

## At Valley Collaborative, It Takes a Village



Dear friends and families:

**T**he opening day of school seems like a long time ago.

However, we will always remember and be appreciative of Commissioner Riley's keynote address which inspired all of us to continue the good and important work we do each day with/for our students. Valley also provides Social Security Administration (SSA), Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) programs for Individuals over the age of 18 with special needs.

We appreciate the Commissioner's student focus approach to his work while at the same time ensuring we are in compliance with state laws and regulations – which have successfully ensured the excellent quality of education across the Commonwealth. Needless to say,

FROM LEFT: GAIL DEGREGORY, KATE POULIN, HEATHER VALCANAS, JULIE FIELDING, DR. CHRIS SCOTT, DR. ANTHONY BENT, COMMISSIONER JEFFREY RILEY, DR. JUDY KLIMKIEWICZ, TIM PIWOWAR, CHRYSTALIA METRAKAS. BACK ROW: JOIA MERCURIO, JOE VENSUS, JESSICA SCALZI, KARI MORRIN, NICOLE NOSKA, BRIAN MIHALEK, DARREN GOAD, JENNIFER BERGERON, HEATHER MACKAY, AMY MURPHY, KAREN ROWE.

Commissioner Riley is a very busy man and we were honored he took the time to welcome our staff back to work on Opening Day.

It's hard to believe that the first term is almost over. At all of our schools we have been busy this fall making programmatic changes and facility renovations to enhance our students' experiences. Our Alternative Vocational Program has added several new shops for students, including Culinary Arts, Multimedia Communications and Home Improvement. We thank you for your understanding and support as we work the "bugs out" – we're almost there.

Staff, student and family surveys continue to be administered throughout the year. We always appreciate

you taking your time to give us your feedback as it helps us reach our goal of continuous improvement.

In particular, thank you to the staff, students and families at Valley Elementary School who worked patiently with us through a lengthy renovation project. The school now has a new HVAC system, windows, and cosmetic enhancements, including a new reception area at the front entrance. We are pleased to announce that our Elementary School will be in this location for the next decade.

It was nice to see many of the families at the Elementary School's open house on Wednesday, October 2nd. (Read more about this great event on page 4).



## In This Issue

## At Valley, It Takes a Village



### We are: Adventurous

■ Page 5: Students from Valley's Middle and High School Alternative Programs have been scaling great heights.



### We are: Teaching Skills

■ Page 7: Valley's Middle and High School Transitional Programs seek to help students learn skills that will lead to rewarding employment.



### We are: Family

■ Page 8: Celebrating staff and Individuals who've been with the Today and Tomorrow program since its very beginning.

»continued from cover

We are also looking forward to seeing many of you at the High School/Middle School and Adult Services open houses on Tuesday, October 22nd.

This fall Valley has successfully completed its financial audit. Valley has had another very successful year of operations, returning another \$500,000 to its member districts. We are proud of the high quality programming we offer in a fiscally responsible manner. As many of you are aware we have also expanded the high quality programming we offer individuals with special needs in the adult programs. The contracts for these programs have increased 82 percent since fiscal year 2014.

Our adult programs are currently being audited by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services to ensure we are in full compliance. A great deal of work has been done over the last couple of years to ensure that the results are positive.

Please don't hesitate to reach out at any time – my door is always open.

My best to you always,

*Chris*

Chris A. Scott, Ph.D.  
Executive Director



VALLEY CUSTODIAN CHRIS DUNN WITH DR. CHRIS SCOTT IN THE ADULT SERVICE PROGRAM'S FUNCTIONAL LIVING SITE AT 25 LINNELL CIRCLE. INDIVIDUALS IN THE TODAY AND TOMORROW PROGRAM LEARN ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING HERE INCLUDING COOKING, CLEANING AND LAUNDRY.



Jeff Riley, Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, was the featured speaker at this year's orientation for Valley employees. Riley took the opportunity to recognize Valley staff for their hard work and dedication to some of the state's most vulnerable students. "Teachers are our most important resource," said Riley. "They are our 'Super People.'"

