LIVE FREE!
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Hello friends and supporters of Crotched Mountain! With the theme of this month’s Horizons being freedom and independence I felt it would be appropriate to share some thoughts we pulled together for a special article commemorating Martin Luther King Junior’s birthday. I hope you enjoy it and, as always, thank you for your compassion and generosity for making all these stories possible!

Over 60 years ago, Harry Gregg looked at a small mountain in Greenfield and saw it as a magical place where children with polio could find compassion and care. Today, his legacy lives on. Polio may be an artifact of the past, but the students we serve today bring with them new challenges: severe autism diagnoses, communication barriers, ultra-rare neurological syndromes, and physical disabilities like cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, and tetraplegia.

Every student that walks our school hallways is incredibly, fantastically unique—but the hard truth is that their lives are probably looked upon as “less-than” by the outside world. Their behaviors will make you jittery. Their outbursts are too loud and disruptive. They don’t conform to the norms that we as a society have deemed to be “the right way to act.”

For the families, teachers, therapists, and staff at Crotched Mountain, our collective charge is to look at these behaviors in a completely different manner, not as barriers, but opportunities, not as walls, but as windows. It is on us to embrace this opportunity and help every child forge the kind of life in the community that we all want — a life of safety, joy, and maximum independence.

I can’t help but think of Billy. A long-time student and now a Crotched Mountain alum, Billy was a young man who lived his life in a motorized wheelchair, limited by his disability to perform even the most basic life functions on his own. But I can’t remember an instance when he was not smiling. Here was a young man living a life which so many “normal” people would consider too difficult, even unbearable.

But anyone who spent just a few minutes with Billy would feel inspired and rejuvenated; he was someone so filled with pure, distilled positivity, you couldn’t help but feel hopeful. I have known few people who were as free as Billy.

He spoke at last year’s Crotched Mountain School graduation, delivering the keynote address he wrote himself using eye-tracking technology. Articulated through his electronic speech device, his comments included these words: “I would encourage all my fellow graduates to work hard to accomplish their dreams, always remember to be helpful to others, and try and be a leader in all you do.”

Martin Luther King gave us the blueprint. He promulgated the basic human value that we all have eternal, intrinsic worth, no matter how we appear from the outside, no matter what others may think of us. I know he would be proud of Billy. And, I hope he would be proud of us.

Because, in a way, Dr. King gave us our marching orders on August 28, 1963: “From the prodigious hilltops in New Hampshire, let freedom ring.”

Sincerely,

Michael Coughlin
President and CEO of Crotched Mountain
When he was born, not many people gave little Liam a chance. But a bunch of 5K marathons, many, many miles of downhill skiing, and an armful of gold medals from the Special Olympics Winter Games later, the world has finally caught on—Liam will not be denied.
He starts out as a dark speck on a field of white. If you squint you can just make him out. Gradually, the form of a teenage boy on skis takes shape and, before you know it, Liam McElhatton is just a few feet in front of you, skidding to a halt, a spray of snow wash kicking up as his skis bite into the terrain. He’s clutching the handlebars of his modified accessible ski equipment, flanked by volunteers and recreation therapists. His breath comes out in short, icy bursts and his face is red from the bite of the wind. But the kid is glowing.

Deirdre, Liam’s mom, sprints up to him, shrouded in layers of cold weather gear (apt for early March on the top of Waterville Valley). “Did you love it?” she exclaims, as she places her two gloved hands on her son’s pink cheeks. “Was that fun?”

Liam can’t voice his pleasure, but his face says it all. His eyes dance and a smile pushes up into the corners of his mouth as he looks back at his mom. His message couldn’t be clearer if it had been splayed upon a 100 foot LED billboard in Times Square:

“Mom, you have NO idea!”

Smurf blue.

That was the first thing that came to Deirdre’s mind when she was holding her newborn baby.

All babies are a little blue, but this kid is Smurf blue.

It was February 3, 1999, and Deirdre McElhatton had just given birth in the company of a nurse who was, as she recounts, “sweating bullets.” Which is not a surprise—the baby had a heart rate of 42 bpm and the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck.

After the briefest of introductions to her child, Deirdre saw her baby Liam whisked away to the NICU. She wouldn’t hold her son again for five days.

“He was like a rag doll,” she says.

