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Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Actions

I’m a movie guy. And while fall is when we tend to get our award season films, I must admit I have a soft spot for the summer blockbuster, those nine-figure big-budget movies that studios drop into the theaters with crossed fingers. Massive explosions, white-knuckle car chases, malicious invaders from outer space, you name it—blockbuster movie season is all about blasting our senses for two, flashy, raucous hours.

And I am into it! Sure, I’m a fan of the icons—the Coppolas, Manns, and Scorceses. But sometimes you just need to plop down into a reclining chair with the A/C blasting and lose yourself in some premium escapism.

Some of my favorite popcorn movie-going experiences are spun from comic books, which have generated billions of dollars with their never-ending pipeline of superhero yarns.

Beyond the action scenes and the CGI, these movies, I think, grab us because we love the concept of extraordinary people doing extraordinary things. That’s at the core of it; the Infinity Gauntlet and the Kryptonite are simply the dressing.

Our blockbuster story features many champions and you, as our donors and advocates, have come together to provide something great for the children of Crotched Mountain School, working tirelessly, giving selflessly, and creating incredible, unforgettable impact. Enjoy the stories of changed lives in these pages and witness that impact.

This edition of Horizons is for you—our All-Stars, our Heroes, our Champions.

Michael Coughlin
President and CEO of Crotched Mountain

Every gift you make changes a child’s life in immeasurable ways.
Please consider one of the many ways you can make a difference today!

• Donate online at cmf.org/give
• Give monthly by credit card and become a Sustaining Donor
• Send a check to: Crotched Mountain Foundation, 1 Verney Drive, Greenfield, NH 03047
• Join the President’s Circle (Leadership gifts of $1,000 or more)
• Host a friend-raiser!
• Make a gift of securities to: The Depository Trust Co., Acct. # 6728029504, Participant Acct. 2803
• Join the Don Kent Legacy Society and invest in Crotched Mountain’s future
• Attend an event
• Ask your employer if they have a gift match program
• Volunteer
• Honor or memorialize a loved one with special gifts or a place in the Memorial Garden or with a special naming opportunity

Questions? Please contact Kathy Waters at kathy.waters@crotchedmountain.org or call 603-547-1485.
He’s one of the most decorated Special Olympics athletes to ever attend Crotched Mountain School. But Reid’s road to sports immortality was paved with perseverance, willpower, and the assistance of all those in his corner—family members, teachers, staff, therapists, and supporters like you.

It’s 10:15 a.m. on July 11, 2018. Carter Hall, the auditorium for Crotched Mountain School, is alive with hustle and bustle as the audience takes their seats. In front, New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu, flanked by the members of the Executive Council, stands and welcomes the attendees—constituents, dignitaries, lobbyists—essentially a who’s who of the Granite State political scene. It’s one of the summer “road trip meetings,” taken by the Governor and the Executive Council to various locales throughout the state. It’s a big deal and everyone is excited.

In the back there’s a young man who’s as cool as a cucumber, despite the fact he’s got a big job to do. The Governor wraps up his welcome and it’s Mr. Cool’s cue. He hefts the flagpole and walks down the aisle, presenting the colors, as the full house stands at attention and watches him go.

In an absolutely airtight performance, he walks the aisle, pivots, and stands ramrod straight as the Pledge of Allegiance is recited. After, he places the flagpole into its base and exits. No one realizes the incredible feat they just witnessed.

But that doesn’t matter to Reid. He’s got places to go and people to see. His work here is done.

FINDING HIS STRIDE

Reid is one of the most instantly recognizable students at Crotched Mountain School. His mop of dark hair, his intense eyes, and, of course, his trademark tube socks pulled up to the hollow of his knees. But more than his façade and fashion sense, it’s his demeanor that distinguishes him; Reid is a man in motion. Catching him sitting in place for an extended period of time is akin to a Yeti sighting.

Watching him go about his business on campus, you would never in a million years think he was a student who, at one point, was faced with an enormous—almost overpowering—collection of extremely challenging behaviors. Before he enrolled at Crotched Mountain School
in 2011, Reid’s home life was punctuated by instances of smashed car windows, violent outbursts, even self-injurious behaviors, all arising from a complex mix of severe cognitive deficits, communication challenges, and autistic symptoms. However, beyond even those barriers, it was perhaps the paralyzing anxiety that boxed Reid in for most of his life.

