Onward, to Independence!
Forging the skills for a great life in the community!
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Horizons
Summer 2019

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To support Crotched Mountain through a gift, visit crotchedmountain.org/give or call 603-547-1485.

On the cover: Nolan Mann’s class, featuring students Evan, Langdon, Wyatt, Drew, and Owen
Above: Shelby and Karly are all smiles
THANK YOU

Dear Friends,

This marks my very last letter to you. I write these words at my desk in Greenfield, NH, looking out my window into the Crotched Mountain School courtyard. Our students and staff are out, enjoying the late summer sunshine, and I’m filled with a profound sense of gratitude for the blessings in my life.

When I was a boy, I had two dreams: pitching for the Boston Red Sox or playing in a rock and roll band. Baseball fell away fairly quickly, when my fastball wasn’t that fast and my curveball didn’t curve. But music stayed with me for quite a while.

The kind of work we do at Crotched Mountain called to me in 1979. The golden thread that links these things—sports, music, and service to people with disabilities—is the sense of community, connection and belonging. For the past forty years it has been my privilege to be part of that mission and that community of people serving a higher goal: a better world for people with disabilities.

That sense of community is what powers Crotched Mountain. It’s the secret sauce, the magic word, the catalyst that charges the engine of our mission. And for three and a half years I’ve been lucky enough to be among the most wonderful team of committed people striving every day for that mission.

The next Horizons will have a note from our new CEO, Ned Olney. I am more than confident that Crotched Mountain will continue to thrive and grow under his leadership. But I will let him introduce himself to you in his own words.

For now, allow me to simply say thank you. Whether you’re a parent, a client, a customer, an employee, a donor, or someone picking up this magazine to read about Crotched Mountain for the first time, I thank you. I am grateful that you have become a part of this community, that you have traveled with us on the road of change and challenge, on the path of possibility and promise.

I begin a new chapter of my life. And as I reflect on my unforgettable time at Crotched Mountain, I know how lucky I am to be a part of it. I know in my core that despite our peerless legacy and rich history, Crotched Mountain’s finest days lie ahead.

I’ll leave you with this, from “Mr.Tambourine Man,” by Bob Dylan:

Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free
Silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sands
With all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves
Let me forget about today until tomorrow

Michael Coughlin
President and CEO of Crotched Mountain
Welcome everyone. My name is Langdon and I have been a student at Crotched Mountain School for 2 ½ years. I would like to speak about my experience on behalf of the graduating class of 2019. Crotched Mountain School has helped me prepare for the outside world. I have become an independent person. When I started at Crotched Mountain School, I was a 1:1 so I had a staff with me all the time. Crotched Mountain School has helped me to grow to be independent and no longer need a 1:1 staff. Crotched Mountain School has also helped me expand my vocational skills. Crotched Mountain School has helped me prepare for a job in the community experience from working and learning in the school cafeteria. I also obtained my Serve Safe Certification. Working off campus at Big E Fry makes me feel confident about my abilities. The following is a speech Crotched Mountain School graduate Langdon Thorne wrote and delivered himself at the 2019 Commencement ceremony.
Welcome everyone. My name is Langdon and I have been a student at Crotched Mountain School for 2 ½ years. I would like to speak about my experience on behalf of the graduating class of 2019. Crotched Mountain School has helped me prepare for the outside world. I have become an independent person. When I started at Crotched Mountain School I was a 1:1 so I had a staff with me all the time. Crotched Mountain School has helped me to grow to be independent and no longer need a 1:1 staff.

Crotched Mountain School has also helped me expand my vocational skills. Crotched Mountain School has helped me prepare for a job in the community by gaining experience from working and learning in the kitchen job in the school cafeteria. I also obtained my Serve Safe Certification. Working off campus at Big E Fry makes me feel that I accomplished something and it’s nice to do what I love, that’s cooking for me.

Crotched mountain School also has a farm program and that has helped me become more responsible and patient. When I started helping out with farm I was taking care of the birds a few days a week. I am now responsible for the birds on the weekend and after school. I put them back in there coops feed them and give them water and collect eggs. One of our ducks got hurt so I got the chance to learn how to give the duck medication through a syringe.

