

Citizen Advocacy News

Citizen Advocacy
of Chester County
205 Church Street
Phoenixville, PA 19460
(610) 933-1299



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New Coordinator starts in January!

We are delighted to welcome Alicia Warner as a new coordinator in our office. She begins work at the end of January.

Alicia comes to Citizen Advocacy from Vanguard, where she worked as a customer service representative. She has also had experience teaching and tutoring, and she has trained as a conflict resolution mediator.

Alicia grew up in Royersford and Phoenixville, and attended the Kimberton Waldorf School. She then earned her degree from Guilford College, a Quaker college in Greensboro, North Carolina. After majoring in German, Alicia earned a Fulbright Fellowship to Germany, where she lived in 1998-99. She also minored in Religious Studies.

Alicia and her husband now live in Elverson, where they are building a house. She is, as she explained, "very excited to be working with people in the community and getting involved." We are thrilled to have her join us!

Nathan and Dave

by Dave Frees

When Moira Mumma first asked me several years ago to consider being an "advocate", it was easy to say no. I was on the board of a number of non-profits, I had a number of management responsibilities for my law practice and businesses, and my family and I had recently established a fund under the Chester County Community Foundation. I "gave at the office," I "gave at church," I "gave at home," and I felt like I just did not have anymore time - and what is an advocate anyway? Moira, however, was patient.

When Moira asked again in the fall of 2000, the situation was different for a number of reasons. First, I had determined in my own life that I was tired of giving money to causes that utilized it in ways with which I was not entirely happy. Furthermore, I had sustained a serious injury and recovered from it, and my perspective on life was different. I wanted to still make donations to appropriate causes but I wanted to take a more active role and be involved in a positive way in people's lives. In the meantime, Moira had met Nate, and she came to me and asked if I would act as an advocate for him. She felt that we were a match because, despite the difficulties that had been visited upon Nate in his life, he was a bright, active 17 year old in need of my special brand of sarcasm. She explained to me that not everyone saw Nate's gifts and potential. She said I should meet Nate. She knows I am somebody who likes to make my own judgments. So I gave her a

Nathan and Dave

(continued from page 1)

conditional yes. I thought that if Nate was interested in making changes in his life, I would help him do that.

When I met Nate, I met a young man who had a great sense of humor, a quick mind, a zest for life and some trouble walking and speaking because of cerebral palsy. I also met a young man who some saw as being limited. Where I saw potential and vitality I soon found not everyone agreed. Since his birth, Nate and his mother have been told he would never sit up, never walk, never read, never work, etc. While Nate did not let this bother him, these perceptions certainly did not help him to get the assistance he needed to reach his full potential.

While Nate and I agreed that we would work together to help him reach his potential, it was not long before I also wanted to be sure that Nate had met my family, that Nate came to dinner, that I got to go out to lunches and dinner with Nate, that I met Nate's family and on and on and on. Soon I also found myself at Nate's Individual Education Plan meeting reading people the riot act and imploring them (successfully) to give Nate the type of help, courses and credit that he needed and deserved. Of course, I employed my special brand of sarcasm, which everyone seemed to enjoy.

Nate and I have many interesting conversations. For example, now I have to make a change here because when I told Nate that I was going to draft this article he told me that "when people write articles about me I prefer they call me Nathan and not Nate." He recently told my brother that he had a secret pocket in his wallet where he was able to hide extra cash from his girlfriend. When I asked Nathan what time he goes to bed he told me he goes to bed when he is tired, wakes up when he is refreshed, eats when he is hungry and if I called and he was asleep he would simply not answer the phone. These are the observations of a quick-witted young man with a keen sense of what is important in life, and one who enjoys my special brand of sarcasm

One of the things that I was able to do for Nathan was to make an introduction that has

changed his life. He told me that he was a Dallas Cowboys fan and a NASCAR fan. When I told him that I did not understand football or NASCAR, he told me that was very sad for me. Nathan also said he wanted to be a mechanic. Having lived here all of my life, it was easy for me to contact many people in town about having Nathan get some experience with cars. While many people I contacted would not help Nathan, Mark Saunders of Saunders Auto in Phoenixville said yes. He was quick to involve Nathan, show him the ropes and always treated him with the dignity that Mark accords everyone. In fact, Mark and his whole crew went out of their way to make

Nathan feel at home. One day when things were slow, one mechanic went home and got his own car so that Nathan could work on an oil change. They also took Nathan to a NASCAR race in Delaware (not to mention that they flew down to the races in a private plane!). Mark has become a fast friend of Nathan's. Mark's opinion, like mine, is that Nathan is a bright young man

with lots of unrecognized potential.

I also have offered Nathan some days of work at my law office where he has become friends with everyone and joins them in going out for lunch and so forth. I thought he should have other kinds of work experiences, and it wasn't long before he was comparing the salaries at a law office to those in a garage.

Nathan recently had surgery on his tendons and when I visited him in the hospital, I took him some books - he has been successfully teaching himself to read. He also negotiated a deal where somehow I ended up doing his Christmas shopping for him.

Nathan's fascination with NASCAR notwithstanding, I believe that he is going to be able to achieve just about anything he puts his mind to. He constantly tells me that he would like to find programs that will help him to learn to read better, to write better, to think better and advance his desire to become a mechanic. I am here to say thank you to Moira for finding me Nathan and to Nathan for making my life a little bit richer and more hilarious than usual (which in my case is saying something).

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