# Getting to Know You: Valley Collaborative Board Member Dr. Denise Pigeon

**N**ot your father's vocational school. That's the refrain that Nashoba Valley Technical High School Superintendent Dr. Denise Pigeon often repeats these days. Once synonymous with industrial-era machine shops, schools like Nashoba Tech are now on the cutting edge of preparing the next generation of skilled workers in Massachusetts.

In recent years the school has embarked on a major upgrading of its technical program in robotics, advanced manufacturing, electrical, biotech, and dental and health, thanks to nearly \$1.5 million in grants. "That funding has enabled us to bring the programs up to where they need to be," says Denise, who serves as a member of Valley Collaborative's Board of Directors.

The school currently serves approximately 700 students in grades 9-14. In addition to attending the vocational high school, students in the school's member districts, including Ayer, Chelmsford, Groton, Littleton, Pepperell, Shirley, Townsend and Westford, can apply to one of Nashoba Tech's post-graduate programs. The students, who've already graduated from their local high school, get the benefit of Nashoba Tech's programs in six different areas: advanced manufacturing, carpentry, electrical, biotechnology, health and dental, and early childhood. "We have students who leave our programs and are going on to make \$60,000 as electricians or carpenters," says Denise.

The state's shortage of skilled workers has inspired Denise to think about how to expand Nashoba Tech's offerings to more people, including adult learners in the community. Nashoba Tech is now in

the process of establishing a post-secondary LPN program, in response to employer demand for nurses. "There's a huge need on the employer side, and we have this major facility. We should be running day and night to help develop the workforce of the future," says Denise.

Denise has spent her entire career in vocational education. She started as a health teacher at Whittier Tech in Haverhill in 1997, then got her certification in instructional technology. "We were just starting to hear about the MCAS at that point," recalls Denise. "There was a lot of concern, 'are our kids going to be able to do this?'" Students in the state's vocational schools more than rose to the occasion, she notes. Today schools like Nashoba Tech place equal emphasis on academic and technical programs and are viewed as a model for education that's relevant and engaging. "It's wonderful to have other schools recognizing that," says Denise.

While Nashoba Tech already works with Valley staff on trainings and student evaluation, that partnership has now been expanded to include Valley's Adult Services program. Adults in the Today and Tomorrow program recently began working at the vocational school, performing what Denise describes as light porter duties. She anticipates that their responsibilities—and opportunities—will grow as the collab-



GOVERNOR CHARLIE BAKER JOINS NASHOBA TECH SUPERINTENDENT DR. DENISE PIGEON FOR A RIBBON CUTTING TO CELEBRATE THE SCHOOL'S RETOOLING OF ITS ADVANCED MANUFACTURING PROGRAM.

oration gets off the ground. "We're like a small city here. Whether it's our restaurant or our cosmetology program, there are so many opportunities that adult learners can benefit from," says Denise.

That new partnership with Valley's adults reflects another of Denise's priorities: building intergenerational communities. Nashoba Tech also partners with Bridges, a long-term care facility for seniors in Westford. Carpentry students at the school recently built chicken coops for the residents, and every year Nashoba hosts a Senior/Senior prom. "Talk about an event that will bring a tear to your eye," says Denise.

From establishing new ties to Valley's Adult Services program to drawing ideas from the work happening in Valley's alternative and transitional middle and high school program, Denise says that being a Valley board member has been an opportunity to learn and grow. "I'm so inspired by what Valley does," says Denise. ■



# Elementary School Open House

On October 2nd, the Elementary School held its annual Open House. We had a great turnout with many returning families and new faces.

We prepared for this event by having the Today and Tomorrow program come and spruce up our entrance. Denise Stuart was instrumental in getting the decorations and making the entrance look festive with hay and scarecrows.