I will never forget when we got to meet the Governor of NH Chris Sununu. The Governor pardoned Brook the turkey. Brook is now a good part of our farm program and we are happy to have her. Working at the farm has really helped me and I’m glad there is a farm program here.
Crotched Mountain has set me up with some volunteer work. I volunteer for Meals On Wheels. We deliver meals to elderly folks and check on them to make sure they’re safe. When we deliver the meals we socialize because a lot of them are lonely. This program has helped my speech because I talk quiet and fast at times. I’m really good with the older folks and I’m glad I got to volunteer for Meals on Wheels.

I have also expanded my academic skills. My main focus has been English. I’m better at writing and expressing myself in essays. I’m more confident about reading and that helps when I’m reading out loud. Crotched Mountain has helped me learn skills other than academic skills. I have earned CPR and First Aid certification thanks to Crotched Mountain School.

I have learned so many skills that will help me in the future. Thanks Crotched Mountain for helping me prepare for the next chapter of my life.
The Ballad of Brook the Turkey

It started on a cool fall day,
(Nothing special about that week)
Fair Brook was resting upon her hay,
Packing feed within her beak,

And without warning, away she went
Whisked into a metal crate!
It seemed her last week’s been spent,
And now she’s headed towards her fate.

‘Twas Thanksgiving, which means one thing
For a turkey so plump and posh,
The parting sight the night would bring
Is Brook adjacent squash.

Lo! It was not the dinner table
Upon which she lay,
But a locale more safe and stable--
‘Twas The Governor, offering her a stay!

There would be no gravy for Brook—
Now what fate would unspool?
(It mattered little! She shan’t be cooked!)
“What’s this,” she thought?
“Crotched Mountain School?”

There she stayed, with fowl friends alike
On the Mountain farm, adored!
Her pen a stop on campus hikes!
A part of mountain lore!

Not a source of protein now,
But a source of endless learning,
She’s a central piece of the farm school Tao:
“Real-world skills, well-worth earning!”

From collecting eggs to spreading feed,
To raking, weeding, sowing,
From planting that first eggplant seed,
To bearing witness to the growing

On Brook’s farm there is a common thread,
A shared harvest from the field:
The kernels of joy and kindness spread—
And independence is the yield.
It’s not just a field trip. It’s not just a movie. It’s an opportunity to explore and discover and, most importantly, debut to the community some newly learned vocational and life skills.

The white van with the blue Crotched Mountain logo rolled into the parking lot, the big, hot late morning sun flashing arcs of light off the windshield. The doors slid open and a group of students and staff and teachers disembarked, primed to partake in that most hallowed of summer traditions: sitting in a chilled, air-conditioned theater to catch a movie with friends.


For Talon, a middle-school day student who had been working with his speech therapist on a special interview project, the trip was more than a movie; it was an opportunity to put some academic learning into real-world practice.

“He has been working on comparing traditional movie theaters to drive-ins and places like Chunky’s,” says Shelby Ouellette, a Speech Therapist at Crotched Mountain School. “They’re all very different of course. We worked on event diagrams, we did a snack taste test, we talked about the different jobs you can have at movie theaters and now we’re here visiting the movie theater.”

At this point Shelby pauses. The pizza has arrived.

ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET

In the theater, there’s a long table dedicated to the Crotched Mountain group. On either side, a mixture of staff and
students sat in high-backed leather swivel chairs, pizza and lemonade in front of them. It was like a slice-of-life scene from a feast at a Viking hall.

As the Chunky’s staff circulated throughout, placing food, pouring drinks and scooping ice cream, the students took turns putting their learned communication skills into real-world practice. Karly used her speech device for everyday requests. Elizabeth used “please” when asking for things. And Talon had his list of questions ready to go.

Which was why this particular field trip was so cool. Talon was able to call upon the social, emotional, and vocational skills he worked so hard to hone at Crotched Mountain School and flex his interview chops.

For the past couple of months Talon and a school peer have been working closely with the speech department and their classroom teachers to produce their comprehensive movie theater research project, capped off with a “backstage tour” and interview with the manager of the Manchester Chunky’s location.

