

# THE THERESA NEWS



THE THERESA ALESSANDRA RUSSO FOUNDATION

Winter 2011

## “Movin’ Right Along...”

By Susan S. Russo

The Theresa Academy continues to grow both in enrollment as well as space! Renovations were completed in time for the fall opening of classes.

We doubled the size of the Art Room and the Black Box Theater. Both spaces serve as multi-purpose rooms during camp, as well as our Saturday Morning Respite program.

Our newest service is the Saturday Morning Respite program, aptly entitled: “Saturday Expressions”.

The program operates from 9am-12pm every Saturday and provides our students with the opportunity to socialize, dance, paint, sing, play an instrument and just have a great time! Siblings are welcome, and it

gives the family (parents) some respite time as well.

We also scheduled a once a month, theme-oriented, Sunday afternoon workshop. The fee to participate in this event is lower than a regular class (\$15 per student) and siblings are welcome to join. These workshops will give the community a chance to “try-us-out”!

January’s theme was “Winter Wonderland”. The children created a gigantic winter mural in Art class, wrote and performed their own short play about all of the activities that they can do in the winter, and danced “snowy movements” to Claude Debussy’s “The Snow is Dancing”. Thirteen TAPA students attended, five of which



Music teacher, Heather Olsen at the keyboard with student, Ebonee Williams

were brother and sister siblings. It was an amazing inclusionary experience for all who participated, faculty and student alike!

## Meet Our 2011 Theresa Award Honorees

### Bob Policastro and His Angel

*Founder of Angela’s House*

By Laury Gelardi



How can one year of a little one’s life reach so many so profoundly? Angela Policastro was born August 30, 1989 to Bob and Angie Policastro. She suffered severe brain damage at birth, was medically frail, and required constant nursing care. She was born into a loving family who found a health care system that was severely fragmented, lacking and difficult to coordinate. The closest

appropriate treatment facility they could find was two hours away and the Policastro family experienced first-hand how exhausting and overwhelming caring for a medically frail child could be. Although Angela died shortly after her first birthday, she changed their lives and the lives of others forever.

Determined not to let other families on Long Island go through their experience, Bob Policastro began what is now a 20+ year mission to

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### A Tradition of Community Service

### Meet Renée Lovelace and Her Family

*2011 NAELA – Theresa Award Honoree*

Theresa Award Honorees seem to all have one thing in common: they all have a blood-line of community service. This year’s NAELA Honoree, Renée Lovelace, also has been inspired by other family members throughout her life and uses that inspiration to inspire others.

“When my daughter was about a year old, someone described her as having a special kindness and compassion for others,” Renée notes. “I was surprised to hear that, but then I thought about my own mother. I had never found the perfect word(s) to describe what I thought was different about her, but that was it. She had a special kindness and compassion. She was generous and caring, always reaching out to other people to do nice things. She was a community volunteer long before I ever heard the term.”



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## Bob Policastro —*Continued*

develop residential centers that would provide therapeutic, nursing and potentially round-the-clock care for medically fragile children. Angela's House, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1992 offers services to medically frail children and their families. His vision was to bring residential facilities that offered loving caring environments that could care for medically fragile children to Long Island. Bob says he is blessed to be in a position to help others and feels his mission is to assist families in dealing with their child through advocacy and education, knowledge and understanding, and sympathy and compassion. Angela's short life provided and continues to provide him inspiration.

Angela's House I opened in East Moriches in 2000 with funding secured with the help of Assemblyman and 2010 Theresa Award Honoree Harvey Weisenberg, Angela's House II opened in Smithtown in the spring of 2005. Angela's House III is still in the planning stages and this house will address the needs of children who are ventilator-dependent. The

homes are beautifully decorated and suited to each child's needs. The medical equipment as well as adaptive equipment and supplies are available, which allows for the highest quality of care. The homes also provide for the coordination of the extensive individual needs of each child.

Angela's House also has a home care component to assist families with the coordination of the complex home care services needed to support children living at home with their parents. This may include services such as: medical equipment, nursing support, therapies, medications and making their homes handicapped accessible. They are currently working with 400 children in the community. Donations and grants are used extensively to purchase medical supplies and equipment that are not covered by other means.

Angela's House is actively seeking alternative options for funding. Caring for a medically fragile child takes its toll on a family emotionally and financially. There are often limited resources available and insurance and government programs don't cover everything. Angela's House then turns to private donations

or grants to assist families caring for their children at home as well as those who have children at Angela's House and those needing respite or relief home care.

Bob's passion is shared by his entire family. Wife, Angie, is a nurse and she and all four Policastro children – Bob, Jr., 23, Alyssa, 19, Joseph, 18, and Vincent, 14 – are all intricately involved in Angela's House events. They are often staffing the booths, telling the stories, collecting the money, wearing the costumes, or doing the set-ups. Bob says they carry the legacy into the community. They inspire everyone around them with Angela's story and are truly remarkable, compassionate and giving people.

Bob, on behalf of Angela's House, was also responsible for bringing the "Angel of Hope Statue" to Long Island. It was erected in Eisenhower Park (close to the Veteran's Memorial) in 2009 and represents hope to all parents who have endured the loss of a child. This Angel is a symbol that represents and honors the children, such as Angela and Theresa, who inspire us everyday and live on in our hearts forever.

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## Renée Lovelace —*Continued*

Renée remembers going with her mother to nursing homes to sing for residents before she was old enough to go to school. Renée's mother visited the residents and other shut-ins, always bringing food, newspapers, books, and other items. Her parents' volunteer activities list was long – but Renée grew up thinking that was how everyone lived.