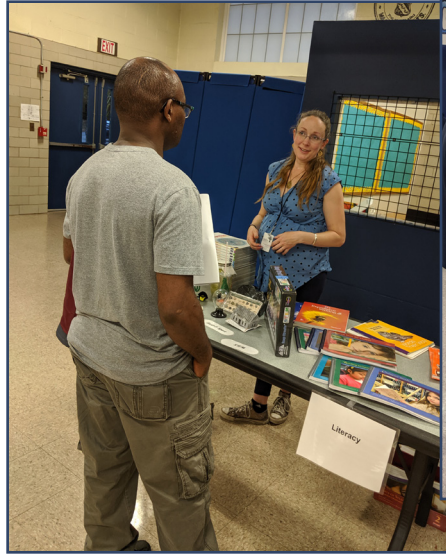
We were proud to show families the updates to our building that include a new reception area in the front entrance, new windows, updates to the classrooms and the HVAC system. Families were particularly fond of our new banner in the front lobby that describes our “Be Kind” motto for the 2019/2020 school year.

Our therapists and specialists held a curriculum fair in the gym for families. The curriculum fair displayed instructional materials and staff had the opportunity to discuss our programmatic elements with parents. It was a great opportunity for parents to meet the team members that work with their student and have an overview of the supports provided.

In addition to the curriculum fair, the teachers held 30 minute tours of their classrooms. In the classroom a presentation for families was shown that included the daily schedule, supports and curriculum. Parents were also given the opportunity to sign up for Parent/Teacher conferences that will be held in November.

Each year we are able to expand on the open house and provide families a more in depth look at the programming here at Valley.

We are grateful for the continued support of our families that work collaboratively with our team for the success of the students. ■

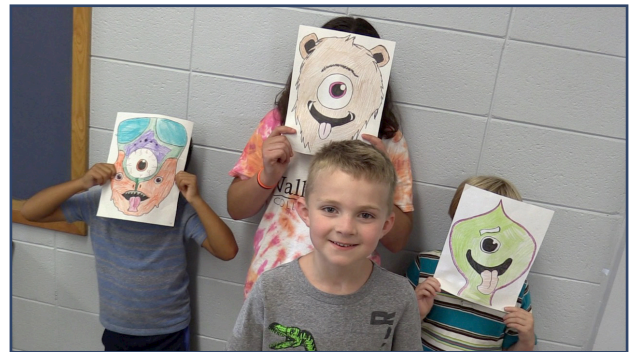


ABOVE: SCIENCE TEACHER EMILY GILSTRAP TELLS A PARENT ABOUT VALLEY'S APPROACH TO SCIENCE AT THE CURRICULUM FAIR. RIGHT: PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER LUCAS BOLDUC, PHYSICAL THERAPIST BOB PISCITELLI AND NURSE KATHRYN MARI GIVE PARENTS AN OVERVIEW OF THE SUPPORTS VALLEY ELEMENTARY PROVIDES TO STUDENTS.

## Best Day of My Life

It's a tradition! For the second year in a row, students and staff at Valley Elementary collaborated on a summer lip-sync video project. This year the students in Megan Ericson's class acted as producers. They brainstormed and selected a song that would celebrate the mood of the school and promote positivity, ultimately deciding upon “The Best Day of My Life,” by the band American Authors. The students also helped plan and direct the filming of the video.

At the end of the summer program, the whole school came together for a premier screening of the video. Everyone laughed and cheered, and supported their peers in



DUNCAN MCLAREN SURROUNDED BY MONSTERS FOR THE LINE “WE DANCED WITH MONSTERS THROUGH THE NIGHT” FROM THE SONG “BEST DAY OF MY LIFE.”

a celebration of the school.

“The project is a way for Valley Elementary to build community and celebrate the school by getting everyone involved and working together,” says music therapist Bryan Thomas.

To see the video for yourself, visit the Elementary School page on the Valley Collaborative website. ■



# Alternative Vocational Program: New Shops for the Careers of the Future

Some exciting changes have been made in the Alternative Vocational Program this year. Our vocational program has opened up some new shops for students, including Culinary Arts, Multimedia Communications, Home Improvement, and Elementary and Middle School Education.



VALLEY'S NEW MULTI-MEDIA LAB WHERE STUDENTS LEARN AND PRACTICE GRAPHIC DESIGN, VIDEO EDITING AND OTHER 21ST CENTURY SKILLS.

