

The CARING TOUCH

The Gregory Kistler Treatment Center For Children, Inc.

Volume 14, Number 2

Fall 2004

A BURNING DESIRE

Determination to be the best he can be leads fireman back to Kistler Center after 20 years

by Donna Payne

Chris Price is a fireman and he has cerebral palsy.

It appears to be a contradiction between ability and disability, something Chris knows a great deal about. His life story is full of things he is able to do in spite of his disability – or maybe somewhat because of it. And don't tell him he can't do something. He will prove you wrong.

The 25-year-old from Rudy began therapy at The Gregory Kistler Treatment Center For Children when he was 8 months old. His mother, Martha, had noticed Chris wasn't using his left side. He continued to work with physical therapist Martha Osburn until his early elementary school years.

Formal therapy, which included a home program administered by his mother, was replaced by climbing, jumping and literal swinging from the rafters in the family hay barn with his sister and two brothers.

"I grew up in the country and we were always outside doing something when we weren't in school," Chris said.

His father, Scott, is a veteran firefighter from Rudy who had his son cutting hay by the time he was 8 years old.

"My dad treated me absolutely no different. I wasn't babied," Chris said.

He also was certified by the state as a firefighter by the time he was 12, because if his father had a meeting, class or even a fire, Chris was by his side.

"That's the only thing I ever wanted to do – be a fireman," Chris said. "It was a battle all the way through."

One doctor actually said, "It'll never happen." Chris' reply? "You wait and see. It'll happen one of these days." In 2002, he joined the Fort Smith Fire Department. He is stationed at Firehouse 9.



Fireman wanna-be, Chris, at age 3

Chris recently decided he wanted to add a little bulk to his frame and headed off to the gym. He began a workout program but the stiffness on his left side interfered. That's when he made his first call to Martha, whom he had not seen in nearly two decades. But Martha wasn't at the



Chris on-the-job at Fire Station No. 9

Center that day. "I tossed it around a little and put it off," Chris said. It took him a year to call back and in August he did connect with Martha. She remembered him vividly and said his determination was evident early on.

"We had a few battles of the will," Martha recalled. "Chris has always felt, from day one, he could compete with everyone. That is why he didn't need me very long after he started school."

His school years included the regular hard knocks and a few extras but Chris set the bar pretty high for himself. He played football and was a member of the swim team for four years. "When I was on the swim team, that's when I was the most limber in my life."

Doing those "regular" things helped Chris stay strong and limber all those years but as grownups we rarely go swinging through the trees. Because the stiffness in his arm kept him from being the overachiever he obviously has been his whole life, he turned for help to the place where it all began – a center started by a fireman and his wife.

When she got the call, Martha suggested she and Chris – along with physical therapist assistant Corey Marquis – have lunch. "We visited as friends. He just needed pointers to help out with his workout routine. We had to re-educate him," Martha said.

A therapist at the Kistler Center for 25 years, Martha recalled sessions with Chris as a child, including a specific puzzle she used with him to work on fine motor skills. "He called the skunk (on the puzzle) a 'pew'," she said.

"This is the best part of staying at the Kistler Center – when kids come back and you see what they've become," Martha said. "Chris is one of four or five kids as

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Introducing The Michelle Kistler Memorial Endowment Fund

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A Burning Desire

adults who have come to visit or ask for pointers about something that's come up."

And it's not just those "kids" who are helped by the visits. "It gives us a perspective on what we need to do at different ages. We learn what we need to educate kids on before they leave us," she said.

Chris remembers little about the Center except, "I remember not looking forward to it."

"It wasn't until 25 years later I realized how much the Center had done for me," Chris said. He said he often finds himself looking contemplatively at children with more severe physical disabilities and wondering, "what if."

Chris said on a day-to-day basis his cerebral palsy has no effect on him. "When I'm doing something that's dangerous, I get tense. The

adrenaline gets pumping and I sometimes notice I have more strength on the right side." And typical stretching exercises and barbells have replaced puzzle pieces and therapy steps.

An unassuming but determined young man, Chris has opinions worth sharing.

His advice to parents?

"If you treat a child with a disability like a child with a disability then he'll have a disability. But if you treat a child with a disability just like you would any other kid, the child knows no different. I think that's why I made it here."

And to the kids?

"Make goals for yourself – higher than you think you can achieve. You'll get there and farther."

And, boy, did he.

Determination – a common thread among firemen

Wayne Kistler is a 20-year veteran of the Fort Smith Fire Department. He and his wife, Betty, founded the Center nearly three decades ago. Their 6-year-old son Gregory was hit by a car in 1962, resulting in a severe head injury that eventually took his life. Because pediatric therapy was rare, the Kistlers were faced with the task of traveling hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles to find medical treatment for Gregory, who lived until 1979.

