



# MSSSG

## Mountain Shadows Support Group

### Mountain Shadows Special Kids

WINTER ♦ 2010

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# Jeffrey Dunham Family Gives Two Special Kids Greatest Gift of All

*It all started with a simple choice for Maurice and Marquez, two brothers living in Mountain Shadows Special Kids Halbrook House: would you like to spend the afternoon cruising Southern California's sun-drenched streets in an exotic Ferrari, then zip off to lunch in a vintage Cobra, or would you prefer to spend the day at Petco ballpark, watching the game from front-row seats, cheering on the team during your first ever visit to a major league ballpark? Well, considering the boy's favorite things in the whole world are race cars and baseball, maybe it wasn't such a simple choice. But maybe the choice they made isn't really what matters at all. Maybe what matters is that they received the greatest gift of all ... and it had nothing to do with race cars or baseball.*

### May I deal with honor

When Jeffrey Dunham founded Dunham & Associates, a wealth management firm, in 1985, his vision was to build a company based upon one fundamental principle: *Performance Counts*. In the investment industry, performance relates to return on investment. Back in 1985, most firms charged their clients a set fee, regardless of whether the investments they recommended increased or decreased in value. Jeffrey held the belief, rare at the time, that the fees his clients paid should be directly tied to their portfolio's performance. If their investments did well, fees would increase. If the funds underperformed, the fees would decrease.

Following the financial debacle in recent years, many investors began to question why they were paying investment managers substantial fees while they were incurring significant, sometimes devastating losses. The performance based compensation model trail-blazed by Jeffrey and other forward-thinking industry leaders was recognized and sought out by savvy investors as a more fair and honorable way of doing business. Today,



The Dunham Family

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as proof that performance really does count, Dunham & Associates employs a 50-member staff which administers a portfolio of more than \$1 billion in assets for a loyal client base.

Jeffrey carries his commitment to the tenet *Performance Counts* into all aspects of his life. In his personal life, choosing the option to “do the right thing” is the measure of performance that counts.

### *May I act with courage*

Doing the right thing often doesn't mean doing things the easy way. Small acts of courage and kindness often pave the road to life's most meaningful experiences. Such was the case when Jeffrey made a call to Wade Wilde, Executive Director, MSSG/MSF. “I called Wade to break the bad news,” says Jeffrey. “The folks at Mountain Shadows had asked if my family could help fill a specific request. Two brothers had just lost both of their parents and were having a difficult time. The staff at Mountain Shadows Halbrook House, where the boys now live, wanted to do something special for them. They said the boys would love to have some video games and toys and asked if we could help. After talking with my family, I had to tell Wade no.

“Let me explain. When my family and I talked about the request to buy some things for the boys, we decided we wanted to do more than just give them a few material things, but we weren't sure what exactly to do. As a family, we decided the first thing we wanted to do was meet the boys. On a Sunday afternoon, we all got in our car and drove to Halbrook

House to meet Maurice and Marquez.”

“Our children do not get many visitors,” says Debbi Dufloth, QMRP of Halbrook House. “Having the Dunhams visit was very exciting for everyone, especially the boys. They all connected and got along great together right away.”

“Visiting the house and interacting with Maurice and Marquez was terrific!” says Jeffrey. “The boys loved having someone there to visit with them. They loved the



*Enjoying a Padres game at Petco Park*

attention. All six of my children loved it too. They got along smashingly and had so much fun. By the end of our visit they were all friends and playmates.”

### *May I achieve humility*

“Most of us don't spend every-day with children with disabilities,” says Jeffrey. “It would have been easier to just send a check. At first, I think there was some uneasiness, some uncertainty about how we should interact with the boys, but, at the end of the day, we realized they are just normal human beings with normal feelings and needs.

“We visited Halbrook House around dinner time. Most of the children in the house had to use

feeding tubes or required assistance to eat. It was a good lesson in humility for my kids to see the challenges faced by the Mountain Shadows children. Suddenly, the traumas my kids face, like not being able to find a shoe, are not quite so big.”

“Maurice and Marquez have Muscular Dystrophy, Duchenne's strain, which is a degenerative form,” says Debbi. “Neither of the boys can walk now. They can talk, but have difficulty with pronunciation and are difficult to understand. Their father died in a horrible car accident and, right after that, the mother was diagnosed with cancer. The boys were recommended for emergency placement at Special Kids and then the mother passed away.

“The boys went through several months of grief counseling and have adjusted well to life at Mountain Shadows considering all they've been through, but we really wanted to do something extra special for them. When we heard the Dunhams wanted to visit, we were so thrilled! The day they came to visit was very exciting for all of us.”