Liam’s challenges are diverse and profound: he has a Down Syndrome diagnosis to go along with a severely underdeveloped brain that affects his motor planning (the ability to conceive, plan, and carry out a skilled,
non-habitual motor act). Add to that his severely underdeveloped muscle tone, and Liam brings a unique set of circumstances that requires a strict, relentless regimen of physical activity.

And from the get-go, Liam’s respiratory system wasn’t efficient. Chronic congestion plagued his ability to function. Constant interventions, including physical therapy, and careful observation were necessary to maintain respiratory airways and prevent chronic infections.

“His brain just doesn’t have the horsepower to keep his muscle memory going,” Deirdre says. “So, for him, being active is more than a way of life—it’s a fight for survival.”

She is not trafficking in hyperbole when she says that. When he was much younger, Liam’s GI tract was constantly under siege from his diet. His physician and family had to play the process-of-elimination game, phasing out the specific foods that irritated his digestive system. And, the beating his lungs took from his weakened musculature presented the ever-present specter that looms over Liam to this day: pneumonia.

“If Liam goes on a ventilator, he’s not coming off,” Deirdre says. “He is as active as he is to prevent the pneumonia that’s going to kill him.”

Keeping Liam fit and in motion slows that ticking clock. When he was 11-years-old, he completed a 5K walk in the Hamptons. Every year, Liam participates in an annual marathon in Disney World. When Liam enrolled in Crotched Mountain School in 2013, Deirdre signed him up for Crotched Mountain Accessible Recreation and Sports (CMARS), where he plugged into the winter sports offerings. At first he wasn’t too keen on the cold, but after some exploratory sessions with snowshoeing, he graduated to skiing.

“Liam is a jock in a body that doesn’t cooperate,” Deirdre says. “In his heart he is a daredevil and if you can make something fun, Liam is your man.”

Thanks to Crotched Mountain’s crack team of recreation therapists and some nifty adaptive ski equipment, he was bombing down the slopes of neighboring Crotched Mountain Ski and Ride in no time, ultimately, at the age of 19, competing in the state winter games for New Hampshire Special Olympics.

“We’re on borrowed time,” Deirdre says. “We just want every day to be meaningful. Here, there is community and he is loved.”

Liam nods at his mom after his run, and then skis off with his staff, ready to hit the lift for his next descent. He would go on to win medals in the Giant Slalom, the Slalom, and the Super G—all of them gold.

But that’s tomorrow, and one thing that Deirdre has learned from those first days when her newborn son teetered on the edge of life, is you can’t ever lose focus of the here and now; every day is a gift.

She waves to her son as he sits on the lift chair, his skis dangling in the open air, ascending the mountain. Deirdre dutifully takes her position at the bottom of the slope and watches, waiting for the shape of her boy as he crests the horizon.
After nearly half-a-century of service a Crotched Mountain legend calls it a career.

When Jim Piet was a student at Crotched Mountain School, he had a science teacher who sprung a pop quiz on the class. Jim wasn’t in a great mood that day and he tore up the quiz. The teacher promptly told him to come back after school. Later that day, Jim vented to his teacher, sharing his frustration over what he felt was a lack of support and how the pop quiz was a raw deal. His teacher listened patiently. After Jim finished, the teacher regarded him.

“You know, you’re right,” Mike Terrian said. “You aren’t supported. So the two of us are going to sit here right now and do this quiz together.”

Today, 40 years later, Jim is a Crotched Mountain Board Member and Mike is a Vice President—but, at the time of this writing, for only a few more days. Because after 46 years, Mike is bidding farewell to pretty much the only workplace he ever knew.

Mike Terrian began his Crotched Mountain career as a teaching assistant, then moved up to be a teacher of deaf and hard of hearing students. As the years ticked by, Mike rose through the ranks, becoming Vice President of Administration, serving at the side of multiple Crotched Mountain presidents.

His omnipresence earned him the nickname “The Mayor of Crotched Mountain;” there wasn’t a corner of the school or the hospital or the wood chip burning plant or the you-name-the-structure that he didn’t have an intimate, working knowledge of.

As a way to honor everything he did for Crotched Mountain, the campus road “Fox Meadow Lane,” where most of the student and adult residences are located (nearly all of which were built on Mike’s watch), was given a new name: “Terrian Way.”