When their granddaughter Michelle was born with spina bifida in 1974, the Kistlers were determined their daughter Jennifer and granddaughter would not go through what they and Gregory had been through. This time, the care would come to the child instead of the other way around.

Armed with a determination only parents – and grandparents – can muster when a child is



Wayne Kistler inspects fire truck in 1958

in need, they went to the community. There were skeptics who, even in the mid-1970s, saw little need to provide care for a physically disabled child. Families were provided with sympathy but little else. Even pediatric wheelchairs were scarce.

But in 1978, this Fort Smith fireman and homemaker founded The Gregory Kistler Treatment Center For Children. They not only wanted to provide for Michelle but also for others in search of help and hope.

Thousands of children – and their families – have entered the door Betty and Wayne Kistler opened for them. A door that first opened into a room in the old Sparks nursing school building that held therapy equipment Wayne crafted himself and a single therapist caring for a handful of children. The Kistlers fought for the right for their grandchild to have a better life than the world was offering her and improved the lives of countless others along the way – including Chris Price.



Betty & Wayne Kistler

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October is Physical Therapy Month



Candy Bar Sales October – December

"World's Finest Chocolate" gourmet candy bars in two flavors: milk chocolate with almonds and milk chocolate crisp - includes a coupon for a free Big Mac. These delicious candy bars are available at the Center or from volunteers within the community for only \$1 each.



Knights of Columbus 19th Annual Oktoberfest

Friday, October 8th, 5:00 pm -11:00 pm
Saturday, October 9th, 9:00 am -11:00 pm

Columbus Acres on Brooken Hill,
off Hwy. 71 South
Donations Accepted at Admission
A Celebration of German Culture Benefitting
the Kistler Center
Bratwurst, Sauerkraut, German Potato Salad,
Apple Strudel, Hamburgers, Funnel Cakes,
and more
Ed Kadlecek and the Fun Bunch Band
Playing 7-11 pm both nights
Local Performances throughout the day
Saturday, starting at 1:00 pm
Children's Activities
Arts and Crafts
Donation Drawing
Silent Auction
**Sponsored by
Knights of Columbus Council 996**



November 15, 2004 - Monday National Philanthropy Day

Established by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, National Philanthropy Day is a time to honor all who change the world through a giving heart. The staff and board of directors of the Kistler Center celebrate and appreciate all our donors each and every day of the year.



December 4, 2004 - Saturday Teddy Bear Tea

Holiday Inn City Center
Fun for all ages! 5 x 7 Portrait with Santa and story time with Mrs. Claus
Lunch, goody bags, and a variety of seasonal entertainment
Wonderful Donation Drawing prizes and "Beary" nice door prizes



For more information, contact Kathie at 479.785.4677

SHARING THE SPIRIT

JENNIFER KISTLER

The Women's Center 2004 Firekeeper



Jennifer Kistler, executive director, was named the 2004 Firekeeper at the recent Woman to Woman conference held by Sparks Health System. This award is presented annually to a woman

who embodies the ideals of both home and community.

The Women's Center's Advisory Board, which makes the selection each year based on submitted nominations, established the criteria:

- Provide a strong voice for women while exhibiting outstanding personal and professional achievement.
- Make significant contributions to home, community, state, society or the public good.
- Exhibit passion, dedication and leadership.
- Serve as a role model and possess an excellent reputation.
- Be an inspiration to other women in the community.

Carol Wood, R.N., M.S., director of The Women's Center, made the surprise announcement by saying, "Jennifer Kistler is no stranger to adversity and has had her share of challenges. But it is her response to these circumstances that sets her apart."

First, an automobile accident left her 6-year-old brother, Gregory, with a serious brain injury and resulting paralysis. The family quickly discovered that special-needs children were seriously underserved in our community, and they sometimes had to travel as far as New Orleans to get the help Gregory needed. Years later, there was another challenge – her daughter, Michelle, was born with spina bifida. She soon learned that the situation hadn't changed much in the ensuing years. There still was a need for local access to developmental and therapeutic services for special-needs children.

Inspired by this challenge, Jennifer along with her parents began a personal crusade. In 1978, after many meetings with community leaders, including former Sparks President Charles Shuffield, their efforts resulted in a community resource that has made an



immeasurable impact on special-needs children and their families in our community over the past 26 years.

To quote from her nomination submitted by Rena LaRue, "In spite of trial and tribulation, Jennifer steadfastly keeps the flame burning at home and at work, ensuring the vitality and continuity of the Kistler Center as well as her family."

ADELE GLENSKY

Celebrating 10 years at the Kistler Center



As the mother of two and grandmother of five, Adele Glensky is all about kids. Now toss in the dozens of children she comes in contact with each week at the Kistler Center.