“As we interacted with the boys during our visit, we noticed their eyes light up every time we talked about race cars and sports, particularly baseball,” says Jeffrey. “When we got home and talked about the experience, we all agreed we wanted to do more than just give them a computer game or other toy. Eventually we decided to offer them a day at the ballpark or a cruise in a couple of hot rods. They chose to go with our family to a Padres game.”

“The boys absolutely loved

*Please see DUNHAM on page 4*

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# Wylie-Shiane's Dream of a Forever Family Takes Flight

The beautiful, multi-colored beads were strung together with a new mother's love. A silver butterfly adorned each carefully handmade bracelet. A poem, written by a grateful new father, was attached to each bracelet. It read:

*"As a caterpillar goes through major changes in life to grow wings and turn into a butterfly, so you have protected and nurtured our daughter so that she may symbolically sprout wings and fly into our forever family. Thank you for protecting, nurturing and loving our daughter."*



Heather and Scott Redington gave one of these bracelets, made from the heart, to each Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes staff member who had provided 24-hour love and care for

Wylie-Shiane during the first 3 years of her life.

"When Wylie-Shiane was brought to Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes, she was 3 months old and skin and bones," says Debbi Dufloth, QMRP of Halbrook, Cami and Maverick Houses. "Her biological mother wasn't taking good care of her, so Child Protective Services placed her with us. We all fell in love with her immediately. She is a total cutie, always bouncing off the walls. She loved going on outings, going to the park, listening to music and playing with her toys. She's so sharp and so funny. She loved playing with the staff and other residents."

"The first time I met Wylie-Shiane was on Mother's Day," says Heather Redington. "My husband, Scott, and I had found Wylie on the California Kid's Connection adoption website. We prayed together about her. At the time, we had 5 special needs children already, but we knew in our hearts our family wasn't complete. After we did some research about Wylie-Shiane, I flew to Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes by myself to meet her. I spent a week with her and fell in love."

"It was amazing to see the love between Wylie-Shiane and the staff. Because of the love the staff



*Heather and Scott Redington with Wylie-Shiane*

showed her, she was able to quickly learn to love and trust us – her forever family. I know Mountain Shadows gave Wylie the ability to know, give and trust in love. That's HUGE! She was lucky to have such a caring environment and was blessed with a great beginning in life because of the care she received by the staff.

"While we will never replace her Mountain Shadows family, Wylie-Shiane was very ready to become a part of our family. She has thrived. It's been amazing to watch her grow in these first few months. She's been eating like crazy and gained 4 pounds in the first month!

"Wylie-Shiane and her 5 siblings have adapted well to each other. She loves her new grandma and grandpa. Wylie has been quick to take ownership of her new family. We are now *her* mom and dad and the other children are *her* brothers and sisters. Wylie and our 10-year-old daughter, Zoey, share a bedroom. They are inseparable! It's so cute. They hold hands as they wait for the bus together.

"God brought Wylie-Shiane and each of our other children into our lives. We have 2 biological children and have adopted our 4 other special needs children. Scott, my husband, and I are Christians. God called upon us to care for 'orphans and widows in need.' We are both passionate about doing this. While caring for 6 special needs children can be overwhelming – our children need 28 medications a

*Please see FAMILY on page 4*

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## ■ DUNHAM *(continued from page 2)*

going to the game with the Dunham family!” says Debbi. “They had *front row* seats. The Dunhams bought both Maurice and Marquez team t-shirts, baseball caps, pennants and lots of other mementos. They had a great time! It was all they talked about for weeks afterward – to anyone who would listen!”

Adds Jeff Dunham, “We all enjoyed the game, but the neat part, in the end, was that this was an experience none of us will ever forget – not just for Maurice and Marquez, but for my family, especially my children, as well. My kids loved it and want to do it again!”

“Several months after the Padres game, I saw Maurice and Marquez at the Mountain Shadows Golf Tournament. For every-

one, it felt like seeing old friends. The brothers recognized me from across the parking lot. I went over, helped them out of the van, sat with them and talked with them. There is a bond between us now and my whole family wants to do this all again.

“I would like other potential donors to realize that giving in this way – giving of your time and your heart – goes way beyond the benefits of a tax deduction. If we had taken the easy way and just given money, we would have missed gaining this life-changing experience for our family. It was a way to give back and to really make a difference in someone’s life. This was a gift not only for Maurice and Marquez, but for my entire family as well.”

*May I deal with honor,*

*May I act with courage,  
May I achieve humility.*

—DICK FRANCIS

A plaque with these words sits on Jeffrey Dunham’s desk – a gift from a client. “The words and the gift are very meaningful to me,” says Jeffrey. “To me, this is another way of saying *do the right thing*. That’s what I try to do.”