## Culinary Arts

In this program, students will learn the skills necessary to seek employment in the culinary and hospitality industries. Students will learn about cooking, baking, professional table service, and front-of-the-house management, and catering services. Successful students will learn to multitask, listen carefully, and communicate clearly as they develop proficiency, knowledge, and skills necessary for success in these industries. Students will develop these skills in order to plan, cater and host an end of year meal.

## Multimedia Communications

In this program, students will learn and practice essential 21st century multimedia skills necessary in industries such as graphic design, marketing, web design and many others. Students will use these skills for an end of year project such as a video yearbook, print yearbook or other projects based on student interest.

## Landscape/Home Improvement

This program is for students who prefer to work outdoors when

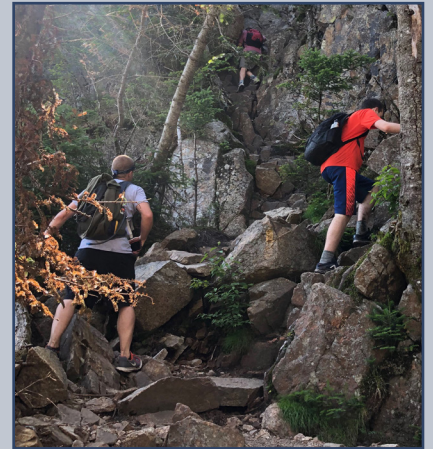
weather permits and learn important skills in and around the house. Students will learn the proper safety and technical skills to operate landscape and carpentry equipment as well as how to plan and order materials necessary to complete projects. These skills will be used to for an end of year project to help rehabilitate an area of need in the community or at Valley Collaborative.

## Elementary and Middle School Education

This program is for students who have an interest in working with elementary and middle school children. Students receive a snapshot of working with children ages 7-14 in our elementary and middle school classrooms. Students will learn about child development, responsibility, professional attitude, cooperation and communication.

Our woodshop is now available for students in all programs as an elective. ■

## Scaling Great Heights



Students from Valley's Middle and High School Alternative Programs hiked, not just one, but two of the famous New Hampshire 4000 foot mountains this summer. Five high school students and one middle schooler conquered the most challenging mountains in Valley hiking history, covering more than nine miles in seven hours.

The hiking trip was such a success that it has inspired a new hiking club for students grades 8-12. "The goal is to provide students from a variety of different programs with an opportunity to develop relationships with staff and one another," says Assistant Principal Glen Costello. Each week a group will venture out into the wilderness gaining valuable skills and experiences, with the end goal of hiking the highest peak in Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire in the spring. ■

## Transitional Middle/High School: Field Trips with a Purpose

On a picture perfect fall day, students from Valley's Transitional Middle and High School headed to Smolak Farms, a working farm in North Andover. They took a tractor ride up the hill to one of the farm's many apple orchards for some apple picking. Then it was onto the barn for cider and donuts. "That was my favorite part," says student Demetrious Vitale. "The donuts were really good." Students also had a chance to see some of the farm's many types of animals and feed a few hungry deer.

Students from across the transitional programming participated in the trip, including students in wheelchairs. "We weren't sure whether they were going to be able to join in the apple and pumpkin picking but Smolak Farms accommodated everyone," says teacher Shana Dunlevy. Students from different classrooms and programs also had an opportunity to interact with each other. As for all of those apples that the students



JADEN QUINONES AND ERIK FANNON IN THE PUMPKIN PATCH AT SMOLAK FARMS.

picked, some of them made their way into a delicious apple crisp which middle schools students learned to make in cooking class with Joanna Abate, their occupational therapist.

The Smolak Farms trip was just one of many notable field trips that the students in the transitional programs have already taken this

school year. Students in John Shea's high school classroom witnessed an awesome sight during a recent trip to Maudslay State Park in Newburyport. Not one, not two, but three bald eagles, including two adults and a fledgling, were spotted flying overhead. "They soared above us for a good five minutes," says John. "The students were amazed."