“Reid can get very nervous processing his environment,” says Meagan Ingalls, Student Services Coordinator at Crotched Mountain School, who works closely with Reid and his family. “He may have the highest anxiety level of any student here, so he’s always on his guard.”

Dogs have always proven to be a unique and terrifying source of anxiety for Reid. The mere sight of a dog would send him running; it was the loudness and the unpredictability of their behavior that activated his flight response.

But, as is the case with all progress at Crotched Mountain School, big changes happen with small steps. Working with his teachers, staff, and occupational therapists, Reid strove to overcome his canine-inspired fear. He spent extended time with docile therapy dogs, then moved on to giving dogs treats—from twenty feet away or tossing them into the room from the hallway—eventually inching closer and closer.

And then, this summer, he took a dog for a walk around the Crotched Mountain School campus

PROVING HIS MEDAL

Reid has always loved sports. But his anxiety has been a major deterrent, like a chain staked to the ground, holding him back. Gradually, with the help of his Crotched Mountain support network, Reid chipped away at this social and emotional brick wall, working his way—step by step—into the full menu of accessible sports at his disposal.

When Tyler Rodgers, Recreational Therapist at Crotched Mountain School, first started working with him, Reid steered clear of large groups, intimidated by the sensory overload and unpredictability that came with throngs of people. Today? When the Special Olympics roll around, Reid is square in the thick of it.

“He has become much more interactive with people,” Tyler says. “The state games at UNH are packed with people and noise. Between events Reid is walking around and checking out all the displays and exhibitions. He is participating in the community.”

The upside of his liberation? Reid has enough bronze, silver, and gold medals from Special Olympics to fill a Boeing C-17.

In 2018 alone, he medaled in the 25 meter run, the 50 meter run, the softball throw, the 100 meter walk, the slalom, and the super giant slalom. He participates in all Special Olympics state and regional games, as well as basketball, bowling, track and field, and aquatics.

“He’s probably the most active, most involved athlete we have at Crotched Mountain,” Tyler says. “He’s come such a long way.”

To see his progress in its clearest form, you need only attend the Opening Ceremonies of the Winter Games. The prelude to the Games takes place every year at the town center of Waterville Valley Resort. Friends, families, and onlookers are packed in, shouting at the top of their lungs. Music is blasting. Fireworks are firing. It’s about as busy and active a venue as you’ll ever see.

The centerpiece of the pomp and circumstance is the parade, featuring each team walking down main street to a chorus of frenzied applause. In the nighttime winter chill, the Crotched Mountain team stands at the ready, waiting for the announcer to welcome them into the hullabaloo.

Standing at the front, ready to lead his team onward and holding the team sign aloft, is Reid. He isn’t bothered by the noise or the crowd or the moment. In many ways, these steps he’s about to take, bearing the Crotched Mountain standard, will be a performance even more impressive than his ski runs.

The announcer calls for Crotched Mountain and the crowd erupts.

Reid gets to work.
Grateful for the services their son received at Crotched Mountain’s Ready Set Connect autism center for children, Kurt and Sarah Mailloux hosted a charitable volleyball tournament at the Akwa Marina Yacht Club in Laconia this summer; 25 teams raised over $12,000 to be used as Ready Set Connect scholarship money.

Cindy Bluestein,
Crotched Mountain Training Coordinator:
“As a former residential counselor and current training coordinator, I see the high caliber of people who work directly with our students and residents. I know the difference they make to so many lives, including the parents who trust us with their children. This place inspires me to donate what I can through payroll deduction.”
The Don Kent Legacy Society was established in 2009 to recognize and honor individuals and families who have made provisions in their estate plans for the future well-being of Crotched Mountain. Steven Gardner, M.D., father of a former student and Don Kent Legacy Society member: “There is nothing on that beautiful plateau above the town of Greenfield that can disturb the singular mission of Crotched Mountain, where inspired teachers assist children and adults with disabilities in a place of both great natural beauty and quiet humanity. I am a member of the Don Kent Legacy Society because I want to help an outstanding organization remain strong for generations of children to come. I am forever grateful for their care and compassion.”