The Mayor’s legacy lives on.
He had a life of comfort and security. Then, one night, it was all taken from him and he was plunged into a nightmare. But on the other end of an unthinkable ordeal was a school on a New Hampshire mountaintop—and the hope for a new future.

Note: The names in this story have been changed.

The three figures ran desperately through the jungle. Sweat soaked through their clothes as they trampled foliage under foot. Hearts racing, legs churning, adrenaline pumping in abject fear, they fled. Exhausted to the point of collapse after six months of forced labor and untold horrors perpetrated against them and their family, they summoned the last remaining vestiges of endurance for one final push towards freedom.
From behind them, the gunfire still rang out; their captors had spent the last few months ravaging villages across the Congo countryside and had run into armed resistance at this most recent stop. This unforeseen exchange of violence had provided a glimmer of opportunity; the men had been distracted, so it was time to run.

So that's what the man and his son and his nephew did. They took off into the bush, with no destination, no direction, no strategy, driven only by the instinct to survive. The bullets cut through the canopy, ripping up the vegetation around them. Death was on their heels.

Sam omits much from his days in the Congo. If you were to prod him for more on his story, he withdraws. It doesn’t take a psychoanalyst to read what’s behind his eyes: these are things I don’t want to revisit.

His is a story almost beyond belief, something you’d more likely read about in a novel or a screenplay. He used to be a prince. An actual prince of an East Congo province, whose family—the Royal Family—has ruled for generations.

Then, one night, his entire family, all 10 of them, were kidnapped from their beds at gunpoint. It was a coup. And over the course of 24 hours, Sam lost his wife and all of his sisters. Just like that. The rest of the family splintered, whisked away to God knows where, leaving only Sam, his nephew and his son. They were marched through the jungle with automatic weapons at their backs. Every night, their captors would come to them and say, “Tomorrow we are going to kill you.”

One day, their party came across a village and a firefight erupted. Sam saw his opportunity within the chaos.

“Go! Go! Run into the bush!” he cried out to his son and nephew.

Together, hands clutched, they ran. Stray bullets pursued them as they cut through the dense underbrush but, eventually—miraculously—they put enough distance between them and the pursuing gunfire; they had escaped.

They walked through the bush for four days, sleeping outside with one eye open, subsisting on whatever fruit they could find. By sheer fortune they stumbled into a village, where they met a Christian missionary who offered food, clothes, and money to pay a driver who hid them in his truck on the way to Kenya.

Once across the border, and safe at a United Nations outpost designated to support refugees from the Congo, Sam met a Catholic priest who found a job for him: counseling. Following rigorous coursework and a successful completion of his exam, Sam began a three-year job offering counseling services, primarily to children and other refugees from the Congo who were suffering from mental health issues like PTSD.

Then, in 2013, he learned that his application for refugee status to the United States had been approved and he was off to Manchester, New Hampshire, his nephew and son by his side. He would later discover a job opportunity for a residential counselor at Crotched Mountain School, which he applied for, received, and began in May 2016.

Sam still works at the school, supporting students with disabilities and helping them achieve maximum independence. His extensive counseling experience has been a major plus for his work with the students, as he’s been able to call upon his training to solidify the bonds with his students. This job is, as he sees it, the apt continuation of a career he kicked off five years ago.

Sam is a quiet, amiable man, quick to smile and soft-spoken. Few people know the madness he fled nearly a decade ago. Today, he lives with his son and nephew in Manchester, the three of them bound together by a connection few people on the planet will ever be able to understand.

And though he has kept many of the details of his past hidden from view, when it comes to the present, Sam offers a few simple words that, really, say it all:

“I feel happy,” he says. “My life is safe. My work is good.”
Your humble chronicler of all things Crotched Mountain takes on gravity with exhilaration—and just a touch of trepidation.

It was a frigid Thursday afternoon. I was hanging out with the Crotched Mountain Accessible Recreation and Sports crew—Geoff, Kristin, Jeff, and Crista (and no, we don’t hire our recreation therapists based on how similar their first names sound)—when news came down that one of the scheduled participants was unable to make it. The afternoon was freed up and I began to politely make my exit when Jeff looked at me and said: “So, Dave, what do you think? Want to go for a run?”
I hadn’t hit the slopes for many years and, uninterested in showcasing my preternatural ability to complete a mountain descent entirely on my rear end, I amicably declined. Then I noticed Jeff was motioning towards the area where the adaptive ski equipment was kept.