“We came up with a list of questions together, which was great,” Shelby says. “We’ve been working on staying on topic and asking appropriate questions while we’re in the community, instead of personal questions and things that aren’t relevant to where we are.”

Once he wrapped up his pizza and lemonade (and, crucially, before the ice cream showed up), Talon, joined by Shelby, met up with the theater manager. She took the small group around the theater, showed them where the controls were for the movies (it’s all digital and through a computer now!), visited the kitchen (that’s where the pizza’s made!) and hit the ticket window to wrap it up (birthday parties! group sales! advertising on the big screen!).

Throughout, Talon fired off questions:

“What do you like most about movies?”

“Why did you get this job at the movie theater?”

“How do you show the movies?”

Shelby was impressed: “The tour helped Talon be able to ask the questions he came up with in an appropriate manner and he was obviously on topic.”

But enough schoolwork for now. The tour was done, the questions had been asked, the cinematic intel had been gleaned, and it was time to get down to the true business of the day—settling in with a bowl of ice cream and watching a great movie in a great theater on a sleepy summer afternoon with friends on all sides.

The lights dim. Showtime.
Wyatt settles into his seat, eyeing the new machine with apprehension. Supported by his staff and therapists, he sidles up to the desk and positions his hands on the foreign apparatus that had been placed in front of him. It’s a big, white, flat, plastic rectangle with two huge black circles on each side. Various wires snake out from the back, attached to a series of switches and big buttons.

An LED flatscreen TV is wheeled up to the desk. And there, just to the side of the TV, is something cool and recognizable—a sleek white Xbox. The power lights flash, the disc drive spins, and the system jumps to life. The Xbox logo pops onto the TV screen, eventually moving into the system’s dashboard. Tyler Conlan, an Occupational Therapy Assistant at Crotched Mountain, navigates the pixels and gets a game teed up for Wyatt. The big, flat, plastic rectangle and the buttons and switches are moved within reach.

And then the magic happens.

**GETTING IN THE GAME**

If you were one of the nine zillion people that watched the 2019 Super Bowl you may have seen the commercial for the Xbox Adaptive Controller. It showed a young boy with a physical disability playing his favorite video games with his friends. There hadn’t really been anything like this technology for mainstream consoles before, a design that allowed people with various physical challenges the chance to dive into the digital world with their compadres.
The project’s design began in 2015, when a team of engineers from Microsoft’s Xbox and gaming division began to explore the feasibility of making video games more accessible. Intensive research and design (and a series of internal competitions) produced a prototype device that would interface with accessories commonly used by video game aficionados with disabilities.

In 2017, Microsoft began to move the controller from prototype to product, partnering with organizations like The AbleGamers Charity, The Cerebral Palsy Foundation, SpecialEffect, and Warfighter Engaged. Feedback from the community eventually led to the final creation of the controller.

Then the ad hit the Super Bowl and stirred something in a handful of donors and before you knew it, two brand new Xbox Adaptive Controllers showed up at the door. Crotched Mountain School’s clinical department jumped all over the shiny new toys and began putting the gear through its paces. Tyler brought over buckets of switches and buttons and levers and plugged and played for hours, looking to get the right mix for the Crotched Mountain students he was working with.

There were a lot of dry runs, afternoons spent in an unused office fiddling with wires and gizmos, connecting and calibrating, until the right combination of accessories was identified to help give the kids the chance to experience something they never have: playing a video game with friends.

POWERING UP

Judy Beckman’s class. 10:00am. Wyatt, who has Cerebral Palsy, is gazing at the TV that is fired up. Tyler and his colleague Jill Thompson, an Occupational Therapist, bracket Wyatt and help him get his hands situated on the huge red button that’s connected to the Xbox Adaptive Controller. Once he’s set, Tyler stands back and uses a standard controller to get the game ready.

They’re playing a game called “Crayola Scoot,” a simple, colorful game that allows the player to zip around a skate park on a scooter, splattering bright paint all over the place. Tyler then switched over to “co-pilot” mode, which allows him to execute the more complex inputs while Wyatt focuses on simple commands with Jill’s support.

It starts off slowly. Wyatt is unsure of this new interface. But as he feels it out and realizes that the actions he takes with the button translate to the really cool stuff happening on the screen, that look begins to dawn on his face. You know that look; we’ve all seen it. It’s the joy of discovery happening in real time.