For over a decade, Premier Sponsor RBC Wealth Management in Nashua, NH has shown what corporate social responsibility is all about through their donations, gift in kind, and event participation.
In the past few years, several foundations including the Cogswell Benevolent Trust, the Samuel Hunt Foundation, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, the McIninch Family Foundation, and the Susan & Donald Babson Foundation, have helped outfit Crotched Mountain classrooms with the latest technology, including eye-gaze communication systems and SmartBoards.

Beginning with their first gift of $150 in 1961, the Masonic Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts has been a loyal benefactor to Crotched Mountain, giving over $310,000 to date. This year, the New Hampshire Order of the Eastern Star Grand Chapter supported Crotched Mountain for the first time with a $15,000 donation.
When Wayne Colsia was eleven years old he attended camp near Greenfield, NH; his fondest memory of that summer is when he helped create an evening of carnival entertainment for the children at Crotched Mountain School. Since 2011, Wayne and his wife Adrienne have been giving monthly by credit card to Crotched Mountain, making them our longest recurring monthly donors. Wayne: “We know our impact on the children at Crotched Mountain is felt year round.”

Leslie Kenney, Crotched Mountain Board Member: “While it’s gratifying to write a check to the Crotched Mountain Annual Fund each year, for me, it’s been far more meaningful to take on a leadership role in encouraging others to give. As Chair of the Board Development Committee, I treasure the opportunity to devote my time and talent to sustaining Crotched Mountain’s incredible mission of service to children and adults with disabilities.”
From the shadow of the Rockies to the southern face of Crotched Mountain, they travelled—in search of safety and purpose, stability and discovery, and the simple joy of a leisurely kayak ride. They found that and much more thanks to you, our champions.

You pull into the parking lot of Dodge Farms Ice Cream and Garden Stand in New Boston, New Hampshire, just off of Route 77; there’s the faintest of drizzles on this raw October morning. The stand isn’t open yet, but there is activity.

A teenage boy is vigorously wiping down picnic tables. You walk over; it’s Colin. A student from Crotched Mountain School. He’s scrubbing away like a champ, dipping his sponge into the bucket of soapy water nearby. Standing next to him, offering instruction and encouragement is Stacy Fiske, an occupational therapist.

You learn that this is a regular stop for Colin, his staff, and Stacy. Dodge Farms has found great benefit in his table-cleaning abilities, erasing the trace amounts of ice cream and other happy goo that make the surface so sticky and unappealing to customers.

Curious about Colin, you chat with Stacy to learn more. Colin loses his focus; your presence is new and Colin is a big-time routine guy. After all, he’s on the clock.

You politely excuse yourself and as you head back to the car, Stacy mentions you should also talk to Colin’s teacher Matt. He can tell you more.

You say thanks, jump into the car, and drive west to Greenfield and Crotched Mountain School.

Matt Jones’ classroom is never dull. Lots of movement. Lots of activity. His group is the older, high-school age students, all boys, and all with unique challenges and behaviors. One of his students walks in, surrounded by exuberant staff who are giving him a great big bear hug. He had just made a significant life skill accomplishment and everyone is excited.

Amid the hullabaloo, you sidle over to Matt.

Tell me about Colin, you say.

So Matt tells you about Colin...
When Colin arrived at Crotched Mountain School for his first day, he was clad in protective gear and flanked by multiple staff. The staff were in protective gear, too. He brought with him a reputation for extreme behavior. A student from Colorado, there were literally no other places for him to go. His father, Tyler, recounts that when looking for safe, appropriate placement for Colin, the family started in Colorado and worked east, finding no options until about a hundred miles west of the Atlantic at Crotched Mountain.

With an autism diagnosis and severe communication limitations, as well as anxiety that boxed him in emotionally, the focus of Colin’s first year or so at Crotched Mountain School was acclimation with a priority placed on safety. If Colin needed support with a behavior, it was always a two-person team of Campus Support Staff who would hotfoot it to the scene.