She may be surrounded by children in her personal and professional life but she sees them as individuals.

"I enjoy working in this environment with other therapists so we can work together and coordinate what's best for each individual child. Individual is the key word," Adele said.

The enthusiasm and persistence she sees in her patients is what makes it all worthwhile. "I work hard to make therapy safe, comfortable and to make it fun so the child doesn't feel like they're working," she said.

Adele also has a strong sense of what the parents need and works hard to develop a trusting relationship with them, helping them integrate the therapeutic activities they learn into their family life.

"It can be hard for a parent to incorporate everything when they have so many things to take care of in a day," Adele said. "We must be realistic in expectations of parents."

While most expect to see progress with children who attend the Kistler Center, the same can be said of parents.

"I like being there for the parents as they progress through many different stages: denial, anger, why me, acceptance," Adele said. "We must be sensitive as to what the parents are going through."

Adele earned a bachelor of science degree in physical therapy in 1974 from the Medical College of Virginia. She joined the Kistler Center staff in 1994 when her husband, Jim, was transferred to Fort Smith with his job at Beverly Enterprises. She enjoys music, gardening and family activities.

MARTHA OSBUN

Celebrating 25 years at the Kistler Center



Physical therapist Martha Osbun and the Kistler Center have grown up together. Nearly from the beginning of both the Center and Martha's career as a physical therapist, they have been

working together to make life better for kids.

"I have enjoyed working with Jennifer (Kistler) for 25 years because we share the same philosophy," Martha said.

That philosophy is the foundation of the Center. Everyone is treated with kindness and respect, every child is valued and no child is turned away for financial reasons.

"As a therapist, I can evaluate a child and make a recommendation for treatment and that plan will be carried out," Martha said. "I never have to ask someone how much treatment I can recommend based on the payment."

Martha is proud to have been a part of something that started so small and see it grow to what it is today. "The Center is a gift to the community," Martha said. "I knew Gregory and Michelle and I understand as a mother how important it is for other mothers and dads to have a place to come to for help."

Martha received her bachelor's degree in physical therapy from the University of Central Arkansas in 1976 and came to work at the Kistler Center in 1979 after spending three years at St. Edward Mercy Medical Center. She especially enjoys working with infants and is certified in Neurodevelopmental Treatment of babies.

She and her husband, Bill, have two sons, both pursuing careers in the medical field. Josh is a second-year medical student at the University of Texas, Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, interested in becoming a neurosurgeon. Nathan is a junior at Texas A&M, pursuing a career in research medicine.

❖ "Volunteers are not paid because they are worthless, but because they are priceless." ❖



Michelle Lynn Kistler
January 8, 1974 - October 2, 2003

A Beautiful Life

"Her middle name was go - that's what she liked to do." Jennifer Kistler is speaking of her daughter, Michelle Kistler. Michelle was born with spina bifida, but that never stopped her from living life to the fullest. Despite the hardships she had in her life, she accomplished the goals she set for herself and was always there for other people in need. She was an inspiration to everyone who knew her, even from the beginning of her life.

According to Martha Osbun, physical therapist, "Michelle was the catalyst for the establishment of the Kistler Center." Indeed, it was Michelle's need for specialized rehabilitative treatment, coupled with her Uncle Gregory's needs - both of which could not be addressed in this area that inspired the Kistlers and caring community members to establish The Gregory Kistler Center. There were many "firsts" for Michelle and her family. Michelle was in the first group of spina bifida survivors, thanks to a break-through in the design of a shunt to drain the build-up of fluid from the brain, known as hydrocephalus. Amazingly, Michelle always bounced back after each surgery or hospitalization, and never complained. She always maintained a sweet and cheerful disposition, and strove to accomplish many milestones: she graduated from high school, learned to drive a specially adapted van, and worked successfully at a part-time job.

Her tenacity was evident in her desire to drive. Although she faced great opposition from high school administration to take Driver's Education, she and her mother insisted she be given the opportunity. Although she did take the class, it was really her grandfather Wayne that taught her to drive. He modified a van with hand controls for Michelle, and put a wedge behind her back to keep her straight in the seat. He took her to Ft. Chaffee for hands-on instruction, and she quickly learned to drive. As Michelle and her grandfather got older, she began to care for him as he had for her. Wayne's vision became impaired, so Michelle chauffeured him wherever he needed to go. "She became my eyes and my wheels", Wayne said of Michelle. Michelle took him to the grocery store, and would read labels to him as he shopped. They also had a standing

dinner date every Friday since she was six years old. Her mom and her grandmother Betty, as well as other friends, would often join them.