The gift of connection – a shared laugh, a hand held, a smile, a hug, time simply shared together – this is perhaps the greatest gift of all between human beings. It is the gift shared between the Dunham family and our Special Kids brothers, Maurice and Marquez. We believe it was the good, and the right, thing to do. Our thanks to the Dunham family for sharing this precious gift of love that will always be remembered. ■

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## ■ FAMILY *(continued from page 3)*

day, 2 are on G-tube feeding – our biggest lesson has been to care for our children with joy. The time we



*Wylie’s first day of school*

have with them goes by so fast. We want to enjoy every moment.

“Wylie is such a joy to watch. She is always smiling and loves to snuggle. She was in her first Christmas play in December. I cried so hard! She was great. She sang her heart out and knew the words to every song.”

“Wylie-Shiane’s new parents are wonderful,” says Debbi. “Scott, her new dad, is a registered nurse and Heather is a stay-at-home mom. Heather is really good with kids, very patient. She brought her other special needs children with her when she visited us. Some were in wheelchairs, some needed help with feeding. She was so sweet, so kind, so thoughtful. The staff was very impressed.

“Heather has called us several times to let us know how Wylie-Shiane is doing. She’s in school

and making new friends. She had surgery on her club feet and she’s been thriving in school. Heather said the teacher thought Wylie-Shiane might not be developmentally disabled at all in the long run. She loves her new room, has gained even more weight and is doing great.

“It was very hard on all of the staff when Wylie-Shiane left. We all loved her. The house is much quieter now. The Direct Care Staff all cried for a week before Wylie-Shiane left and for weeks afterward. We were all very close to her. In the end though, this is what we want for all of our Special Kids – we want them to find their very own forever families.”

“Our family is complete now,” says Heather. “Wylie-Shiane was a perfect fit and has made our family whole. God has answered our prayers.” ■

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# MSSK Celebrates Direct Care Staff Appreciation Week

Our Direct Care Staff (DCS) members are the heart and soul of Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes. They provide the 24-hour love and care our children need to live more satisfying, fulfilling lives. In recognition of all they do, MSSK recently hosted a week of festivities aimed at honoring our hard-working staff.

“Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes has recognized our Direct Care Staff before, but this year we really went all out,” says Mel Harris, MSSK Office Manager. “DCS Appreciation Week was held in September and a special activity was held each day of the week as a way of saying thanks to the staff.

“DCS Appreciation Week was kicked off on Monday with a hearty breakfast – homemade and served piping hot by our administrative team. On Tuesday, the DCS’ers were all treated to scrumptious deserts. Lasagna was served on Wednesday. Rounding out the week’s festivities were a Mexican Fiesta, a tailgate party, and a Soul Food potluck.

“Throughout the week, the staff had the opportunity to participate in games, and just have fun and relax together. Gift cards from Stater Brothers, Starbucks, WalMart, and Subway were given to the winners as prizes.

“The highlight of the week was definitely the Soul Food potluck. The staff loved it! We had Cajun chicken, jambalaya, collard greens, cornbread, sweet potatoes and lots more. The food was great and the staff couldn’t get enough!”

In the South, soul food is a long-held tradition

at many family get togethers and celebrations. Ordinary ingredients are lovingly combined into mouth-watering dishes that sooth the soul and warm the heart.

While most of our DCS staff would likely describe themselves as “just ordinary people,” the care they provide to our children is extraordinary. They combine the ingredients of love, respect, and encouragement, sprinkling them into the daily lives of our Special Kids, creating an environment that comforts the heart and inspires the spirit to thrive.

*I've seen and met angels wearing the disguise of ordinary people living ordinary lives.*

—TRACY CHAPMAN

Many thanks to all of our DCS Angels. You make Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes extraordinary! ■



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# Mountain Shadows Announces New Board Members

Mountain Shadows is proud to welcome Dr. Ravindra Rao, David G. Erickson, OTR/L, and Steve Cassidy to its Board of Directors. These dedicated men will complement the exemplary cross section of community and industry leaders who selflessly volunteer their time and are committed to the mission of Mountain Shadows.

## *Dr. Ravindra Rao*

Three principles have guided Dr. Ravindra Rao throughout his life: trust, loyalty and hard work. Trust in himself and others, loyalty to those who have helped him, and working hard, without focusing on



*Dr. Ravindra Rao*

any potential rewards received from his labors – these are the standards lived by that have made Dr. Rao a leader in the field of pediatric medicine, as well as a dedicated and loving husband and father.

As a boy growing up in Bangalore, India, Dr. Rao was encouraged early on by his parents and school administrators to follow his vision and utilize his gifts to pursue a career in medicine. “I never had any other idea than to study medicine when I was growing up,” says Rao. Today, Dr. Rao, a Board Certified Pediatrician, is the Head of the Division of General Pediatrics at Loma Linda University Medical Center (LLUMC), a leading-edge, world-renowned facility, which specializes in providing Whole Person Care to more than a half million patients annually.

