**MMI Expands With the Addition of Two Outstanding New Faculty**

MMI welcomes Drs. Wayne Fisher and Cathleen Piazza. Dr. Fisher has been recruited to MMI to direct the Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders, and to develop and expand research at MMI in the areas of autism and behavioral genetics. Dr. Piazza has been recruited to MMI to further her research on the study of brain-behavior relations in individuals with medical and behavior problems. A major component of their work has been the clinical and scientific application of behavioral science to problems found in pediatric medicine.

MMI is renovating space on the first floor of the Hattie B. Munroe Pavilion for Dr. Fisher’s and Dr. Piazza’s clinical research space. Dr. Fisher’s goal is to train and supervise teams of clinical researchers and therapists who will conduct behavioral and functional analyses to better delineate behavioral phenotypes and to develop an NIH funded center to compare indirect, direct, and controlled functional analysis methods. He hopes to work collaboratively with other MMI researchers to develop a program project grant (P01) focused on the bio-behavioral assessment and treatment of autism stratified by genotype. Dr. Piazza’s current research involves the assessment and treatment of three types of behavior problems common to children: 1) pediatric feeding problems, 2) dangerous behaviors that lead to injury, and 3) pediatric sleep problems. Her work in the area of pediatric feeding problems is centered around understanding the interaction between physiological and behavioral causes of feeding problems and the use of this information in treatment development.

Prior to being recruited to MMI, Dr. Fisher was a professor of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Dr. Fisher served as the Executive Director for the Neurobehavioral Programs at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, Maryland and more recently as the Executive Director of the Marcus Behavior Center in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a member of the American Psychological Association and the Association of Behavior Analysis. Dr. Fisher is the past Editor for the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (JABA). He is a recipient of the Bush Leadership Award and received the award for Distinguished Contribution to Applied Behavioral Research from the Behavior Analysis Division of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Fisher serves on the board for the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies and the Maryland Autism Project, and is a former vice president of the Society for the Experimental Analysis of Behavior and a former president of the Maryland Association for Behavior Analysis.

Dr. Fisher has co-authored over 115 research articles on severe behavior disorders among children with autism and developmental disabilities and related topics. He has a grant (R01) from the National Institute of Mental Health to study the functions of aberrant behavior displayed by children with autism. Dr. Fisher’s early research involved epidemiological investigations that provided a basis for understanding the natural history, course, and risk factors relevant to the development of behavior disorders among persons with autism and developmental disabilities. Dr. Fisher’s research team conducted the first population-based epidemiological investigations in the United States on autism, childhood onset, pervasive developmental disorder, and hyperlexia. While at Hopkins, Dr. Fisher’s research activities focused on three major areas of investigation. The first area focused on the use of precise, quantitative measurement to ascertain not only the influence of relatively static genetic and environmental variables on the prevalence and morphological characteristics of aberrant behavior, but also the more dynamic social and contextual variables that modulate the expression and severity of these disorders. The second major area of study involved the development of new research methods for analyzing and categorizing aberrant behavior in terms of its function (i.e., the outcomes produced by the behavior in various situations that increase or decrease its future expression). The third major area of investigation involved the use of principles derived from basic behavior research on choice responding to improve behavioral assessments and interventions.

(continued on page 11)
Awards and Noteworthy People

UNMC Chancellor’s Silver Award Winners:

- **July 2005**
  - Amy Beyersdorf
  - Physical Therapy

- **August 2005**
  - Holly Dixon
  - Occupational Therapy

- **September 2005**
  - Laura Ball
  - Speech-Language Pathology

- **November 2005**
  - Lisa St. Clair
  - Education and Child Development

- **December 2005**
  - Angela Sakaris
  - Occupational Therapy

New Additions to MMI Staff

- **Christopher Bullock**
  - Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

- **Cathleen Piazza and Wayne Fisher**
  - Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

- **Jill Smith**
  - Education and Child Development

- **(From left: Rebecca Stroebele, Lisa Winkler, Jamaar Sauer, Sania Wali and Eileen Griess)**
  - Human Genetics Laboratories