The students were enjoying a day of hiking and exploring at the water-front park as part of Valley's Experiential Physical Education Program, which gets students out of the classroom and into the world. Pete Loring, who oversees the program, says that the trips give students an opportunity to challenge themselves, and experience things that are new to them. The field trip to Newburyport is a perfect example of the sorts of opportunities that arise on Outdoor Education trips, says Pete. "I believe it was the first time that any of these students had seen a bald eagle in the wild." ■

## Making the Band: Meet the Flying Acorns!

That may sound like satellite radio coming from the music room lately, but it's not. It's The Flying Acorns. This group of students will join the illustrious ranks of Valley's former middle school band, The Fair Hearts, when they take the stage as the new Valley house band. "I experienced the Fair Hearts while working in the middle school and saw firsthand the positive impact the band had on the community," explains teacher John Shea. John approached music teacher Vlad "Vladdy" Stoicescu and asked what he thought about forming a new school band. "The rest is Valley musical history," says John.

Vladdy immediately got to work on making the

idea of a school band a reality. He has assigned instruments to students as well as figuring out ways to include students who want to be a part of The Flying Acorns in other capacities. He and John are working with students to design a band logo, create band outfits, move and set up band gear on performance days, as well as record performances of the Acorns in action.

Vladdy has been teaching music at Valley for 6 years. His programming combines elements of a traditional music class with a hands-on therapeutic approach. Drop by one of his music classes and you might find students writing their own music or connecting soundscapes to their moods. "I want the music

room to be a place of discovery and for students to express themselves. Music is such a tremendous emotional outlet, so I just want to provide the guidance for students to tap into those feelings," says Vladdy.

So what does Vladdy envision for The Flying Acorns? "I hope we will become a familiar presence at school events," he says. "We have been rehearsing and feel like we are almost ready for our first gig." But before you tell anyone they're playing your birthday party, you may want to check their availability. They just may already be booked to play the next Valley event. ■



# Transitional High School: Serving Up a Slice of Life

Teacher Eric Brown says that he recognized Anthony Beasley's kitchen skills in the High School Transitional Programming cooking class last year when he served up restaurant-quality fried chicken, despite never having made the dish before. "From the very beginning it was clear that he had skills," says Eric, who began teaching the School-to-Work class last year.

Eric mentioned Anthony's aptitude to Vocational Coordinator, Scott Morin. "We've got to get this kid into a kitchen," recalls Eric. Scott, who is constantly on the search for possible job placements for Valley students, immediately thought of the small neighborhood pizzeria in Methuen called Oakland Avenue Pizza. Scott contacted the owner, a local police officer, about a possible internship for Anthony at Oakland Avenue Pizza. He liked the idea, and so did Anthony. "It's really an ideal situation," says Scott. "Anthony walks to work four days a week, he's learning new skills, and he has a real work family."

Transition Specialist, Karen Rowe, says that Anthony's story is also a tribute to what makes Valley's vocational programming so unique. "Our goal is to help students find meaningful work that they enjoy and that enables them to be productive and contribute their talents to society," says Karen. But translating that goal into a reality takes work, not to mention trial and error. For example, when Anthony joined the School-to-Work classroom, after meeting graduation requirements through the high school's alternative programming, he had no idea what he wanted to do. Being part of a vocational crew allowed him to experience a variety of work sites and to begin to develop some job skills.

Part of the high school's transitional programming includes an emphasis on life skills, and it wasn't until Anthony started cooking class that a possible career path started to emerge. "You really see all of the pieces working together here," says Karen. "Eric saw something in Anthony, and Scott developed that into an internship. Then you have the therapeutic setting at school, the clinicians working in the classrooms and with the student in the community to develop those social pragmatics, the 'soft skills' of the workplace. All of the various departments worked together to make this happen."

The internship hasn't just paid off for Anthony (he receives a motivational stipend for meeting work-based learning goals), he has also come to be seen as a valued member of the restaurant's team. In fact, when the owners want to try out a new menu item, they regularly enlist Anthony to give it a taste, and his unvarnished feedback. "They know that I'll tell them exactly what I think," says Anthony. He's also able to talk to his work team about the things going on his life, and can turn to them for guidance or moral support.