Involved in the evaluation and care of children with disabilities since the beginning of his career, Dr. Rao has spearheaded various service organizations and has launched innovative, new programs aimed at improving care for the disabled.

One such program began more than 20 years ago at Mountain View Child Care Center, which is now known as Totally

Kids, Inc. At the time, medical care for children with disabilities was provided only at hospitals. Dr. Rao saw a need and filled it by offering to provide care to the children on-site. This improved quality of care and life for the children and reduced cost of care significantly. He went on to provide on-site care to Special Care Children’s Home (SCCH) in Riverside, CA, which is now known as Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes (MSSKH). He was the first and has remained the only Pediatrician to care for the children of SCCH and MSSKH since the organization’s inception. Today, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Dr. Rao, the concept of in-home health care for the disabled is an industry standard.

Dr. Rao then branched out into sub-acute care for high-technology dependent children and, later, launched a new acute rehabilitation hospital for children. He has also provided leadership as a Board Member for many organizations, including the Board of Trustees, Inland Counties Regional Center, Inc. and the Board of Directors at Loma Linda University Health Care, Department of Pediatrics.

In addition to his responsibilities as Head of the Division of General Pediatrics at LLUMC, Dr. Rao holds the position of Medical Director for the Spina Bifida Program and Team Clinic at LLUMC. He is an active member of The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), The American Academy of Cerebral Palsy & Developmental Medicine (AAPDM), and the Spina Bifida Association of America and California, and other national and international professional organizations.

Dr. Rao was recently honored with the Loma Linda University Annual Good Samaritan Whole Person Care Award, a distinction voted upon by his peers. He received the Global Service Award in 2007 for exceptional service.

Many years ago, as a first year resident at LLUMC, the Chair of the General Pediatrics Division stopped a young Dr. Rao, or Ravi, as they

called him, in the hallway and said, “Ravi, I want to let you know, I see the perfect resident in you. When I look at you I see hope. I see you working hard and doing well.” Those few and simple words made a life-long impact on a young Dr. Rao which he has always tried to emulate. “I always try to be positive, to encourage others and to give hope. I will bring this vision, this hope, to the Mountain Shadows Board of Directors.”

Deeply committed to family, Dr. Rao has been married to his wife, Gayathri, for more than 30 years. They have two children, Rekah and Rajiv. “Without my family, I could not be doing all of this,” says Rao.

We welcome Dr. Ravindra Rao to the Mountain Shadows Board of Directors and will work hard along side him to advance our shared vision of hope for the future of our residents.

## *David G. Erickson OTR/L*

David G. Erickson’s life path changed during a lunch break between classes at Loma Linda University.

“Students from the Occupational Therapy Department were giving a presentation. They invited me in. I followed them, listened, and came out of that meeting knowing I wanted to become an Occupational Therapist.

“Occupational Therapy, to me, is the perfect mix of psychology and medicine. Today, many medical practitioners no longer really see the whole patient. In Occupational Therapy, the occupation of life, all facets of life, is the basis of the profession.”

As a faculty member at the renowned Loma Linda University School of Medicine (LLUSM), Department of Pediatric Neuroscience, David’s passion for whole

*Please see BOARD on next page*



*David Erickson*

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## ■ BOARD *(continued from page 6)*

person care jells perfectly with the university's mission – to make man whole. He incorporates this philosophy as he manages a caseload of 800 pediatric patients at LLUSM's Muscular Dystrophy Clinic.

"Many people ask me how I can work with this patient population and not get depressed or sad. To me it isn't sad at all. To me it's all about living. I focus on the positive and look to help my patients achieve the best quality of life possible. I think this feeling comes through when I work with patients. Though treatment for Muscular Dystrophy is a long and arduous process, family members often tell me it is enjoyable to come to our clinic. I think that's because I look at the upside – life!"

David is currently the consulting Occupational Therapist at Mountain Shadows Community Homes. Whenever he walks across campus, wheelchairs flock to him. "I usually have a trail of followers when I'm at Mountain Shadows. I think this is because I like to come to the homes when life is happening. Many consultants don't get involved and really have no idea what goes on in the houses. I want to see how my clients really live. I hope to bring this real perspective – this kind of view from the trenches so to speak – to the Board of Mountain Shadows.

"Going above and beyond is a job requirement," he says. His work ethic was influenced by an Orthopedic Surgeon, Dr. James Shook, who taught classes when David was still a student. "Dr. Shook wore Boy Scout pants, rubber shoes, and drove a Subaru wagon every day. I never would have thought he was a surgeon. He never made you feel like he was better than you. He would always say, 'I'm nothing special. I just take care of patients. I'm only doing what I was born to do. Surgeon is just the label.' He had a larger view of the whole patient. I try hard to emulate him in my practice and all that I do."