- **James Askew**
  - Molecular Genetics

- **Shannon Kosch**
  - Occupational Therapy

- **Andrea Mack**
  - Occupational Therapy

- **Sara McCormick**
  - Occupational Therapy

- **Sarah Hinsley**
  - Physical Therapy

- **Tammy Molinelli**
  - Physical Therapy

- **Jennifer Brock**
  - Project BEST-CASE

- **Jessica Woolhisier**
  - Recreation
Awards

Cytogenetic Technologists Pass Certification Examination

Thomas Tucker and Abigail Wood, Cytogenetic Technologists in the MMI Human Genetics Laboratory, recently passed the National Certification Agency’s accreditation examination for Clinical Laboratory Specialist in Cytogenetics [CLSp(CG)]. Tom Tucker started working in the MMI Human Genetics Laboratory in September 2004 and Abby Wood started in October 2004. The successful completion of this accreditation brings the number of NCA-certified Cytogenetic Technologists in the Human Genetics Laboratory to twenty-eight!

Congratulations Tom and Abby!

Congratulations Goes Out To Laura Ball and Marsha Sullivan . . .

Laura Ball, Ph.D. and Marsha Sullivan, MA, of MMI’s Speech-Language Pathology Department, received the honor of the Nebraska Speech Language Hearing Association at their annual meeting in September 2005. Laura received the Clinical Achievement Award for outstanding clinical contributions to the state of Nebraska in the areas of augmentative communication and apraxia. Marsha received the Kleffner Award for her years of outstanding service to individuals with communication disorders.

Congratulations Laura and Marsha!
Happenings

MMI’s Behavioral Health Clinic Update

Dr. Joe Evans and Dr. Jodi Polaha continue their active involvement in providing information to rural healthcare providers about MMI’s Behavioral Health Clinic (BHC) program. Most recently this has included presentations at both the National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH) and the Nebraska Rural Health Association (NeRHA) Annual Conference.

There are currently over 13 outreach clinics that provide mental/behavioral health services in primary care in mental health shortage areas of Nebraska. The BHC program benefits patients by allowing them to see a behavioral health provider in their physician’s office, increasing the collaboration between medical and mental health providers.

Childhood Apraxia Of Speech Program

by Marsha Sullivan

The Speech-Language Pathology department received funding from the GWR Foundation to support the development of a childhood apraxia of speech clinical research program. Childhood apraxia of speech (CAS) is a severe speech disorder that impacts all aspects of communication. Although the child usually has normal cognition, speech is extremely limited and difficult to understand. Some children can only produce vowel sounds or noises, and often create unique systems of communication involving non-speech sounds (lip or tongue pops, growling, etc.) This severely limits communication, and the resulting frustration from the child’s inability to communicate often leads to withdrawal or aggression. CAS also limits reading development and impacts overall academic success throughout the school years. Unfortunately, these children’s progress in traditional speech pathology programs has been limited and new methods for intervention are urgently needed.

The initial goals of the CAS project involve determining: 1) an improved definition of CAS, 2) documentation of the patterns of speech and severity, and 3) development of assessment and treatment protocols that would better treat this population. The long range goal is to improve services for the children of Nebraska (and nationwide) who have been diagnosed with CAS.

Training has begun with the speech pathology staff at MMI and the RiteCare clinics in Omaha, Lincoln, and Hastings. They will participate in the identification of children with CAS, as well as the development and testing of treatment programs. All participating staff met at MMI for a two day training session in May. Eighteen children with CAS are currently receiving intervention.

Some initial data collected from children with CAS in an intervention program at MMI was presented by Korey Stading and Laura Ball at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in San Diego this past November. This is one of the first treatment programs to provide objective data that demonstrates effective intervention for these children. This particular project was completed in conjunction with a student from UNO, Denise Larson, who was participating in the LEND program.
**MMI Offers Internships for Spanish-trained Physical Therapists**

MMI’s Physical Therapy Department, in conjunction with the Pediatric Section of the Spanish Physical Therapy Association, has offered internships for Spanish-trained physical therapists interested in learning more about services provided in the United States. Dr. Wayne Stuberg, Director of MMI’s PT Department, reports that this is the sixth year of the collaborative relationship between Munroe-Meyer and the Spanish Pediatric PT Association. To date, eight PTs have received training with an emphasis on computerized motion analysis, outpatient services and services provided in the public schools.