“You should do it,” Crista said. “It’s exhilarating.”

Do what exactly?

Wait...are they talking about…

“Come on Dave,” Jeff repeated. “Let’s go for a run.”

And that’s how I found myself suited up in layers, a ski mask covering my face, and my whole 6’3” frame tucked into the welcoming embrace of the Easy Rider adaptive bi-ski. We started in the CMARS space inside the Crotched Mountain Ski and Ride complex. Jeff was working his engineering sorcery, tightening straps, securing clips, and testing stability. When it all checked out in “dry dock,” we went outside and made our way to the ski lift.

I was getting the full point-of-view of the average CMARS participant and I felt a smorgasbord of feelings -- excitement, anxiety, and security. Excited to be taking on a unique, thrilling experience; anxious because I’m not used to being completely dependent on another person; and secure that the person in charge was Jeff, who was obviously The Man when it came to this stuff.

Still, though, I hadn’t yet made it up the mountain. What range of bonkers emotions awaited me at the peak?

**THE DESCENT**

We approached the lift. I was buttoned up in my bi-ski so we (the ski and me) were going up as one organism. With Jeff on one side of me and Don, a CMARS volunteer, on the other, they released a latch, lifted me up so I was nearly perpendicular to the ground, and fed the ski through the lift seat. With a WHOOOSH the lift scooped us up, I was clicked back into the sitting position, and the seat bar came over all three of us, locking us into place in the chair.
A few minutes later the lift deposited us on the top of Crotched Mountain. Jeff secured the tethers and took his place behind me. Don skied out front, acting as sort of a forward-operating scout to clear the way and let other skiers know that I was on my way down.

And we were ready to go. I was feeling the nerves. Here I was, giving myself over to someone I couldn’t see, having no control over my ski equipment, ready to blast down a mountain. Our party inched across the terrain and... then...we were off.

The only way I can describe the next few minutes is “thrilling amusement park ride meets Winter Olympics travelogue.” We were slaloming from the left to right, my bi-ski cutting side to side to side into the packed snow, kicking up ice-wash. And though the burly Easy Rider wasn’t built for dynamic skiing it sure felt dynamic to me. We’d hit grooves and I’d get a touch of G-force as we caught air. Our trip through some moguls kept me riveted as we zigged and zagged like downhill dervishes. And velocity—oh, yes, Velocity.

That’s the name of the straight and clean steep run right before the end of the course. We hit Velocity with a fair amount of speed when Jeff pointed us due south (i.e., down), opened up his skis, and we were flying.

We ended up taking another run after that and then we were done and back in the CMARS office and I was extricating myself from the Easy Rider and shedding my outerwear and warming my hands and feeling my heartbeat slow as the adrenaline gradually left my bloodstream.

I am, of course, not the typical Easy Rider occupant, nor the usual CMARS participant, but I was grateful for this quick glance of what our students and adults are able to enjoy. The wind in my face, the mid-air jumps that jittered my guts, the full-blown rush of a full descent—thrills that many of the folks we serve were likely told they may never experience, they experienced. Add to that, it’s all therapeutic; participants get to work on social, emotional, and physical goals all while dive-bombing fresh powder.

Jeff told me that our students will sometimes go for up to 10 runs in a single session. And who can blame them? In my fleeting taste of adaptive skiing, I realized something I suspect those who came before me—and those would come after—understand: no matter the vessel, there is freedom on the mountain.

Crotched Mountain relies on the generosity of donors to change lives in countless ways, be it through new technology or program funding or the harder-to-measure treasures such as the look of joy that spreads across a child’s face when they make a breakthrough.

With tax law talk dominating headlines recently, we wanted to share some information that we thought would be helpful. Highlights are below, and you also can request our free booklet, Your Guide to Effective Giving After Tax Reform. Simply return the enclosed response card.

Earlier versions of the tax reform legislation, and the publicity leading up to the new “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017” becoming law, left many believing that charitable giving would be affected in drastic ways. You will be surprised to learn that the tax changes may impact you very little.
Actually, for or those making larger gifts, there are incentives to expand your charitable giving.

