines of The Marsh Campus. Students canoe, fish, study wildlife, hike, eat over campfires, make crafts and much, much more. Each group home has a week of camp, and once again this has been a very positive and rewarding experience for the youth.

Our Equestrian Program is also in full swing as each student is provided the opportunity to ride horses daily under the supervision of Steph Hall and Erin Calvelage. In addition to riding instruction, the students learn how to care for and demonstrate respect for the horses.

**Below: Master Gardener Dee Jackson leads a class on gardening during summer school.**



# A commitment to excellence

## Supper Club Wraps Up

The Marsh Foundation and Big Brothers Big Sisters recently wrapped up the fifth year of what is known as Supper Club. The program is a partnership between the two organizations where Big Brothers provides volunteers to spend time with youth from The Marsh Foundation three times a month.

Twice a month, the entire group gathers in the evening to eat and participate in some type of planned activity. The third time, the youth and the volunteer choose a time to get together. The program is beneficial to the youth because it provides them with another opportunity to form a trusting relationship with someone outside their family and treatment team.

According to Nancy Eberle, school program director at Big Brothers Big Sisters, the program is also beneficial to their volunteers. "It allows them to get involved but isn't quite as time consuming as our typical program," she said. She added, "the volunteers really enjoy spending time with the kids and seeing them get joy out of the

little things they do together."

The program typically runs from November to May with a break during the summer and fall. This year seven youth were able to participate, but according to Eberle, there is room for more. If you are interested in volunteering and participating in the Supper Club, call Big Brothers Big Sisters at 419.394.2990.



Above: A youth, and her mentor spend time fishing and talking at the final Supper Club of the year.

## Marsh Foundation JSO Counselor Receives Certification

Recently, the juvenile sex offender program at The Marsh Foundation was one of the first programs in the state to be certified by Ohio's Department of Youth Services. In addition, in November, 2008, Steve Morrison, A.C.S.W., L.C.S.W., I-L.I.S.W.-S, who is contracted by The Marsh to provide therapy services for the program, was also certified.

The application process was a lengthy one. In addition to discussing his treatment philosophy and experience, Morrison provided treatment contracts and effective treatment plans and needed to demonstrate his ability to perform evaluations and

assessments in order to be certified.

Morrison and The Marsh were among the first certified in Ohio, however, according to Morrison, this certification will soon be mandated to serve juvenile sex offenders. Morrison has been practicing for 21 years, 10 of those at The Marsh. He holds a master's degree in social work from Indiana University.

Morrison is licensed to practice privately in Indiana and Ohio. In addition to the services he provides at The Marsh, he also offers therapy services through a community based program through the Youth Bureau in Van Wert, known as the CARE program.

## Clymer Chat

Summer is in full swing for the girls at Clymer Hall. Currently, the house is at capacity with 10 youth. They are all very excited about their move back into the renovated Clymer Hall. The girls have already concluded their week of Camp Lomack and enjoyed canoeing, eating over a campfire and much, much more. In addition to Camp Lomack and the Equestrian Program, the girls will be continuing their community service throughout the summer.

## Marsh Matters

The boys at Marsh Hall are excited about the summer! Currently, there are 10 boys in the house but a discharge is anticipated in the coming weeks. They have already been enjoying games of kickball and softball on campus and fishing

at the pond. They have even been able to catch fish using a piece of hotdog. They are also very energized about the Equestrian Program, even though some are a bit frightened by the large animals. One youth was overheard saying, "I conquered my fear of horses!" The staff at Marsh Hall are looking forward to a very busy and exciting summer.

## Vance Voice

The boys at Vance Hall are also enjoying the summer. They have been spending time outdoors and participating in the Equestrian Program. Currently, there are 10 boys in the house and an opening isn't anticipated until the end of the summer. The boys are also continuing to visit the nursing home once a month throughout the summer as a community service project.



Steve Morrison, A.C.S.W., L.C.S.W., I-L.I.S.W.-S, is contracted by The Marsh Foundation to provide therapy to juvenile sex offenders. Recently, Morrison and The Marsh JSO program were certified by Ohio's Department of Youth Services.

## Renovated Greenhouse Open



In April, The Marsh Foundation proudly held a grand opening of the newly renovated greenhouse on campus. Above: The Marsh Foundation Board of Trustees, from left to right, Mr. Don Sutton, Mr. Gerald Thatcher and Mr. Paul W. Purmort are presented with a plaque honoring their dedication to the greenhouse and gardening program by Sherry Grone, activities coordinator and Jeff Grothouse, executive secretary and treasurer.