In addition to his work at LLUSM and MSCH, David is a consulting Occupational Therapist at Angel View Crippled Children's Foundation. Angel View operates 18 six-bed residential homes (ICF-DD/H and CHLF licensed) serving more than 100 children and young adults in

locations throughout California's Coachella Valley and high desert. He also consults at several other organizations, including Christopher Ranch, an ICF-DD/H facility, JonBec Adult Day Health Care, and Colours 'n Motion, where he provides clinical support for Wheelchair sales.

Prior to this, David acted as Chief Supervising Therapist for California Children's Services (CCS), where he administered the CCS program to a caseload of 4,000-5,000 pediatric patients. In this position, he managed a staff of 40 OT/PT professionals in 10 locations throughout San Bernardino County.

In 1999, David was selected as one of ten "Community Heroes" by the San Bernardino County Newspaper for making a positive difference in the community. He was also recognized for clinical excellence by the Occupational Therapy Association of California.

As the founding Board Member, David also spearheaded the successful launch of the Valley of the Falls Community Center, Inc., which now acts as a vital hub for all community activities and events. He was a paid-call firefighter for the San Bernardino County Fire Department for most of the 1990's, where he proudly served during the Malibu fire and the Northridge quake incidents. He continues his work with the Fire Department as the coordinator of the Fire Auxiliary, which promotes local fund-raising efforts.

David was awarded a Bachelor's Degree in Occupational Therapy from Loma Linda University, School of Allied Health Professions, Department of Occupational Therapy. He is registered with the National Certification Board for Occupational Therapists and holds a current license with the California Board of Occupational Therapy.

David resides in a little mountain hamlet known as Forest Falls in the San Gorgonio Wilderness area of the San Bernardino Mountains. "I love the mountains," he says. "Whatever my day brings, whatever crisis lies down the hill, the mountains are my sanctuary."

We welcome David G. Erickson, OTR/L, to the Board of Directors and look forward

to working toward our common goal of making a positive difference in the Mountain Shadows Community.

### *Steve Cassidy*

During his tenure at Xerox Corporation, the \$17 billion world leader in document management services and technology, Steve Cassidy was inspired by the company's client-focused, employee-



Steve Cassidy

centered core values and its commitment to innovation and adaptability in a constantly changing global marketplace.

While at Xerox, Mr. Cassidy held various positions, including Major Accounts Sales Manager. In this position, he achieved membership in the prestigious President's Club, Xerox's top performance award, for four consecutive years.

His more than 20 years of management experience at Xerox and other small and large corporations has earned him a reputation as a results-driven, creative problem-solver. He is a strong advocate of fiscal responsibility and adheres to a management philosophy that nurtures a culture of openness and inclusion. He has successfully led multi-disciplinary teams responsible for the launch of cutting-edge technology for companies including General Atomics.

As the corporate liaison for the Xerox Foundation's United Way Program, Mr. Cassidy spearheaded the development of new partnership opportunities, which increased employee participation by more than 50% and generated thousands of dollars in additional donations to charity each year.

When he retired from Xerox, Mr. Cassidy remained committed to continuing to promote the Xerox belief that everyone must be an active participant in society – that each individual must give something back to the world. He shares our Mountain Shadows Foundation philosophy and looks forward to promoting our vision throughout our community. ■

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# Janet Steen: A Chain Reaction of Love

Perhaps we can call it the Domino Effect – Steen Family Style.

“I miss those days,” says Janet Steen. “When I was a child, our whole family would get together every Saturday afternoon. My father and all my uncles were big domino players. I used to love watching them play. Our backyard was always full of kids – my sisters and brothers and cousins. We were all raised together and enjoyed playing in the backyard, eating hotdogs, and just having fun.

“Keeping the family together was very important to my dad. He was the one who made sure we all stayed in touch. We had a big family dinner, with all my cousins, aunts and uncles every month. Family was everything to him.”

Janet followed in her father’s footsteps. “I love my family. We are all really, really close. We have a big family. My grandmother had 16 children and each of her children had 8 kids. When I was young, my mom and dad cooked huge meals every weekend. It was important to them that the family got together and stayed together. Through them I learned about love of family and I learned to love to cook. Last Thanksgiving, I hosted a dinner at my son’s house. Over 100 family members were there! It was perfect. My father would have been very happy.”

“Janet engineered the entire Thanksgiving event for her family,” adds Ruth Hill, Consulting RN, MSSK. “She loves them. She’s the glue that holds them all together. In addition to putting together her own family’s Thanksgiving celebration, Janet also helped with Thanksgiving dinner for the staff members who worked on that holiday.” Adds Toni Albright, Director of Human Resources, MSSG, “Janet is legendary at MSSKH for her cooking! She also made potato salad for over 100 people for the Annual Picnic last year. It was fantastic! She also rocked the soul food for our DCS Appreciation Week in 2009. Everyone always looks forward to what Janet is bringing when there’s a potluck!”

