

The Newsletter of
The Little Light House
Central Mississippi



T H E Beacon

Our Allyson

Charles and I had no idea how life-changing our OB/GYN appointment was going to be September 3, 2003.

At my 37 week appointment my amniotic fluid had dropped to a dangerously low level. They scheduled a c-section, we packed a bag, and within two hours it was time to meet our second daughter!!

We were congratulated on our healthy, yet tiny, addition. However, during the last month of my pregnancy I had had this gnawing anxiety that something wasn't right. Was it because my daughter Mary Parker had played with a child with Down Syndrome at the pool? Or because my friend's child had just been diagnosed with

autism? But the doctors told me Allyson was fine and healthy and I let that anxiety go.

We felt so blessed, until the pediatrician spoke with us the

next day about Allyson. Then I knew what that gnawing feeling was—it was Trisomy 21, or Down Syndrome.

I cannot describe the devastation and fear we had at hearing those words. Parents of other children with Down Syndrome came to offer encouragement at the hospital—they meant well, but only time could comfort us. We didn't want to be in that "club," we wanted the healthy little girl we had planned for.

What would this do to our family? The despair was so extreme in those early days. We learned that about 60 percent of babies with Down Syndrome have a heart defect, but they didn't hear a murmur and assumed Allyson's heart was fine. That's the only thing that kept me going. I kept saying, "At least we don't have heart defects to deal with." But, two weeks later we found out she did have



Pictured from left, big sister Mary Parker, little brother Patrick, and Allyson.

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the heart defect and would soon have to have open heart surgery.

My college degree is in Home Economics. I thought, “I’m not prepared for this—how can I do this??” But we

just did it. When she was four months old, we took her to get that sweet heart fixed. She sailed through open heart surgery like the fighter she is today. We had several hospitalizations due to

asthma in the next year, but since she turned two her health has stabilized.

Allyson teaches us everyday about life, love, and what God meant for this world to really be. She has the

sweetest spirit and sassiest little personality. What we thought would be a burden has turned out to be such a blessing. We were so tired of hearing “God only gives special babies to special people.” At the time we did NOT want to be special, we wanted to be normal. Now we are humbled to know that God did think we were special enough to entrust this little angel to us. The blessings far outweigh the burdens. Of course, she works so much harder to do the simple things typical children enjoy, but the slower pace is sometimes refreshing in this very fast, competitive world.



Running the Race, Winning the Prize.

*Maureen Harbinson,
Executive Director*

As I review the stories we are reporting on for this issue of the Beacon, two phrases from scripture come to mind; “run the race with perseverance, the race marked out for us,” and “press on toward the goal to win the prize.” We are to run the race and win the prize.

In the cover article, you can read about Allyson,

people without a vision run aimlessly. We ran with ambitious goals in mind, and we won the prize!

With a record 305 people in attendance at the tea party, we raised \$22,000. The “Tees for Tots” golf tournament, under the able leadership of Ronnie and Emily Schmitz, raised \$6,000 more than last year.

Kimberley Massey, our Director of Development starting running this year with our new “Let It Shine” annual campaign. She too is seeing the prize come into view, through the generosity of our parents and the community at large.

Shaveria Hodge—a precious addition to our school—finished her race on March 17th this year. After much perseverance, she ran into the arms of Jesus and received the ultimate prize.

Scripture reminds us that we are surrounded by a great crowd of witnesses. They, like Shaveria, have gone on before us and are cheering us on. So, parents, teachers, staff, volunteers, therapists and donors, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, “keeping our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

“...press on toward the goal to win the prize.”

our first graduate, who has achieved so much in so short a time. She really is racing ahead to win the prize, both figuratively and literally. The girl is never happier than when she is running!

The good reports on the tea party and the golf tournament are the result of our staff and committed volunteers running the race. Proverbs 29:18 says that

Linda Blunt, the Little Light House lead teacher, also won the prize. Running in the race to love and educate our children, she was recognized as one of the top five teachers in the Jackson area by Metro Christian Living magazine. Sadly, Miss Linda is leaving us to run the race back in her native New Orleans, where she will continue her unflagging dedication to children with special needs.



*Allyson at the Golf
Tournament*

We are so fortunate to have been part of the Little Light House. Allyson has benefited so much from being a student there and our entire family has learned to look for her hidden abilities instead of dwelling on her disabilities. She is doing great at swimming lessons and is looking forward to her second trip to Disney World, and we hope to enroll her in a ballet class in the fall. Look out world—here comes Allyson!

Vision, Teamwork Pay Off for LLH Tea Party, Golf Tournament



Tees for Tots organizers Ronnie and Emily Schmitz, and Dana Rivard at Castlewoods Country Club.

The Little Light House-Central Mississippi raised over \$44,000 in two weeks through the combined efforts of the 2007 Tea Party and the Tees for Tots Golf Tournament. With the invaluable help of LLH families, sponsors and volunteers, these two events will provide special education and speech, physical, and occupational therapy to young children with special needs.