According to her work supervisor, Jeff Lambert, "Michelle was a good Christian and she led by example. She was always pleasant and sweet, and she was truly dedicated." To illustrate that dedication, Jeff mentioned the time Michelle was involved in an auto accident on her way to work. The accident was no fault of her own, and as soon as the police officer made a report and her van was towed, Michelle drove her wheelchair to the office! That is the kind of person Michelle was. As her mother says, "You couldn't keep her down". Jennifer's love and devotion for Michelle, coupled with her concerned parenting, played an important role in the development of Michelle's can-do spirit. Michelle was brought up and treated as a typical child and given expectations that made her responsible.

Michelle had many friends, but none as close as Sharon Baumgartner. Sharon assisted Michelle with daily living, but she soon became much more than a client to Sharon: "She was like a sister to me. Michelle brought joy into my life I would never have experienced had I not met her." One of the best times they spent was jet skiing at Lake DeGray State Park during the summer of 2003. A good swimmer, Michelle always loved the water, and riding the jet ski was one of the greatest adventures of her life! Michelle enjoyed many activities, including making jewelry and pottery, two hobbies she and her mother did together. But it was Michelle's strong faith that her mother believes was most remarkable: "Michelle was always happy and never had a bad word to say about anyone. She had a good heart and a loving nature, but most of all she displayed the quality of endurance." Her best friend Sharon concurs, saying "Michelle was an inspiration we should all live by: happy and independent, with a good spirit about her. She went on with the cards that were dealt to her and made the best of them."





*The Michelle Kistler
Memorial Endowment Fund
Established 2004*

In loving memory of Michelle Kistler, The Gregory Kistler Treatment Center For Children, Inc., has established a special and unique endowment fund. This ongoing endowment, through its earned interest, will be used to help fund needed therapy to more of our special children so we can continue our philosophy of never turning a child away for financial reasons.

Additionally, as the Center's board directs, some earnings may be directed to operational activities to sustain and grow the Kistler Center's ability to provide the most up-to-date physical, occupational and/or speech therapy possible for children. Contributions may be made as a one time gift or spread over three to five years. Won't you become one of our Charter Benefactors?

(Please note your desire to participate with a response using the pledge/contribution form below.)



*Thank You For Your
Generosity!*

Keep this as a reminder
of your pledge to commit.

\$ _____ on a(n) _____ basis

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If we have reported your gift incorrectly or failed to include your gift, please call the Kistler Center at 479.785.4677. Thank you for your support!



WISH LIST

Feeding Therapy Items:

Animal crackers
Applesauce snack packs
Chocolate pudding snack packs
Instant oatmeal packets
Juice boxes
Microwave popcorn
Pretzels, small
Starburst candy

Other:

Band-aids, colored or patterned
Band-aids, waterproof
Bathroom scales
Construction paper
Cookie cutters
Crayola brand markers
Electrical tape
Elmer's school glue, not washable
Iron
Playdoh brand play dough
Jigsaw puzzles, up to 100 pieces
Rolling pin, large
Tempera paints

Specialty Items:

Neuromuscular electrical stimulation unit, \$1,200
"Scooter" stools, \$70 each (need 3)

Contact Jennifer for more info.

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Children learn at Sensory Garden

Occupational Therapist Pam Taylor was browsing through a magazine when an article she read inspired her to pursue an addition to the Kistler Center; something that would be fun, educational, and motivational all at the same time. The new "sensory garden", located atop the hill behind the Kistler Center, is a place to play and learn.

John Northrip donated and set up the railroad ties to create the space. John Clayton, Sr. worked his magic and secured donations for the dirt, toys, and tools needed to get the garden off to a great start.

The Kistler Center's sensory garden is a low-tech, high value treatment tool. Children experience temperature and texture changes on toes and fingers to help them accept different sensations, develop fine grasp by pulling tender weeds and increase muscle strength by digging. Planting develops eye-hand coordination and encourages the child to follow instructions. Muscle strength and coordination are targeted

by carrying pails of water to the plants and by navigating the three railroad tie steps into the garden. This special place is also used as a motivational tool and reward.

"We've had kids that had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the sensory garden," Pam said. "But then the children learn that it is fun and look forward to the next time. It is a progression. Kids can go from hyper-sensitivity to more normalized sensations without fear, which allows them to cope in the real world."

Pam says in the spring she, other Kistler Center therapists, and the children will plant different textured plants. While some of the plants



Pam Taylor & Vivianna Northrip dig in sensory garden



Zachary & Tra Clayton deliver toys for sensory garden

will be soft and delicate; others will be prickly and sturdy. There will be flowers with wonderful fragrances too and this will add to the benefit of the sensory garden.

Such a great place...thank you so much to the Northrip and Clayton families for making this "wish" a reality.



This newsletter is provided through the courtesy of Graphics Place, graphic design, composition and printing; Davis Printing, paper; and Alan Sowers, logo design.



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