Janet raised four boys as a single mother. “I divorced my ex-husband when my youngest boy was three years old. It was an abusive relationship, so I walked away. It took courage to walk away, but I didn’t want my boys to see that abuse – ever! The divorce made me stronger. Being a single mom changed everything. Everything was all about my children after that. I worked 2 to 3 jobs and my sisters helped out with babysitting. It was very hard.



*Janet and her family*

We struggled, but we made it through. My sons learned to appreciate everything they got and they all turned out fine.

“I have four sons, Marshall, 29, Derrick, 27, Lance, 26 and Brandon, 25. My parents had always stressed the importance of education, but I knew, as a single mother, it would be hard to put four boys through college. My whole family has always been very sports-minded, so I encouraged my sons to participate in athletics from a very young age. Derrick turned out to be good at football, won a scholarship, and played in the NFL for several years. Brandon received a track scholarship. I’m proud of the fact that all of my children graduated from college and are good people. There could have been a very different outcome.”

“Janet’s children are all in their 20’s now and they’re all bigger than her – but she’s the one who’s in charge,” says Ruth. “Her sons have a great respect for her. They are all very giving. Janet taught them, by example, to be that way.

“Throughout her years at Mountain Shadows, Janet has always been willing to go the extra mile. I don’t recall in all her years here that she ever took a day off. She’s always been on-call 24/7. Janet came to Mountain Shadows 17 years ago as a Direct Care Staff member. She did an excellent job! Several years later, she was asked to take over responsibilities for staffing for all nine houses. She was a staffing expert! When she recently took over office administrative and trust accounting activities, she rose to the occasion.

“Her new position required a move to a new office – in the garage of Maverick House. It’s a three-

*Please see STEEN on page 10*

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# Doing Right by Angel'Lena

“Angel'Lena had quite an impact on everyone here, the staff and residents alike,” says Ruth Hill, RN. “There was one resident in particular who really had a special relationship with her. DeAndre, a teenager, kind of took Angel'Lena under his wing. He really loved her and watched over her. If Angel'Lena was upset, DeAndre became upset. He was her guardian, her protector. He always watched us to be sure we were doing right by her.

“Angel'Lena was born premature on February 21, 2009. She came to Mountain Shadows on March 19<sup>th</sup>. Due to complications the mother had during delivery, Angel'Lena was at risk for developmental delay. We were very worried about her at first. She was quite unresponsive. She showed little eye contact and showed other signs of developmental delay. Then, after a couple of months, she started to show signs of improvement. She started watching people, she began to cry and coo for attention, and she started to smile and chuckle.”

“Angel'Lena had a hard time in this world,” adds Tiana Gonzalez, QMRP. “She was barely alive when she was born. She made progress every day, though, at Mountain Shadows. Most people would never have known she was medically fragile. She had a HUGE personality and the staff got really close to her.”

“Angel'Lena was so tiny when she came to Mountain Shadows,” adds Corina Vargas, DCS. “The only time she cried was when she was hungry. Otherwise she was always happy and smiling. The staff loved to put pretty headbands on her. She left them on all day! She was so adorable!

“She loved the camera and would always give a BIG smile when anyone took her picture. She loved mirrors too. I remember one day as I was changing her, I glanced at the mirror on the wall. She wanted to see what I was looking at and looked too. The look on her face when she saw herself was priceless. She was fascinated and just couldn't stop looking at herself! It was so cute.”

“Angel'Lena came to us with absolutely nothing,” says Ruth. “The staff took her on as a special project. They had a ball dressing her up in cute clothes. They all worked together to create a special Halloween costume for her. It was the cat's meow.” Adds Corina, “We made the cutest sheep costume for her – everyone loved it!”

“The family that adopted Angel'Lena really did their homework,” says Ruth. “They wanted to know everything about her and her condition. They took a lot of time to get to know her so they could take good care of her when they brought her home. They have another young child, a boy, with developmental disabilities and purposely adopted another developmentally disabled child.

“The grandfather took on responsibility for the family's other son while the new mom bonded with Angel'Lena. It was good to see that she'll be supported by an extended family. They are taking on a challenge.

“Angel'Lena's new mom wanted to give her a good start in life. After only three weeks at her new home, Angel'Lena had already been taken to all the specialists she needs – the pediatrician, the neurologist, the physical therapist, the occupational therapist.”

“I'm glad Angel'Lena found



a good family,” says Corina. “Her new family was very grateful to the staff at Mountain Shadows for taking such good care of her. The new mother couldn't stop thanking us.” Adds Tiana, “Angel'Lena's new parents are a very nice couple. They were very concerned about her well-being and health. They are very excited and happy to have her in their lives. They are good people.”