An older brother continued in much the same manner. "He is a positive force in hundreds of lives," Renée points out. "He and his wife adopted four children, spent years coordinating almost-daily deliveries of slightly damaged goods from grocery stores to Dallas homeless and animal shelters, and now write dozens of checks each month for college students they barely know.

Renée helped her parents with volunteer activities throughout her childhood, starting as a hospital volunteer ("candy striper") at age 13, and tutored other students from junior high school on through college. While based in New York as a flight attendant, Renée joined a volunteer group that worked at the Foundling Home and Bellevue Hospital several times a month. There she watched

wonderful employees work compassionately and effectively with the children, but then leave for other jobs due to the low wages. She researched funding allocations in the disability field while working towards an MBA, but did not see ways in which to make significant changes to those allocations. Instead of steering towards human services, she went into investment banking, then on to law school, and then to the corporate section of a large Dallas law firm.

Years later, when her step-son was hospitalized with schizophrenia, she returned to some of her prior disability research. "It was theory versus practice," she notes, "When it is your child who needs help, theory is irrelevant. Everything you do is directed towards getting help."

She and her husband, two lawyers with successful law firms, faced the "regression to poverty mandate" where they could not out-earn the cost of care that their son needed. At times the options were bleak. After diligently searching and pleading, Joe and Renée were able to find a facility that would provide their son with therapeutic rehabilitation. With only three slots available and most 300 families vying for those three slots, their son

was accepted into the program because the director believed Renée and Joe would work on a transition to another program when their son turned 18.

In the years that followed, Renée and Joe have worked on many disability advocacy projects, served on numerous boards and committees, and chaired a major conference. Renée worked to establish a mental health law project with the Dallas Bar Association, took many individual pro bono cases, handled corporate work for nonprofit organizations, and wrote numerous articles on special needs trusts and planning. She was one of the primary team members drafting and establishing the Arc of Texas master pooled trusts and wrote and compiled a 1,000 page guide (distributed on CD) for Texas attorneys to use as a resource when representing families of children with disabilities.

Renée recently authored the book "Pooled Trust Options: A Guidebook," published in 2010, which was a project of the National Plan Alliance.

Renée and Joe are certainly living the tradition of community service in their family.

# The THERESA FOUNDATION 2010 Grants

The Children's Learning Center	To purchase rolling stools and ballet slippers	\$1,264
The Hummingbirds Institute	To assist with rent for a space to hold classes in music dance and yoga	\$2,500
Diocese of RVC-Office of Faith Formation	To pay for two speakers as well as for the rental space for a workshop on April 24th: "Caring for the Caregiver"	\$750
Campabilities	To hire specialists who will provide each camper with a written assessment of their abilities in each sport.	\$5,000
Alpine Alternatives	To hire three specialists, and for three full scholarships or 6 partial scholarships for campers.	\$3,600
In The Company of Kids	To upgrade technology	\$5,000
Arc of California	Grant in honor of 2010 Theresa Awards Recipient Stephen W. Dale	\$1,250
Contra Costa Arc	Grant in honor of 2010 Theresa Awards Recipient Stephen W. Dale	\$1,250
Theresa Academy of Performing Arts	Grant in honor of Harvey Weisenbeg - Scholarship for TAPA Classes	\$5,000
UCP of Suffolk	To support the creation of a therapeutic and recreation accessible playspace in the Children's Center	\$5,000
El Rio Health Care Center Foundation	To support the "Reach out and Read" program at six pediatric clinic sites	\$1,000
JCC of Greater 5 Towns	To support the creation of "Soul Mates"- an innovative program for adolescence ages 13-18 with a variety of special needs,	\$3,000
Pal-o-Mine Equestrian	Educational supplies for this years summer camp	\$1,000
Project Happy	To provide transportation for children who use wheelchairs	\$4,000
School for Language and Communication	To support the weekend Music and Dance Program	\$1,000
Long Beach Catholic School	Annual Scholarship for Community Service	\$400
Kulanu Center for Special Services	To support the production of "Kids & Yiddish"	\$2,000
Mehibosheth Angelic Riders	Childrens games materials and labor for 28 Children with Special Needs	\$2,700
IDEAS	To support the Creative Drama Program at Lavelle School for the Blind	\$3,950
Accessible Arts	Wheelchair Ballroom Arts program	\$5,000
<b>TOTAL \$54,664</b>		



## TAPA Events

### Spring Session

March 29th through June 21st

### Saturday Respite

January 8th through June 25th

### Summer Session I

June 27th through July 1st

### Summer Session II

August 15th through 26th

Please call for additional information.  
Space is limited.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

- Parents Night Out (March)
- Students Art Exhibit at The Long Beach Library (TBA)
- Sunday Afternoon Workshops (once a month)
- Back-to-School Bash Concert & Fundraiser (September)

Volunteers are always welcome –  
knowledge of the arts is not necessary

## Susan Russo Receives the Making the Difference Award



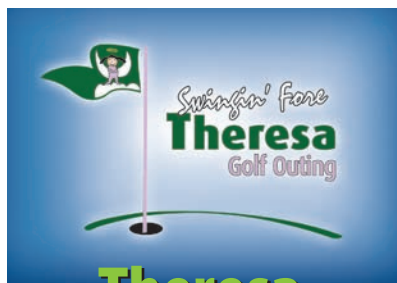
Susan accepts the Making the Difference Award from Susan Malise, Board President of the South Shore Child Guidance Center

# THE THERESA NEWS

Save the Dates!



17th Annual  
**Theresa Awards**  
May 6, 2011  
The Bridgeview Yacht Club,  
Island Park, NY



Swingin' For  
**Theresa**  
Golf Outing  
**Theresa**  
**Golf Outing**  
June 30, 2011



**TAPA**  
**Spring Session**  
March 29 - June 21

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