You may or may not have itemized in the past. While it is true that the number of people who do not itemize is expected to increase under the new tax law, the income tax charitable deduction will remain if your adjusted gross income (AGI) is higher than the standard deduction of $12,000 for single filers and $24,000 for married couples filing jointly. A larger planned gift may allow you to itemize. No changes have been made that affect charitable gift annuities and certain types of trusts.

MAXIMIZING YOUR GIFT

There are tax advantages for several types of gifts. Gifts of stock, charitable IRA rollovers, and beneficiary designations are just a few ways you can support Crotched Mountain with tax benefits today and in your estate plans.

Gifts of Appreciated Stock – Donors avoid capital gains taxes when making gifts of appreciated stock. The stock must be owned for more than a year, and the stock gift must be made directly to the charity.

Beneficiary Designation – You can name one or more charities as a beneficiary of a checking or savings account, a life insurance policy, or any retirement savings account. This is a no-cost, simple way to give a legacy gift to any charity. The gift is given directly to the non-profit organization, which avoids probate and reduces potential tax burdens for heirs. A beneficiary designation qualifies a donor for membership in our prestigious Don Kent Legacy Society.

Charitable IRA Rollover – After age 70.5, those with traditional or Roth retirement accounts are required to take a minimum required distribution. When donors give funds directly from an IRA to a charity, they are not required to report the income on their tax returns and the gift satisfies the minimum required distribution. The distribution must be made directly to the charity. This method of giving provides the same tax benefit as itemized deductions, even if a donor doesn’t itemize. A total of $100,000 in charitable IRA rollover gifts can be made in a single year.

Pledge Payments – A donor can choose to accelerate one or more future pledge payments to qualify for itemization.

If you’d like to learn more about the many other ways to give, let’s work together so we can discover what feels right for you and your family and create the impact you’d like your support to have for Crotched Mountain’s people and programs.

MEET DOREEN

Doreen Oliveira Baker (pictured) has just joined Crotched Mountain as the President’s Circle and Planned Giving Manager and can be reached at 603-547-1482 or doreen.baker@crotchedmountain.org.

Doreen’s career in philanthropy spans more than two decades. She joined the development team at Crotched Mountain in April and is dedicated to answering your questions about the Don Kent Legacy Society, the Crotched Mountain Memorial Garden, and other special ways you can ensure Crotched Mountain will evolve and innovate in response to ever-changing human needs.

The information contained herein is offered for general information and educational purposes. Your personal circumstances, your State laws, and other factors may impact results. It is always recommended that you consult with your financial advisors before making important financial decisions.


Interested in organizing a fundraiser for Crotched Mountain with your friends, family, or coworkers? We can help! Contact Jeannette Nieder at 603-547-1486 or jeannette.nieder@crotchedmountain.org.
Crystal and her super-staff Amy celebrate a successful round of hoops skills at the annual Special Olympics State Basketball Games. Crotched Mountain School sent a team of athletes who showcased their dribbling, passing, and shooting talents, while taking home medals and ribbons, earned in the crucible of competition.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Crotched Mountain Golf Classic
June 8
Crotched Mountain Golf Club
Learn more at cmf.org/golf

For more information, contact Jeannette Nieder at jeannette.nieder@crotchedmountain.org or call 603-547-1486

Kevin Harte, Vice President of Advancement for Crotched Mountain Foundation presents a special New Hampshire commendation to Rick “Nifty” Middleton, legendary hockey player and president of the Boston Bruins Alumni Association. Rick’s fellow legends skated to the delight of a packed house of fans in January for the annual Bruins Alumni Classic.

THAT’S NIFTY!

It’s a three-peat! The staff-powered Crotched Mountain Eagles team took home the championship (again) at the annual Hoops on Wheels wheelchair basketball tournament, put on by our good friends at Granite State Independent Living. Here, the team poses with New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu (whose team, alas, was the first to succumb to the Eagles’ rampage).

BACK-TO-BACK-TO-BACK CHAMPS
CMARS - Accessible Recreation
Adaptive Kayaking, Cycling and Hiking

Children of all abilities can enjoy the thrill and adventure of kayaking, cycling and hiking with Crotched Mountain’s Accessible Recreation and Sports (CMARS).

Our certified and licensed recreation therapists and trained volunteers develop individualized lessons with adaptations and equipment to meet each child’s skill level and goals. Lessons are held in the Monadnock Region.

Join Us
and Register Today!

cmf.org/cmars
603.831.3565
cmars@crotchedmountain.org