Because of his anxiety, Colin was uninterested in coming to school. But thanks to the power of the Slim Jim—far and away Colin’s favorite snack—staff were able to incentivize his trip to class. According to his staff, getting Colin to school was a “three Slim Jim process.” Those Slim Jims came in handy everywhere and helped Colin get used to his new surroundings and heed what was being asked of him. Colin’s dad would send cases of Slim Jims to Greenfield to keep the supply chain moving.

But Colin settled in. He would eventually find safety and comfort in his new surroundings. His protective gear was discarded. His staff and teachers gave him more flexibility—essentially backing away and reducing directives, allowing him to choose freely.

As the anxiety began to dissipate, a highly empathetic, sensitive young man emerged. Following his incidents of aggression towards others he would immediately weep.

When he was younger, Colin had injured his grandmother, which had prompted his residential placement. A few months ago, he saw her in person for the first time since the incident and immediately burst into tears.

He hugged her.

You also learn that he’s a big sports guy. He plays basketball at the after-school program and does every single activity offered by Crotched Mountain Accessible Recreation and Sports: kayaking, cycling, and skiing. He went to the prom this year, too.

You finish talking to Matt just as Colin returns from his community adventures. His staff are right behind him as he strides into the classroom. It is obvious to you he feels comfortable here. He has found safety and stability and, most importantly, purpose. He has made his own choices and determined his own experience.

Before you leave, Matt tells you one more thing. His father, Tyler, who frequently flies in from Colorado for visits, was at Crotched Mountain a few weeks ago. He had booked a room at a nearby resort. For the first time in over a decade Colin stayed overnight with his dad, without any staff. While they were there, they tried out the hot tub.

You like to think they shared a Slim Jim.
In the small town of New Hartford, located in the Leatherstocking region of Central New York, there is a house on 9377 Chapman Road. It’s a split-level, with white vinyl siding, and a small two-bay garage, the kind that was built 40 years ago for cars the size of dishwashers.

The house is empty now. There’s a For Sale sign out front.

Vanessa Blase used to live in that house. Though born in Oklahoma, she had lived in New Hartford for 45 years, when her mother and father returned to the greater Utica area to rejoin the rest of the family.

She worked her entire professional life for insurance companies, in sales, underwriting, and customer service. She had two cats, Rha and Geo. She has no children. She never married.

In 2015, she was was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy. For the next two years, her scans came back clean.

In September 2017, she began to experience extreme back pain. She went to the hospital to have tests, which revealed that she had a tumor on her spine. She promptly had the tumor surgically removed.

Two days after the surgery, while recuperating, she went into septic shock. Another scan revealed tumors in her brain. On October 1, she began hospice. Two days later Vanessa Blase died at the age of 53.

Elisa Minchin, her cousin, was named executor of her estate. She and her family went into the house on 9377 Chapman Road to clean it out. The cats were taken in by a friend.

As they moved through the house, they found a tin metal Captain America shield (Vanessa was an avid collector, filling her basement shelves with all manner of pop culture paraphernalia). Upon further inspection, they discovered writing on the shield: the autographs of the principal stars of the film Captain America: The Winter Soldier and Stan Lee, the Godfather of Marvel comics.

Elisa’s nephew, a staff member at Crotched Mountain, would receive a text describing the shield. As the executor, she offered to donate the shield to be sold, with all proceeds going to support the children of Crotched Mountain School.

The shield found its way to New Hampshire. The next step: how best to maximize its value? After a few inquiries into auction houses and Ebay resellers, the shield ended up in front of the pensive gazes of the owners of Pop Culture Cards, Comics, Collectibles, and Gaming, a local comic and game store in Raymond, NH. One of the owners, known by his nickname “Opa,” was intrigued by the item—and when notified of the destination of the funds that would result from his sale—lit up. Turns out Opa has a soft spot for helping kids with special needs; he is a drug counselor for youth and frequently welcomes kids with autism diagnoses to his regular gaming nights at the store.