## Master Gardeners Partner to Provide Education to Youth

The Master Gardeners perform a variety of activities and services within Van Wert County and The Marsh Foundation is fortunate to have them as a partner in the on-campus gardening program. The Master Gardeners have over 20 members and are organized through the OSU Extension Office. After undergoing extensive training, each member is required to give a certain amount of hours back to the community.

Several members do this by partnering with The Marsh on various projects. Altha Brooks is a member of the Master Gardener's plant sale committee, and that is how she got involved at The Marsh. The group uses the greenhouse on campus to grow mums for their plant sale. In addition, youth are given a cut to grow themselves. This year, the youth then gave the mums to their mothers for Mother's Day.

According to Brooks, the Master Gardeners are very appreciative of the relationship that has developed. "We very

much appreciate that we are able to grow the mums there and hope that the kids are able to learn from that too," she said.

In addition, the Master Gardener's educational committee has also worked with Sherry Grone, activities coordinator, to develop a comprehensive gardening program for the youth this summer. Together with Dee Jackson, a program has been put together that will include topics such as gardening, greenhouses, planting seeds, compost, weeding, garden safety, fertilizing and much more. Jackson has already been on campus leading youth in classes and activities.

Jackson said she is very excited about providing this ongoing class throughout the summer and teaching the youth about nature and the earth. She also said she enjoys the partnership with Grone and The Marsh activities program. "The children at The Marsh are very fortunate to have Sherry and we appreciate the ability to work with her."

## Meet Marsh Foundation Trustee Wally Purmort

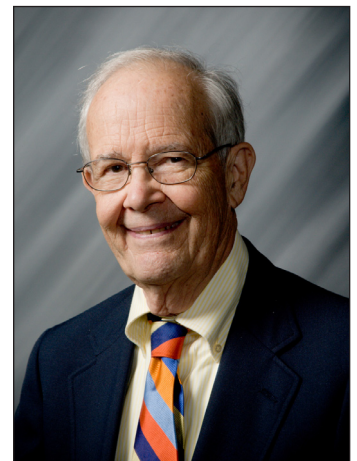
Paul W. Purmort Jr. (Wally) has been a Trustee of The Marsh Foundation since 1981. Since then, he has been one of The Marsh Foundation's biggest supporters. In the past 27 years he has seen quite a few changes and the evolution of the organization.

When he became a Trustee, there were 100 children in four homes on campus. Now, The Marsh has three group homes on campus, with 10 youth in each and an independent living foster home. There are a total of 13 youth in The Marsh Foster Care program as well. Purmort said he feels the changes he's seen have been good. "It's different than when I started, but it is still a great place for children and their families."

As a Trustee, Purmort helps oversee the operations of the organization, including all business and financial aspects. However, he has also taken a personal interest in the youth and goes above and beyond to be a part of their lives. "It is really nice to see how our youth respond to Wally and his kindness," said Susan Mihm, program manager at Marsh Hall. "His thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated by family teachers and the boys."

He does a variety of activities and has spent a great deal of time with the youth on campus. He has traveled to baseball and hockey games and regularly comes to campus just to play pool or spend time with the youth. Several years ago, he donated a pool table to The Marsh and now likes to put it to use. "Sometimes I win and sometimes they do," he said with a chuckle.

Over the years, Purmort has



Wally Purmort

become affectionately known as 'Grandpa Wally' and he doesn't mind a bit. "I like it," he simply said. Even though he is a Trustee and not directly involved in the care and treatment of the youth, he still feels it's important to be involved. "I feel like I know the kids on a one on one basis and I think that's important," he said.

It is obvious that his actions are noticed and appreciated by the youth. Matthew\* is a former group home resident who now lives in a Marsh Foundation foster home. He said that he really appreciates the time Purmort has spent with him and others. "He is real nice and fun to talk to," he said. Matthew especially remembers when he lived in Marsh Hall and he got a birthday card in the mail, with money inside, from Purmort. "He always thinks about the kids before himself," he said.

Purmort said he enjoys serving as a Trustee but he is grateful to its founder. "We are very fortunate that George Marsh's will provided for kids and foresaw their changing needs. Because of that we have been able to meet those changing needs today."

Story continued on page 8...