More button presses. More on-screen shenanigans. And Wyatt is suddenly lost in the game.

“Oh yeah!” he shouts as his digital avatar performs a front flip, purple paint splattering everywhere.

Grace, Wyatt’s classmate, takes a spin and embarks on the same journey—incredulity to realization to gigantic fun. But, eventually, the session comes to a close. The Xbox powers down. The buttons are put back into their bin. The Xbox controller is packaged back up.

As Tyler and Jill leave, saying their goodbyes and throwing enthusiastic “Good job!” at Grace and Wyatt, Judy’s class reverts back to the typical day. The staff and students return to their academics. And then lunch is in about 45 minutes.

There is, of course, one big difference: Wyatt and Grace are gamers now.
With the support of many big-hearted Crotched Mountain donors, our programs for young children continue to grow, with children like “Kate,” a 7-year-old girl who experienced intense trauma as an infant and toddler before being adopted by a new family.

When Kate first came to Crotched Mountain School as one of our “Littles” a year ago, she had to be spoon-fed in a booster seat. She never drank fluids. All her fluids came via food, which was not an easy proposition. Recently, her mom came for a visit and saw Kate sit on a chair, at a table, and eat food on her own. And she followed that up with her new favorite: ice chips! (Which helps solve the fluid issue.) Mom cried happy tears to see Kate regaining her childhood.

Over one hundred and seventy generous donors have given to build much-needed classrooms designed for Littles like
Kate. Because of these kind people giving what they could, the contractor’s plans are completed and we are very close to starting construction on the four classrooms.

One such donor is Tom Covey (pictured previous page, middle), who has been supporting Crotched Mountain for years through our Golf Classic as a player on the RBC Wealth Management team. It was hearing about the children in need Crotched Mountain School is serving—some as young as three-years-old—that moved him to step up in a huge way.

He and his wife Amy lost their baby daughter, Aria, in 2014. They have channeled their grief into action by helping other young children in need. That’s why the Littles’ story hit home. He knew that helping these vulnerable children would be the perfect way to honor his own daughter’s memory.

So Tom and Amy committed to give a major gift through the Aria Covey Foundation towards the Littles Campaign to build the specially equipped classrooms urgently needed for our Littles. Tom shared that he is “so humbled by this philanthropic work.” We are humbled by the generosity and spirit behind this very special gift.

Your support is still needed, as more funds must be raised in order to complete this vital project. However, thanks to so many of you, we are well on our way! These young students are here now. They need their classrooms now. But we can only do it with your help. Visit crotchedmountain.org/littles or call 603-547-1485.

We would like to say a heartfelt “Thank You” to the following foundations and trusts that have supported the wide range of programming available at Crotched Mountain Foundation in fiscal year 2019.

(* indicates first time foundation support in FY19)

Ann De Nicola Trust
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This summer, Crotched Mountain School welcomed Serna, an engineering student from Olin College, for several months of innovative project design and implementation. Her centerpiece project was a uniquely fabricated mechanism that can be used in kayaks for Crotched Mountain Accessible Recreation and Sports (CMARS) participants with physical disabilities. Here, Felix works with CMARS staff member Jeff Burnett to get ready for a paddle on Sunset Lake using Serna’s prototype, which is positioned inside the front of the kayak and will help stabilize his legs. Thank you Bose Corp. for sponsoring this successful internship.
Crotched Mountain School’s annual trip to Story Land brought staff and students alike to the iconic family theme park in Glen, NH for a full day of action and attractions. Once again, our great friends at Storyland donated the passes! Quinn, one of our students, takes a moment to check out the fabled Crotched Mountain Wishing Well, a fixture in the park since the early 1950s.

The school-age children in Ready Set Connect’s Life Skills program get an up-close-and-personal experience with the ins and outs of baking cookies—adding ingredients, taking turns mixing, and then finally seeing the delicious fruits of their labors when these treats come out of the oven. Speaking of Ready Set Connect, a new clinic is set to open this September in Tilton to serve the Lakes Region.

Find out more at readysetconnect.org!
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