**Pediatric Dental Residents and Faculty Providing Services In The Community**

During the fall, pediatric dentistry residents and faculty, *(pictured at the right)* could be found not only working in the pediatric dental clinic, but also working within the community and across the UNMC campus. These current residents, along with Dr. Mohs performed dental screenings at Walnut Elementary School and at a South Omaha Health Fair. They also gave tours of the University of Nebraska Medical Center to students of Walnut Elementary and Westridge Middle Schools.

**MMI AmeriCorps Program Update**

**MMI AmeriCorps Volunteer Program Nationally Recognized**

This past June, MMI’s AmeriCorps Volunteer Program was nationally recognized as one of the “most innovative programs” in the United States. There are 48 AmeriCorps programs in Nebraska, and thousands across the country. According to Amanda Volkmer, AmeriCorps Project Coordinator, “This national recognition means a great deal to our program. This is our first year of operation and to receive this kind of honor so early in the development of our program says a lot about the quality of our volunteers and the support they receive from MMI faculty and staff.”

**Child Identification Day**

Each year, AmeriCorps members are required to either host a certain number of community service events or participate as volunteers. To help them reach their goal, on September 11, 2005, MMI AmeriCorps members hosted their first annual child identification day. Absolute Power Communications, an Omaha company, provided 500 free kits for the event. Each child was fingerprinted, photographed and provided a DNA sample. Parents also provided contact information for at least three relatives and important medical/dental information. This information is then filed with local law enforcement agencies. On January 28, 2006, AmeriCorps will host their 2nd annual child identification day. The event will be held at the Girls and Boys Club of North Omaha, located at 2610 Hamilton, from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. This event is open to the public.

**Omaha Food Bank**

During a four day food drive, the MMI AmeriCorps volunteers collected 379 lbs. of dry and canned foods for the Omaha Food Bank. Way to go!!
Hanabi-PII Metaphase Chromosome Harvester

The Human Genetics Laboratory is the first clinical cytogenetics laboratory in the United States to acquire and place into operation an automated Hanabi-PII Metaphase Chromosome Harvester. This system has been operational in the Asian market for several years and is marketed in the USA by Transgenomic Laboratories of Omaha, Nebraska. The Hanabi-PII is the first system to fully automate the multi-step process of harvesting chromosomes from cell culture suspensions. The harvester has “walk-away” harvest capabilities and can simultaneously process up to 24 separate blood, cancer blood, or bone marrow samples. Automation of this process frees up valuable technologist time, helps to prevent operational errors and standardizes the culture process.

New Software Program

The Human Genetics Laboratory is accredited by the Laboratory Accreditation Program of the College of American Pathologists (CAP). In 2006, the CAP will begin conducting unannounced on-site inspections. To transition into this inspection process, the laboratory has purchased Lab Passport, a quality management software program from Genial Genetic Solutions. This software program will consolidate much of the required laboratory inspection information into one easy-to-use system and central location which will assist laboratory supervisory staff in facilitating inspections. Some uses of this software will be management of the laboratory’s standard operating procedures, policies and procedures, equipment logs, quality control logs, material safety data sheets, and staff training and competency records. This system will track revisions and new editions and an electronic audit system will keep track of which documents need reviewing. The laboratory will have this program fully functional by the time of our next CAP on-site inspection in the spring of 2007.

Comparative Genomic Hybridization (CGH) Microarray Technology for the Detection of Chromosomal Imbalance

Diane Pickering, M.S., CLSp(CG), Bhavana Dave, Ph.D., Denae Golden, B.S., CLSp(CG), Kim Wiechman, B.S., CLSp(CG), Warren Sanger, Ph.D.

The identification of constitutional chromosome abnormalities is an important aspect of the clinical cytogenetics laboratory. The ability to detect subtle chromosome aberrations has improved in our laboratory over the last decade due to higher resolution of G-banded metaphase chromosomes and the development of FISH procedures. These improvements have led to a significant increase in the detection rate of chromosome abnormalities in patients with mental retardation and/or congenital anomalies. Most recently, the Human Genetics Laboratory has developed and validated chromosomal microarray, a procedure that tests many chromosome regions in one assay. There are two different microarrays utilized for clinical applications.

- The Spectral Genomics Constitutional Microarray 400 is designed to test for deletions and duplications in a large number of chromosomal regions known to be associated with specific syndromes.
- The Spectral Genomics 2600 is a high-resolution array (approximately 1 MB) employed to further delineate previously identified breakpoints, confirm constitutional array results and interrogate chromosome regions not represented on the constitutional array.