“We heard from the family after Christmas and the mom said Angel'Lena is doing great,” says Corina. “She said Angel'Lena is a wonderful baby. She slept very well the first night in her new crib, she's been eating very well and she smiles all the time. Her new brother is very excited at having a new sister too!”

Adds Tiana, “Angel'Lena brought so much joy to the staff. She was such a happy little girl. We'll miss her.”

On the day she left Mountain Shadows, Angel'Lena's guardian and protector, DeAndre, was there too – watching. He watched as Angel'Lena put her arms up to her new parents, as if to say, “I'm ready to go home now.” He watched as Angel'Lena left Mountain Shadows for the last time – and he cried. But behind the tears there was also a knowing ... a look that said “I'm sure now that we're doing right by her.” ■

## ■ STEEN *(continued from page 8)*

car garage we use as an office. When Janet first walked in and saw the dingy white garage walls with no pictures or other room decorations, she immediately volunteered to spruce things up.”

“The office is also used for staff orientations, so it’s the first impression new employees get of Mountain Shadows Special Kids Homes,” says Janet. “I thought if we added some fresh paint, some color, and a few pictures and plants, we could make a better impression. When I mentioned what I had in mind to my sons, they loved the idea and wanted to help.”

“Janet is so generous with her time and energy,” adds Ruth. She and her sons came in on a weekend to paint. They did a great job! It feels like an office now, not a garage. Janet also added some pictures on the walls – and the office isn’t done yet! We plan to add window coverings and a plant or two, which will be donated from my model home.”

“I’m so thankful to Mountain Shadows for keeping me here all this time,” says Janet. “I love Mountain Shadows and all of the people. I feel blessed to have this job. I can’t imagine going anywhere else. Some of the children here weren’t born into the best families in the world. I’m lucky. My family brings me so much joy. Working here makes you appreciate what you have. I’ll be at Mountain Shadows as long as they’ll have me.”

It may not have occurred to Janet on those warm, sunny, Saturday afternoons in her backyard, but as she watched her father playing dominoes, we believe she was learning about much more than a simple game.

The **domino effect** represents the idea that some change, small in itself, will cause a similar change nearby, which then will cause another similar change, and so on in a linear sequence, like a falling row of dominoes standing on end. President

Eisenhower used this metaphor to justify the Vietnam War: if Vietnam fell to communism, then Cambodia would be next, then Laos, and eventually all of South-east Asia.

We believe this metaphor applies to positive change as well. Every Saturday afternoon, Janet’s father taught her about the joy of family. Janet instilled the same value of family into her sons and her sons will share that same value with their families.

*When one domino moves, it causes a chain reaction of linear movement.*

The domino effect – Steen family style – has now graced the homes of Mountain Shadows Special Kids for 17 years. We have all experienced Janet’s love of family just by watching her and we will each add that experience to our own and share it with others. We’d call it a chain reaction of love.

And it is our hope the chain will never be broken. ■

## Holidays Overflow with Joy for our Special Kids

Thanks to the generosity of many of our friends of Mountain Shadows, the halls of our Special Kids Homes were bustling with the holiday spirit of peace and good-will this season:

- \* Ho-ho-ho! Santa & Mrs. Clause squeezed down the chimney with care and left magical gifts for each of the special children there. The group K.I.S.S. visited all of our homes in Riverside and Moreno Valley again this year. Beautiful handmade, crocheted booties and hats were given to each child to warm their hands, heads and hearts. Each house scored a huge assortment of DVDs too – meant to entertain, entice and enthrall our children all year round.
- \* The songs of Christmas filled our Moreno Valley homes with joy as carolers from Jurupa Calvary Church, Harvest Christian Fellowship, and Moreno Valley Choral Group sang a variety of traditional carols for our kids.
- \* Ken Steele and his wife, Candy, donated more than \$800 in gifts to our children. Gifts included CD players, DVD movies, music CDs, coloring books, crayons, dolls and toy cars. Ken and Candy also host the Chariots of Southern California Car Show which benefits our Mountain Shadows Special Kids.

We hope you all enjoyed a wonder-filled holiday season!

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# Louie: The Itsy, Bitsy Spider Who Never Gave Up

“Anything you can do, *I* can do better!”

If Louie, former resident of Juniper House, had been able to speak, those are the words he would have been saying. Julie Myers, RN, is certain of it.

“Sometimes when you looked at Louie, you thought he didn’t understand what was going on,” says Julie. “Sometimes you could see the frustration behind those big, beautiful, brown eyes of his. He was so eager to learn and to do things. He never allowed that frustration to keep him from learning and succeeding though.”