Eric says that the job placement has also given Anthony new confidence. He brings the expanding knowledge of flavors and ingredients he's been picking up at the restaurant back to the high school's kitchen. In one recent cooking class, students were looking at a recipe for pasta carbonara which called for guanciale, an Italian pork product similar to bacon. No one in the class had heard of it—except for Anthony.



ERIC BROWN, WHO TEACHES THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK CLASS AT THE TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, RECOGNIZED THAT ONE OF HIS STUDENTS HAD KITCHEN SKILLS THAT COULD BE PARLAYED INTO A COOKING CAREER.

"His understanding of all things cooking related is astonishing," says Eric. And his fellow students aren't the only ones gaining from Anthony's expertise. When Anthony learned a new cooking technique in class recently he took it back to the pizza shop to show his coworkers.

Anthony describes his work experience as "amazing." He says that in the eight months he's been working at Oakland Avenue Pizza he's learned a lot, from how a pizza oven works to how to operate a deli slicer and a fry-o-lator, to what combinations of toppings taste best. "I figured out that you can throw as many toppings on a pizza as you want and it still works," says Anthony. ■

# Adult Services: Celebrating the '30 Year Crew'

When Sean Curran was recognized this summer for thirty years of dedication to Valley's Today and Tomorrow Program, he made sure to share the honor with the adults who've been right there with him. In addition to Human Rights Coordinator Pat Evans, the "30 year crew" includes Individuals Lisa Bedard, Lisa Demeo, Mark Fitts, Julie Higgins, John Jasilewicz and Michael Kempton. "There is a whole group of us who've been here since the first days of the program," says Sean.

What is now known as the Today and Tomorrow Program at Valley got its start way back in 1987 as a handful of students in the school's vocational program prepared to move on to assorted adult programs. "That got us thinking 'why don't we have an adult program?'" says Pat.



FRONT ROW, FROM LEFT: JULIE HIGGINS, MARK FITTS, LISA DEMEO. LISA BEDARD, BACK ROW: SEAN CURRAN, MICHAEL KEMPTON, JOHN JASILEWICZ AND PAT EVANS.

The goal in the early years was to find community-based employment for adults with disabilities, much like Valley was already doing for its high-school aged students. At that time there was little state support for independent employment, recalls Pat. "The students who were coming to us already had the experience of working out in the community. It seemed wrong that they would have to go back into sheltered workshops."

The solution was to extend the vocational model that worked so well for high-school-aged students to adults aged 22 and above, enabling them to work in the community with the support of job coaches. Says Sean: "Pretty early on we knew we were onto something."

Fast forward to the present and there are now 95 adults in the program, one third of whom began as students in Valley's vocational program. Across the three decades, the goal has remained largely unchanged: to get the Individuals in the program out and working in the

community. What's changed, says Pat, is an increased emphasis on person-centered career planning. "We're able to customize the model for all different levels, offering more or less support as necessary."

Job developers, including Sean, are constantly on the lookout for employment opportunities that might be right for specific adults in the program. "When we spot a job opening, our first thought is 'what about this person?'" says Sean. "We really try to advocate for our Individuals."

The emphasis on helping adults find paid work that interests them has paid off in high levels of enthusiasm among the adult workers. During a recent visit by the state, an inspector wanted to know what Valley's secret is. "The fact that the Individuals decide what kind of activities they participate in makes all of the difference. They have choices, they can go to different places, and they control where they go," says Pat.



SEAN CURRAN CELEBRATING HIS 30TH ANNIVERSARY WITH DR. CHRIS SCOTT AND JENNIFER GLIDDEN.



## Valley Volunteer Keeps Trolley 'On Track'

**H**op aboard the trolley that runs through Lowell's National Historical Park in the summer months and you're likely to encounter superstar volunteer Mike Krawczyk. A participant in Valley's Today and Tomorrow program, Mike has been volunteering at the Lowell site for fifteen years and now plays a key role assisting with the operation of the open air trolley.

