



# The Growing Tree News

A Publication of the E. John Gavras Center

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Richard M. Hansinger, Executive Director

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## A Message from Rick Hansinger

For our December issue I have the privilege of introducing three of our staff recently honored in Albany at our State Cerebral Palsy Conference. It was a pleasure to be in attendance and witness our staff cross the dais to accept their award.

What made this evening even more special, the three who were honored were chosen by the Staff Recognition Committee as finalists from all of the exceptional service nominations made throughout the year. It is always a special honor to be chosen by a committee of your peers. Congratulations go out to Aaron Clark, Physical Therapist, Nancy Gremli, Medicaid Service Coordinator and Laurie Wheeler, CMS Administrator. Please stop by their respective work areas and take a look at their award certificates.

To the Staff Recognition Committee, you are coming to the close of 2007 and I want to personally thank you for a job well done. You represent a cross section of our entire agency and you have faithfully recognized our staff throughout the year for all that they do. Today, you, the entire committee, deserve an exceptional service nomination award. Congratulations and thank you for taking staff recognition to an extremely high level. I truly appreciate your efforts.



# Horsin' Around...

## The Saga of Painting the Playground Ponies

By Anna Wilhelm-Ellis

(First off, so you know who I am talking about, let me introduce our playground ponies:

- Lightning – the black pony without a lightning bolt. I'll put one on later!
- Sky – the light blue pony with clouds.
- Candy – the red pony with lots of colored dots.
- Fancy Nancy – the purple pony with eyelashes and decorated saddle straps.)



I remember it being a happy, sunny spring afternoon on the playground. I happened to be within earshot of Nancy Damalt as she was walking toward the ponies. She was saying to the little guy that she was doing a speech therapy session with, "Gee, I wish these ponies were different so we could talk more about them." Suddenly, the right side of my brain giggled and out of my mouth spilled, "I'll paint those ponies for you, Nancy!" I didn't stop to think about anything else, all I had in mind were colorful ponies and children riding them gleefully.

That vision was a long time coming. There were many weekend hours of sanding, painting and designing the ponies. Next came a slight setback as Candy and Sky collided in my garage. It was the result of painting two ponies at once. Candy

was propped behind me, on my husband's tool cabinet, and Sky was in front of me being painted. I hate to admit this, but 15 minutes before Candy came bounding over my left shoulder, just missing the paint can but scoring a direct hit into Sky, my husband warned me to reposition the red pony. "It's okay," I said, even jiggling it a little to show him that the foot bars were holding it, yet not thinking that the throw rug under it was going to bring about the near demise of Sky! Sky hit the garage floor head-first, cracking the entire length of his mane (OUCH!). Poor Sky had to be welded and repainted.

So, at long last, on the playground they are. Fancy Nancy, as I said before, is my dedication to Nancy Damalt, who was my inspiration for re-inventing the ponies, and to my favorite teacher Nancy Kratz, who I believe is the original horse whisperer.

The project took me much longer than I thought it would, but I feel so proud when I watch the little posse of kids galloping gleefully on our painted ponies.

*(Anna Wilhelm-Ellis, pictured to the left, is a One to One Aide in our Preschool, on the Green Team.)*

## A Ponies Tale

By Maureen Carberry

Once upon a time in Gavras Land  
There lived 4 little ponies looking dull, sad and bland  
Until Anna came and offered them a helping hand  
So to her home they would go for a time  
Where she would scrape, sand and paint to make them shine  
The first little pony was meek and shy  
She painted him blue and white and named him Sky.  
The second little pony was fast but not frightening.  
She painted him black and named him Lightning.  
The third little pony was sweet and dandy

So she painted her many colors and named her Candy.

The last little pony was quite the little filly  
When you hear her name you may think it's silly.  
She's pretty and purple and always prancy.

Her name is Fancy Nancy.

Now the four little ponies are all beaming with pride

So stop by to see them and take them for a ride  
Thanks to Anna for she has restored their joy and laughter

Now the four little ponies can live Happily Ever After.

*(Maureen Carberry is a Teacher Assistant in the Preschool, on the Green Team.)*

## **KJ the DJ's Music Corner**

### **CARRIE UNDERWOOD – FROM AMERICAN IDOL TO TOP 40 FAVORITE**

by Kelly Shanahan

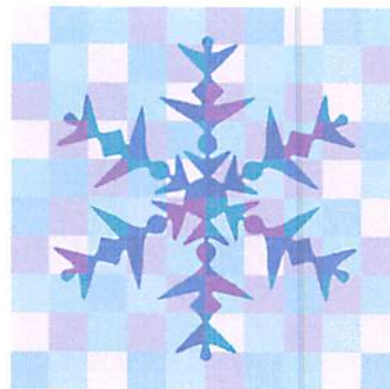
Twenty-four year-old Chikota, Oklahoma native, Carrie Underwood, got her start on American Idol in 2005. From her original audition in St. Louis, Missouri she went directly to Hollywood. The judges commented that they had never had any country singers in the competition. From Hollywood week, Carrie survived round after round of vote-offs. Throughout the duration of the competition she never was in the bottom three, and the judges never ceased to give her positive criticism. Towards the final four Carrie was deemed "front runner." Her beautiful country ballads soon brought her to the winner's circle with Bo Bice. America's 63.4 million votes decided Carrie Underwood to be the American Idol winner of 2005.

Two weeks after being crowned the American Idol, Carrie released her debut single "Inside Your Heaven," and soon after the song flew to the top of the country charts. On November 15th of 2005 she released her long-awaited debut album "Some Hearts" which produced six #1 singles and won

her four Grammys, including the Grammy for Best New Artist on February 11th, 2007.

After making Idol appearances and touring the venues throughout the United States in the fall of '07, Carrie then released her follow-up album "Carnival Ride." This album gained Carrie several Country Music Awards, and the first single "So Small" hit radio in mid-August. I think that "Carnival Ride" will be just as successful as her debut album.

Carrie Underwood has come a long way from her Idol win, proving that American Idol can and will produce many stars to come. And that's a fact.



## **Welcome to New Employees**

- Kate Gleason
- Cori Jackson
- Brian Fitzgerald

## **Best Wishes**

The following employees have moved on to new other ventures.

- Robin Civitello
- Amy Knapp
- Amanda Nash



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Editor's Note: This is OUR newsletter. Please send me your ideas, your articles and your feedback. I can be reached @ (315) 255-2746, via internal email to Ellen Baumes, or at [ellenb@gavrascenter.com](mailto:ellenb@gavrascenter.com). Thank you! The Growing Tree is available on our website, view it electronically @ [www.gavrascenter.com](http://www.gavrascenter.com)

## **Employee Recognition Recipients**

### **November 2007**

Robin Civitello  
Mimi Gilmore  
Michel Hutchinson  
Carol Johnson  
Brandon Magill  
Joan Meyers  
Harmony Pidlypchak  
Julia Short  
Nancy Tehan  
Rob Whittaker

## **Safety Reminder**

Now that it's getting colder, don't get so busy that you miss those icy surfaces, in our parking lots here, and elsewhere – be careful out there...

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

Basket Raffle – December 7  
Annual Staff Holiday Party – December 7  
Christmas Elf Family Gifts Due – TBA  
Preschool Closed – December 24 thru January 1

## **Thought for the day....**

**The true test of a first-rate mind is the ability to hold two contradictory ideas at the same time.**

**- F. Scott Fitzgerald**