“We had two other children in highchairs at the House at the same time as Louie. He actually learned to eat and feed himself by watching another resident, Shiane. She was older than he was and it was obvious he really admired her. He watched her all the time and imitated her. The look on his face as he watched her said ‘I can do anything she can do!’”

“I remember one time Louie saw Shiane pick up a green bean and eat it. From that day on, Louie was insistent that he would eat green beans. He insisted on having green beans every single day from then on!”

“Louie was born 19 weeks premature to a substance abusing mom. He came to MSSK’s Juniper House when he was two months old. He quickly became everybody’s favorite little boy, because of his smile and personality. He was an absolutely adorable little boy caught in a MRCP (mental retardation/cerebral palsy) body. Louie also has hydrocephaly (water on the brain). When he

came to us, he was also having seizures and feeding difficulties.”

Adds Ada Tejada, LVN, “Louie is a beautiful, charming boy. When he was at Mountain Shadows, he would always give everyone a smile, even if he didn’t know them. Louie loved musical toys and his favorite song was *Itsy Bitsy Spider*. He absolutely loved that song and we played the *Itsy Bitsy Spider* game over and over with him every day.

“Because Louie’s biological mother was addicted to drugs while she was pregnant, he was born with many challenges to overcome. Louie made a lot of progress when he was with us, but progress takes a long time for babies born to drug addicted mothers. It takes a lot of time and patience to teach them things. We spent a lot of time with Louie, and before he left, he was able to do many things he wasn’t able to do when he came to us –he was able to reach for toys, he was able to turn over by himself, he was able to scoot on the carpet, and much more. While these may not seem like big achievements for a child without disabilities, these were huge improvements for Louie. It was a big deal and it was very satisfying to see him succeed.

“Life was hard for Louie. He was often sick and in pain. He had a shunt that malfunctioned several times and he had several operations to repair it. He was so brave through all of it. He was a big fighter. Finally, the doctor’s did a full replacement of the shunt and it was the best thing they ever did. It was very successful. He hasn’t had a problem

since.”

“When Louie’s new parents first came to meet him, it was obvious this wasn’t just a visit,” says



Julie. “They were there to fall in love with Louie and take him home to be with them forever. It was love at first sight all the way around. Louie’s new mother is a registered nurse. That is a huge blessing due to Louie’s many special needs. Louie and his new father automatically clicked. When his dad held him for the first time, Louie looked at him with those big, brown eyes that said ‘Okay, this is where I belong!’ It was like they’d known each other all along, not like they were strangers. They were laughing and giggling and were totally comfortable with each other. It turned out to be a life-changing visit for everyone.”

“Louie was sick when his potential parents first came to visit him,” says Ada. “Like most of us, when he was sick and in pain, he could be a fussy boy. So, when his parents first met him, he wasn’t the boy we had described to them. We had told them he was always smiling and happy. But when they first met Louie, he had a high temperature, wasn’t feeling well, and had no smiles. The parents met with him for about a half hour and Louie was feeling worse and worse, so we had to send him the ER right then and there. The parents fell in love with him anyway, just as he was.”

*Please see LOUIE on page 12*

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## ■ LOUIE *(continued from page 11)*

“Louie was admitted to the hospital with pneumonia and then he was discharged directly to his adoptive parents,” says Tiana Gonzalez, QMRP.

“He didn’t come back home, so we didn’t even have a chance to say goodbye to him,” adds Julie. “Adoption is not my favorite topic. When Louie left, for each of the staff members, it was like we were giving away one of our own children. Everyone had fallen in love with him.”

“About 2 months ago, Louie and his mom were in town and they came to visit us at Bain House,” says Tiana. “Louie’s mom wanted to give everyone a chance to say goodbye to him. Louie looked great! He was saying words and crawling all over the place. To see him doing so well

was amazing.”

“In the short time he was with his new family, Louie went from being a little baby to becoming a little man,” says Julie. “It was so good to see that he had grown to be a part of his new family.

“As he and his new family drove away, we all just stood in the driveway and cried. It was the hardest thing to let him go, but we know we gave him everything we could. Now he can move on with his forever family.”

“It was really hard when he left us,” adds Ada. “We all have such good memories of Louie. It was a sad and happy moment for us when he left us. We were all so emotional, but we know he is now with a good family.

“I’ve been with Mountain Shadows since 1998. One of the

main reasons I stay is that I can see the difference we can make in the quality of life for special needs children everyday. It’s very rewarding. In this case, it’s gratifying to see Louie’s new parents are so in love with him and he’s so happy and doing so well.”

“The Mountain Shadows children give us the lessons,” says Ada. “It’s not the other way around.”

From Louie we have learned many lessons. Lessons about how bravery and tenacity can overcome the greatest challenge. Lessons about love and loss and hope. Lessons about life we will never forget.

*“Anything you can do, I can do better!”*

Yes, Louie, we believe you can ... and will. ■



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