"Over the years, his responsibilities have steadily increased," explains long-time National Park Service volunteer Sharon Krawczyk, a retired Dracut teacher who also happens to be Mike's sister. Mike not only interacts with visitors to Lowell, answering whatever questions he can, he also helps to operate

the trolley and keep riders safe. Among Mike's current responsibilities: flagging intersections to make sure that the trolley gets through safely; conducting the passenger count and keeping track of the total; assisting with boarding and disembarking; turning the trolley car; and doing the "check sheet" to make sure that everything is functioning and operating correctly.

In fact, Sharon says that Mike's work as a trolleyman is so exceptional that she uses him as a model when she trains new Park employees.



MIKE KRAWCZYK ABOARD THE TROLLEY AT LOWELL'S NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK.

»continued on next page

## Celebrating the '30 Year Crew'

»continued from previous page

Lisa Bedard and Lisa DeMeo, both of whom have been part of the program since its start, say they enjoy their work at 3M in Chelmsford, which has partnered with Valley for 30+ years. Julie Higgins says that the longtime ties between the adult workers and Valley staff are part of what she loves about the program. "We have a wonderful group," says Julie, who is currently employed as a cleaner at Valley's Bridge Street facility and hopes to someday get a second job in a pediatric hospital that would allow her to read to children.

Michael Kempton is known as the "Mayor." Sean says, "Wherever we go Michael knows someone. It might be from a current worksite or someone he met at our worksite 20 years ago. Michael can tell you the person's name, the work they did at the company, and all about their

kids. He is amazing with people!"

John Jasilewicz works five days a week as a utility worker with Joe's Bistro over at 40 Linnell. John is Chef Joe Reilly's right hand man. He is well known by not only Valley staff, students, and adults, but by all the surrounding businesses whose employees regularly dine at the Bistro.

Mark Fitts aka "Fitzzy" has been part of the Valley family since he was eight years old and an elementary school student. Over the years, Fitzzy's interests have changed—at one point he wanted to be a bartender; these days he has his eye on a bagging position at Market Basket. His favorite part of the adult program is career planning, says Fitzzy. "I like my job coach."

It isn't all work, of course. There are also plenty of recreational and social activities for Valley's adults, including seasonal meals and dances, group pottery and painting, apple

picking and trips to see the Lowell Spinners in action. Work groups also celebrate individuals' birthdays with a group lunch at a restaurant of their choice.

A nurse on site monitors the health of the adults, often identifying health issues before they become more serious. "It's something we're required to do but we do it really well," says Pat.

More than three decades ago, Sean, Pat and their colleagues set out to create a program for adult individuals with disabilities to realize their full potential through supported employment in the community. By any measure, they've done just that. Along the way, Today and Tomorrow's long-time staff and Individuals have developed deep ties, says Sean. "Because we've been here so long, we're like a family."

Congratulations to Sean and the rest of the "30 year crew"! ■

# Valley Volunteer



»continued from previous page

“Mike’s ability to read the traffic makes him one of the better conductors,” says Sharon. “He does it all the right way.”

Mike’s enthusiasm for his work is evident to anyone lucky enough to ride the trolley through Lowell’s historic downtown. Now he hopes to turn that passion into a paid job. “I really want to get a uniform,” says Mike.

When Mike isn’t volunteering in Lowell, he works at Joe’s Bistro, or at LMI. A graduate of Valley’s school in Dracut, Mike also enjoys the leisure activities provided through the Today and Tomorrow program. A Spinner’s game in 2018 was one of his all-time favorites.

Congratulations to Mike on being recognized by the National Park Service as part of their Volunteer Spotlight series. As the NPS put it, “Thanks for keeping our trolley service ‘on track,’ Mike!” ■

# Showcasing Creativity

**H**ave you ever had a day where nothing goes your way? Cartoonist Colleen Bird, who drew the cartoon below certainly has. “When I get frustrated by something I try to turn it into inspiration for drawing,” says Colleen, who is part of Valley’s Today and Tomorrow program. Imagine, for example, that you’re a scarecrow whose job it is to scare crows away. “I started thinking about how funny it would be if the crows weren’t scared at all. It would mean that the scarecrow wasn’t doing his job. How can you be a good scarecrow if you’re not scaring any crows?”

