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The Bradley Bulletin

NEWS AND NOTES FOR OUR DONORS AND FRIENDS



Bradley Hospital
A Lifespan Partner

Al and Gerrie Verrecchia: Long-time champions of Bradley's mission

More is needed to address the stigma of mental illness, asserts Al Verrecchia

Al and Gerrie Verrecchia boldly advocate for an issue that some may prefer to ignore – children's mental health. The Verrecchias, co-chairs of last year's Bravo! Bradley fundraiser, are the loving parents of four grown children and adoring grandparents of four grandchildren. Committed to education and pediatric health, with a relationship to Bradley Hospital that spans 30 years, Al was asked to join the board some 25 years ago. *"More than merely a pediatric hospital or school, Bradley truly changes – and saves – children's lives,"* said Al, a retired executive with Hasbro, Inc. Bradley, which devotes significant resources to early intervention, helps thousands of children avert crises each year.

After learning of Al's involvement with Bradley Hospital, numerous colleagues, friends and neighbors shared that they were seeking help for a loved one. Although some people still are reluctant to admit to mental illness, those who "risked" asking Al to connect them with Bradley typically found a sense of relief, hope and optimism.

"Randomly select any two people and each of them will know someone with mental health issues," explained Al, who also served as chair of the Lifespan board. *"Because of the stigma that, sadly, silences so many people, they may not know it, but it's there."* Support for Bradley, the nation's first psychiatric hospital devoted to treating children and adolescents, is crucial, he said.

Stigma aside, pediatric mental health issues are on the rise; today, one of every four or five children needs some form of mental health assistance. As a Lifespan partner,

Bradley is a stronger institution, said Al, who also lauds Bradley Hospital President Dan Wall and Bravo! Bradley for helping to lessen the stigma associated with mental illness, though more needs to be done. *"Decades ago, Bradley may have been the place of last resort; today, it's the first choice for many."*

Superb healthcare facilities and high-quality schools are key factors in recruiting new businesses and business leaders to a community, acknowledged Al, whose business acumen is legendary. That's why Gerrie and Al support – and in some cases, serve on the boards of – many youth-focused entities, including Adoption Rhode Island, Hasbro Children's Hospital, the University of Rhode Island, Wheeler School, Women & Infants Hospital and The Wolf School. As a long-term Hasbro Children's Hospital volunteer, Gerrie read to and played with hospitalized babies. The couple also spearheaded the very successful Bradley School campaign back in

2004, which resulted in the opening of the Bradley School in South County (RI).

"Years ago, Merrill and Sylvia Hassenfeld's generous philanthropy inspired us," said Gerrie. *"I remember thinking that I would like to be able to do what they were doing – helping others in a real, tangible way,"* she said. We thank the Verrecchias for doing just that! Our gratitude to them for their generosity of time, talent and philanthropic support is enormous.



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Bradley Hospital's Focus on Autism Disorders Leads to Groundbreaking Research

One in 68 children in the U.S. now has an autism spectrum disorder, a 30 percent increase from just two years ago, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Though identifying a cause has remained elusive, researchers at Bradley Hospital have recently identified a genetic change in a gene associated with autism – and that change may inform experts about autism's roots.

Eric Morrow, M.D., Ph.D., director of Bradley's Developmental Disorder Genetics Research Program, led the groundbreaking research. A newly recognized autism-associated gene, Activity-Dependent Neuroprotective Protein (ADNP), helps regulate early brain development; changes in this gene may be among the most common causes of autism.

"Genetic testing is a very powerful diagnostic tool for individuals with developmental delay," said Morrow, for a story about the news that appeared in the September 2, 2014

Medical News Today. *"Through genetic testing, which is available to some in the clinical setting as well as in research, a medical diagnosis is possible for a large subset of patients."*

This remarkable study arose out of a collaboration between Bradley Hospital and the Rhode Island Collaborative for Autism Research and Treatment (RI-CART).



Bradley provides community-based education for students with special needs



All children, especially those with learning differences or emotional issues, need safe and secure classrooms. As part of its community-based approach, the Bradley Schools launched an innovative partnership program designed to educate special needs students within their public schools. In addition to the more than 300 students who attend the stand-alone Bradley Schools, some 100 special needs students attend 15 Bradley classrooms across seven Rhode Island school districts. It's a win-win-win: Students receive academic, social and emotional support from Bradley teachers and clinician providers in a familiar school environment. Parents and teachers report positive outcomes and the districts experience significant savings in special education costs. Most importantly, students can be educated in a less restrictive setting within their community.

The program is attracting interest from neighboring states, noted a June 14 Rhode Island Public Radio (RIPR) story, and statewide demand is growing.

Trish Martins, education director for Lifespan School Solutions – the entity coordinating the Bradley classrooms – noted in the RIPR story that students benefit when they stay in their school community and make meaningful connections with other students.

Dale Radka, MD, director of Lifespan School Solutions, said: *"This is an exciting time. Lifespan School Solutions brings all of our special education programs under a single umbrella, allowing more students who need our services to access them in their local community classrooms. Our expanded classrooms are having a big impact across the spectrum."*

Reporter Elizabeth Harrison's story quoted Jill Brash, the mother of a middle-school boy, now in a Bradley classroom: *"He's a happier kid ... I see him relaxed and able to finish the day happy."*

For children who require a different kind of learning environment, fully independent schools are located in South County, Providence, Portsmouth, and Westerly, Rhode Island. To learn more about Bradley's school programs, please visit www.bradleyschool.org.