Clockwise starting at top right: A Vance Hall youth participates in the on campus talent show, how many ways can you eat a pizza? A Marsh Hall youth participates in the talent show. Marsh Hall had the opportunity to tour Parkview Field in Fort Wayne before its grand opening this spring. Youth and a volunteer spend time together fishing at the last Supper Club meeting of the year. During spring break, youth had the opportunity to spend a day at Woodhaven Program Center in Lima. One of the activities they participated in was conquering a ropes course by working as a team, exerting confidence and trusting their team members.

## Marsh Staff, Foster Parents Help Youth Turn Life Around

Nicki Bittinger is a happily married mother, with a full-time job and a great husband and daughter. According to her, she's living an awesome life. Unfortunately, it hasn't always been so good. But, she has been able to turn it around, thanks in part to her experience with The Marsh Foundation.

She had been raised by her paternal grandmother for most of her childhood before strained relationships with her family and trouble in school caused her to enter foster care at age 14. She was later placed at The Marsh at age 16. First, she lived on campus in a group home and worked on her behavior and studies. While on campus she was mentored by Vicki Chavarria, who would eventually become her foster mom.

After a year-and-a-half in the group home setting, Bittinger moved in with Vicki and her husband Steven. Because of their previously established relationship, the placement was a perfect fit. Although she still struggled in school, she worked hard. "We have a good relationship, she

worked hard and was responsible," said Vicki.

Bittinger refers to her childhood and family as 'untraditional'. The first time she flew a kite was while living with the Chavarrias. And the first time she was ever in a family picture was with them as well, when she was 17. "I think the little things like that were meaningful to her," said Vicki.

Even though she struggled in school, Bittinger went on to study for and get her GED. "I didn't give up, I wasn't going to," she said. Recently, she has even written a book based on her experiences in foster care. She is hoping to save up some money and have it published in the near future.

Bittinger said she is grateful to the Chavarrias for helping her to get where she is today. "If I didn't have foster parents like them I wouldn't have went down the road I did. I am thankful I have them in my life." In just the past few years, Bittinger and her husband have married, built a house and had their daughter.

**Story continued on page 8...**



Nicki Bittinger had her first-ever family picture taken with Steven and Vicki Chavarria when she was a foster child in their home. She was 17-years-old.

## Staff Spotlight

### Meet Mrs. Audrey McClure

Mrs. Audrey McClure is the music and piano teacher at The Marsh Foundation. Except for a one year leave of absence after the birth of her youngest daughter, she has worked at The Marsh School since 1973. At the end of summer school she will officially retire.

McClure holds a bachelor of music education from Otterbein College and a master of education from Wright State University.

McClure said she enjoys working with the students (usually), especially when positive changes begin to happen for them. "That is always so rewarding and makes the challenging days worthwhile," she said. "I also feel very privileged to be a small part of the tremendous Marsh team of staff members. The unselfish and consistent efforts of the staff to help our students are very commendable. The friendships and 'family' atmosphere are a real blessing," she added.

A typical day for McClure begins with music classes each morning. Along with regular music activities such as singing, theory, reading and games, the students also present two programs each year; "Scrooge" at Christmas and "Wizard of Oz" at the spring recognition program. After lunch she gives piano lessons. Each youth on campus receives one piano lesson each week. Each group home on campus has piano lesson books so they can (hopefully)



**Audrey McClure**

practice. They also perform in a piano recital at both the Christmas and spring programs.

McClure's husband, Bob, passed away suddenly in 2002. The couple has four daughters; Teresa (Guy) Metzger, Shelly (Reggie) Waugh, Stacey (Terry) Crowle and Marcy (Chad) Mark. They have 12 grandchildren; Marta (Luke) Wilder, Amanda (Markus) Black, Robby, Christina, Raquel, Mallori, Alec, Karlee (adopted Chinese girl), Terra, Tanner, Aidan, Ava and two great-grandchildren; Nathaniel (deceased) and Carter.

Her hobbies and interests include music (of course), but she especially enjoys watching her family participate in their many activities and babysitting the younger ones. "When I retire, my daughters have suggested that I become a traveling nanny!" she said.

McClure's future plans include continuing piano lessons at The Marsh, visiting family more often, mowing her yards, spending time at her home in Florida and to whatever else God leads her!

## A Day in the Life ... of a Marsh Hall Youth



*Benjamin\** has been living in Marsh Hall on The Marsh Foundation campus for the past four months and every day has been a little bit different. He is one of eight youth currently living in the home. Now, since school is out for the summer, the daily schedule varies.

Monday through Thursday summer school is held in the mornings, so after breakfast they head straight to class until lunch time. Each youth on campus participates in at least one group therapy session a week; the boys in Marsh Hall have one nearly every day.