Over 300 ladies of all ages attended the Second Annual

Tea Party benefiting the Little Light House on Saturday, April 21, 2007. Held at the Fairview Inn in Jackson, the Tea Party raised over \$22,000. Maggie Wade, WLBT News Anchor, provided an inspirational message about the importance of faith, hope and love for our families and special little ones. The Fairview Inn provided a wonderful array of sandwiches, scones, cookies, and of course, tea.

“Early on, our goal was to double our attendance from

last year’s event,” said Maureen Harbinson, LLH Executive Director. “Not only did we exceed this goal, but we also doubled our income from last year!” The Tea Party was sponsored in part by the Fairview Inn, CoatTails, Trustmark Bank, and BankPlus.

The Tees for Tots Golf Tournament was held ten days later on May 1, 2007 at Castlewoods Country Club. Thirty teams played in the three-man scramble, with the

top teams in each flight winning cash prizes to the Castlewoods Pro Shop.

Sponsored in part by Currie, Johnson, Griffin, Gaines, and Myers Attorneys at Law, Nucor Steel, Atlas Tube, and U.S. Legal Forms, the tournament raised over \$21,500 for the Little Light House. Coordinated by Ronnie and Emily Schmitz, the tournament included lunch, a “Ball in the Boat” prize, refreshments, post-game appetizers, and door-prizes, making the Tees for Tots tournament one to watch for years to come.



At the Tea Party, speaker Maggie Wade with LLH student Caleb Underwood and his mom, Stacey.

Little Lighthouse Teacher Honored

Linda and Chester Blunt began running a new race when they relocated to Ridgeland following Hurricane Katrina in August, 2005. After teaching special education in New Orleans for over twenty years, Linda became the first Lead Teacher of the Little Light House upon its opening in January 2006. Since starting at the Little Light House, Linda has



Linda Blunt

seen not only the start-up of the school, but also the addition of the school’s second class of children.

Linda was recently surprised to be honored as a finalist

for Metro Christian Living’s Teacher of the Year. Camille Ball, one of the nominating parents, stated “I am a mother of six and have been through a lot of teachers. No one remotely comes close to the dedication, love, and encouragement Linda Blunt has given to her students and their families.”

This honor is a fitting tribute to the time and talent Linda has given to the Little Light House during her tenure here.

Linda and Chester will be returning to New Orleans in the fall to rebuild their lives there. Linda says, “I may never know why my life had to change when Katrina hit, but God saw fit to change it. Along the way I have made so many friends that are now an important part of my life and who I am. I will never forget everything that my newfound Mississippi family has done for me, and I am honored to have been a part of your lives, too.”



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Milestones Reached in "Let It Shine" Annual Campaign

The Little Light House has raised over \$189,000 in our 2006-2007 "Let It Shine" Annual Campaign in the past eleven months. This represents a sixty percent increase in the number of contributors from our last fiscal year. Through the generosity of individuals, businesses, organizations, and churches in our community, we were able to open our second class for children with special needs in January of this year. However, even with our recent expansion, we currently have 22 students on our waiting list.

As you know, the Little Light House is committed to fiscal excellence and responsibility. For this reason we do not use credit and we raise our funds in advance. Please take a moment to consider two wonderful opportunities—monthly giving and classroom sponsorship—to help us move forward and prepare to add a third class during our 2007-2008 school year.



80 New Monthly Giving Contributors in 3 Months!

We currently have about 20 individuals giving through the Monthly Giving program, providing a combined \$1,250 in monthly support for the Little Light House. Our goal is to increase our monthly giving participation to 100 by the end of August.

Monthly Giving is a quick and easy way to contribute regularly to the Little Light House. Choose an amount comfortable for you to give on a regular basis, complete a Monthly Giving form (call 601-829-3446, or go on line at www.llhms.org and download), and let us do the rest.

21 New Classroom Sponsors in 6 Months!

Little Light House Classroom Sponsorships significantly help us provide the special education programs given to each of our students completely tuition free. For a minimum annual donation of \$2,000, classroom sponsors receive recognition at each of our fundraising events, in the classroom, and on our website. The Classroom Sponsorship is a wonderful opportunity for a business or civic group. However, individuals may also participate. Our goal is to obtain at least 21 new classroom sponsors by Christmas 2007.

Running the Race Marked Out For Us...

In the next Beacon you will learn about the "Struttin' Their Stuff" event—a fundraiser in which our students get to show off their achievements. There will also be the opportunity for our adult participants to strut their stuff, too!

But for now, we have marked out a race for Little Light House supporters old and new alike. Adding 80 new monthly contributors and 21 new classroom sponsors is ambitious—but meeting this goal is nothing compared to the efforts of every one of the Little Light House children as they work to meet new milestones everyday.

The Little Light House Central Mississippi is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit Christian Developmental Center for children with special needs, age birth through six years of age. The Little Light House Central Mississippi does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, color, national or ethnic origin, or medical diagnosis (unless it affects the child's ability to attend on a regular basis) in the administration of its educational policies, and other school administered programs. Some behavioral conditions may be evaluated on an individual basis. The Little Light House Central Mississippi assures that all children's records will be maintained as confidential. All gifts to The Little Light House Central Mississippi are tax-deductible, less goods and services received.