After some number-crunching, he presented two alternatives for the shield: 1) a straight cash offer of $200 or, 2) a mother lode of items from the store. Door Number 2 was selected and two weeks later several boxes filled with board and card games, posters, collectible action figures and miniatures, and a two-foot stack of (age-appropriate) comic books arrived at Crotched Mountain School.

The games were added to the school’s inventory, the comic books landed at the Media Center (given their own corner of the library), the posters ended up on the middle school classroom walls, and the rest of the swag was earmarked for a very special purpose: the Incentive Store.

Crotched Mountain School’s elementary school “littles” program weaves in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to help the youngest children on the campus gain the skills to overcome the emotional and behavioral challenges (typically resulting from trauma) that have had such a profound impact on their development.
A key approach to this curriculum is the incentivizing of “replacement behaviors;” that is, reduce focus on the behaviors to curtail and instead amplify the positive behaviors. For example, if a student needs a break from his studies, instead of bolting out of the classroom and falling to the floor in a fit, the replacement (or alternative) behavior would be for him to simply say “I need a break.”

When these positive behaviors happen—and no matter how small a success they may appear, they are indeed massive wins—-incentives become a powerful positive reinforcement. The way this all works: students earn points for these alternative behaviors on their own custom “progress boards” and periodically throughout the day, they can cash in these points for various incentives, like some time on the iPad or an extra long break. None is more popular, though, than a trip to the Incentive Store.

Yes, the Incentive Store, a massive closet containing a cornucopia of cool stuff, sure to appeal to any kid. Throw open the closet doors and you’ll see awesome swag adorned with all the heavy hitters: Batman, Wonder Woman, Superman, Thor, Spider-man, and Star Wars icons from every corner of the universe. These are the items from the shield transaction.

Points are cashed in, loot is collected, and the process continues, every day, as each child moves forward, step by step.

Back in Raymond, inside Pop Culture, the Captain America shield hangs on the wall, mounted and framed. Those signatures pop right away, contrasted against the evocative red and white circles that ripple out from the star in the center. It’s an eye-catcher, easily the centerpiece of the store’s collection.

Passersby may take a moment to check it out, before returning to their browsing. Aficionados will likely spend a bit more time, nodding in appreciation as they read those autographs—Chris Evans. Sebastian Stan. Anthony Mackie. Hayley Atwell. Stan Lee.

What they don’t know is the true power of that shield or the story of its former owner—a solitary woman from a small town in New York who gave a gift that turned into treasure helping children hundreds of miles away on a mountain she had never set foot on.

“She will also be remembered by an aunt, numerous cousins, and many friends who blessed her life,” reads Vanessa Blase’s obituary from October 10, 2017.

Now she has more friends.
Rocky DeCarolis was a long-time donor to Crotched Mountain and a passionate outdoorsman. One day, while he was fishing on Moosehead Lake, a squall rolled in out of nowhere and capsized the boat. Rocky and other family members lost their lives in the tragedy. For over 60 years, “Rocky’s Rangers”—the DeCarolis family and their friends—have fundraised for Crotched Mountain in Rocky’s memory. On October 13, Rocky’s Rangers stopped by to offer their check and visit Crotched Mountain’s Memorial Garden, where Rocky is forever memorialized. If you would like to honor a loved one with a Memorial Garden tribute, please contact Doreen Baker at 603-547-1482 or Doreen.Baker@CrotchedMountain.org.
If it’s the holidays that means it’s time for Evergreens for Autism. Each year, Ed Cyr sells Christmas trees, wreaths, and ornaments at his two stands in Kingston and Seabrook, NH. A portion of the profits go to Crotched Mountain’s autism services. If you would like to land a prize Yuletide decoration visit cmf.org/evergreens for more information.
Boston Bruins Alumni Classic

Sunday, January 27, 2019 - 2:00 pm

Tickets on sale January 3, 2019 at cmf.org/bruins

The Crotched Mountain Wild hockey team will face off against the Boston Bruins Alumni at Sullivan Arena, St. Anselm College. The Bruins Alumni Classic is a fun event for the whole family and all proceeds benefit Crotched Mountain Accessible Recreation and Sports.

For more information
Jeannette Nieder - 603.547.1486 or jeannette.nieder@crotchedmountain.org
Sponsorship opportunities are available