Colleen is at work on a comic series inspired by her experiences at Valley. Entitled “The Autistic Adventures of Pauline Finch at Bass Hill Collaborative,” each panel traces the

experiences, frustrations and joys of its title character. The series has provided Colleen with a creative outlet and an opportunity to share her point of view with the world. We’ll be featuring Pauline and her adventures in future issues of the Valley newsletter. ■



CARTOONIST COLLEEN BIRD AT WORK.

Ever have one of those days...





## Valley Orientation 2019



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: TIM PIWOWAR, SUPERINTENDENT, BILLERICA PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND CHAIR, VALLEY COLLABORATIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS; MASS. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, JEFF RILEY; VALLEY BOARD CHAIR EMERITA, JUDITH KLIMKIEWICZ; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT.

RIGHT: DR. ANTHONY BENT, MASS LEADERSHIP CONSULTANT; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT. BELOW: NICOLE NOSKA, PRINCIPAL, TRANSITIONAL MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL. BELOW CENTER: ACCOUNTING MANAGER GAIL DEGREGORY. BELOW RIGHT: DEPUTY DIRECTOR JOIA MERCURIO AND HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR KARI MORRIN.



RIGHT: VALLEY TECH TEAM, RICHARD INFANTE AND ANGEL CARTAGENA. FAR RIGHT: GLEN COSTELLO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, STEM LEAD. BELOW: KATE POULIN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ADULT SERVICES; KATHLEEN DIAZ, HUMAN RESOURCES SPECIALIST.



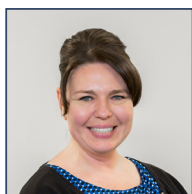


# Valley Collaborative Leadership Team



**Chris A. Scott, PhD**

Executive Director,  
Finance and Operations  
cscott@valleycollaborative.org



**Nicole Noska**

Principal, Transitional  
Programming,  
Valley Middle School,  
Valley Transitional High  
School  
nnoska@valleycollaborative.org



**James George**

Accountant  
jgeorge@valleycollaborative.org



**Julie Fielding**

Principal, Alternative  
Programming,  
Valley Middle School,  
Valley Transitional High  
School  
jfielding@valleycollaborative.org



**Joia Mercurio**

Deputy Director  
jmercurio@valleycollaborative.org



**Heather Valcanas**

Director of Adult and  
Transitional Services  
(Interim)  
hvalcanas@valleycollaborative.org



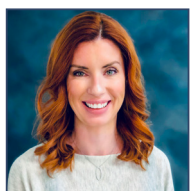
**Kari Morrin**

Director of Human  
Resources  
kmorrin@valleycollaborative.org



**Katherine Poulin**

Assistant Director,  
Adult Services  
kpoulin@valleycollaborative.org



**Jennifer Bergeron**

Co-Principal, Valley  
Elementary School  
jbergeron@valleycollaborative.org



**Jessica Scalzi**

Lead Nurse  
jscalzi@valleycollaborative.org



**Heather Mackay**

Co-Principal, Valley  
Elementary School  
hmackay@valleycollaborative.org

## Valley Collaborative Board

**Chair: Mr. Timothy Piowar**

Superintendent, Billerica Public Schools

**Dr. Jay Lang**

Superintendent, Chelmsford Public Schools

**Mr. Steven Stone**

Superintendent, Dracut Public Schools

**Dr. Laura Chesson**

Superintendent, Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

**Dr. Denise Pigeon**

Superintendent, Nashoba Valley Technical School District

**Mr. Brad Morgan**

Superintendent, North Middlesex Regional School District

**Mr. Christopher Malone**

Superintendent, Tewksbury Public Schools

**Dr. Michael Flanagan**

Superintendent, Tyngsborough Public Schools

**Mr. Everett (Bill) Olsen**

Superintendent, Westford Public Schools

### Special Thanks To:

**Curtis Knight Entertainment and  
Joe Cronin**  
photography

**QPL Inc. & The Image Group**  
printing

VALLEY COLLABORATIVE  
STAFF, ORIENTATION DAY,  
SEPTEMBER 3, 2019