Following group, the boys participate in activities or have free time until dinner. According to Benjamin, his favorite activities are playing game cube and riding his bike. Many of the youth on campus also work in

the garden during the summer months. An extensive gardening program has been added to the summer school session this year.

One of the summer highlights at The Marsh is the equestrian program. Several times a week the youth spend time with the horses, learning how to ride and care for them. Benjamin said he really enjoys this activity. "It's a lot of fun because you get to learn how to ride them and handle them," he said.

Each evening the youth participate in something known as family conference. All the youth gather around the table, discuss and resolve problems, advocate for privileges, give staff feedback and vote for leadership positions within the house. Family conference is also a time where youth share accomplishments and work on relationship development with each other.

All youth in the house are responsible for their own set of



Now that it is summer, a lot of time is spent outdoors.

chores each week. This week, Benjamin is assigned to trash and recyclables. On Saturdays, the youth perform a 'deep clean' on their rooms and bathrooms in addition to the daily cleaning done throughout the week.

Weekends feature added activities. Every Saturday morning or afternoon there is time for community service. Youth spend time at the local nursing home, cleaning up parks or doing another activity to benefit the community. Benjamin said community service makes him feel good. "It's fun to do things for others and show them you care," he said.

Each Saturday evening is known as 'priv' or privilege night, for the youth that have earned privileges that week. Sunday night is family night and everyone in the house spends the evening doing a fun activity together.

Family visits also occur on the weekends for youth who have reached that point in their

treatment plan. "I like it when my parents come to visit and we go off campus together," said Benjamin.

The staff and youth at The Marsh attempt to stay on schedule as much as possible. However, with doctor's appointments, behaviors, family visits, restitution, shopping trips and other errands, each day proves to be a new adventure.

Overall, Benjamin said he likes it at The Marsh and is glad that he has the opportunity to learn from his mistakes. "I am learning empathy toward others so that when I leave here I do not make the same mistakes again," he said.

He also said he feels like it is a good placement for him and has learned how to cope with his emotions and deal with anger. "I'm trying to figure out who me is."

*\*Benjamin's name has been changed to protect his identity.*



Lunch is served in the cafeteria in the basement of the Administration Building.

## New Staff Members

- Joyce Dennie - overnight family teacher at Clymer Hall.
- Stacie Sturwold - family teacher at Vance Hall.
- Kyle Hainline - family teacher at Marsh Hall.

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### Meet Marsh Foundation Trustee Wally Purmort

Continued from Page 4

Purmort is a lifelong resident of Van Wert. He graduated from the Culver Military Academy, Miami University and the Wharton Graduate School, University of Pennsylvania. He is an Army veteran of the Korean War where he served as an aide to a General. He has been married to his wife Laurie since 1955; they have two children and four grandchildren.

*\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the youth.*

### Marsh Staff, Foster Parents Help Youth Turn Life Around

Continued from Page 6

“To have your dreams come true when you never thought they would is the most awesome thing in the world,” she said.

Bittinger has kept in contact with the Chavarrias ever since she moved out on her 18th birthday. In fact, Steven and her biological father walked her down the aisle at her wedding, while Vicki served the duties of the bride’s mother for the day.

To her, Bittinger said the Chavarrias are saints. “They take you in and cradle you as you’re their own for years.”



**THE MARSH**  
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Visit The Marsh  
Foundation  
website at:

[www.marshfoundation.org](http://www.marshfoundation.org)

## Calendar of Events

Summer 2009

- May 27 - August 10, Horse riding program for the youth
- June 1 - June 20, Camp Lomack. 8:30 a.m. - Noon and 1 - 3:30 p.m.
- June 1 - July 9, Summer School. Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. - Noon.
- June 19, Camp Lomack Closing Ceremony. 11 a.m.
- June 28, Kimberly Fox concert. 6 p.m.
- July 7, Brumback Library Mad Caps Puppet Performance. 1:30 p.m.
- July 28 & 29, Kennedy Kuhn Farm Focus Event.
- August 12, Horse Show
- August 15, Trip to Fort Wayne TinCaps baseball game.
- August 24, School resumes for the 2009-10 school year.



For more information about any event, visit [www.marshfoundation.org](http://www.marshfoundation.org).

## Attention Marsh Foundation Alumni

Are you an alumni of The Marsh Foundation? Did you know that on our website, [www.marshfoundation.org](http://www.marshfoundation.org), we have a directory of alumni? To view the directory, or sign up yourself, visit the Alumni page online.