Advantages of Microarray

- Comprehensive screen of many “critical” chromosome regions
- Eliminate numerous single-FISH tests, particularly sub-telomere panel
- High resolution (<2 MB)
- Reliably detects chromosome duplication and deletion

Limitations of Microarray

- Does not detect balanced chromosome abnormalities, mosaicism and gene mutations
- Parental studies may be needed in some cases to resolve the variable nature of certain loci represented on the microarray.

Overall, the microarray procedure is clinically indicated for patients with moderate to severe cognitive delays with or without dysmorphic features. The overall detection rate of chromosomal imbalance in this clinical category is 10-15%.
Sportsmen Assisting Nebraska’s Disabled Sportsmen (SANDS)

by Dave Burgess

My name is Dave Burgess, and I have been in a wheelchair for over 4 years. It is because of my wheelchair that Mike Freel, Rik Cutting, and I came up with the idea for a new grassroots program that would be hosted by the Nebraska Games and Parks Commission (NGPC). I have been working with the NGPC on the program, known as SANDS-Sportsmen Assisting Nebraska’s Disabled Sportsmen and Women. SANDS’ goal is to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to get out and enjoy all of the outdoor activities the great state of Nebraska has to offer. By providing a means for people to exchange contact information, SANDS connects individuals with and without disabilities. The program connects people with disabilities with able-bodied outdoorsmen and women to assist individuals with outdoor activities. The SANDS program utilizes a database located within the NGPC’s website, where people can make connections. For example, if you are an able-bodied outdoorsman you could print off the names and information of people with disabilities that have signed up for the program, or if you have a disability you could print off the names and information of people that have signed up to assist. You make contact with a person and simply work out the details of your trip.

This is the story of how SANDS came to be. I was a truck driver for about 14 years. Because of health reasons I had to give up driving in January of 1998. I took some classes to become a Certified Nursing Assistant. I had plans of working as a C.N.A. while I went to school to be either a nurse or a physician’s assistant. In April of 1998, I was injured at work, as I caught a lady falling out of bed. This caused me to herniate part of a disc in my lower back and required me to have surgery on the disc. It wasn’t long after the first surgery that the disc collapsed and the doctor had to go back in and remove the disc and fuse my back at the L-5/S-1 level.

It was very depressing for me and my family because I was no longer able to get out and do a lot of the things that we as a family enjoyed doing; hunting, fishing and camping. My wife was upset and depressed by having to sit by and literally watch me deteriorate with each passing day. When my wife was able to get me out, everything at home had to stop. My two daughters and my wife had to put their lives on hold for however long I wanted to go out, and it became a very tense situation for everyone. I finally got to a point where I was just going to stop doing anything and just give up trying.

One day, out of desperation, I posted a message on the NGPC website forum: “Disabled Hunter Needs Help.” I got a dozen or so answers. Two of the people that answered were Rik Cutting and Mike Freel. They both offered to take me out hunting whenever they went. This was great! The answer to all our problems sat right here in front of us. I talked to Mike and Rik on the phone and set up a time when my wife and I could meet with them, sit down and talk over how this was going to work. We worked out the details of the hunt and I was set. This is the whole idea behind SANDS.

Mike and I took the idea to Greg Wagner with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC). He thought that it was a great idea and helped us to work out some of the smaller details. We then took the idea to Jeff Rawlinson with the NGPC in Lincoln. After four months, the idea was approved and now it is a service offered by the state of Nebraska.

For further information about the program or to sign up, go to www.outdoornebraska.org and click on the SANDS link, or go to www.sandsnebraska.com.

I now work for AmeriCorps, which is a non-profit organization, that was started in the mid to late 90’s by then President Clinton, and works to strengthen communities through volunteerism. Dr. Joe Evans, Director of Psychology and Amanda Volkmer, AmeriCorps Project Coordinator, help support the program by allowing me to work on SANDS and covering costs of the brochures and the SANDS logo patches. The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission supports the website by covering the cost of the website, and has placed links from their website to the SANDS website. We are looking into holding special events like fishing tournaments and deer and turkey hunts for the disabled and the mentors.
New Grant Initiatives Help Produce a Record Programming Year for Recreation Therapy at MMI

Thanks to increased funding from two new foundations, the MMI recreation therapy program has achieved national top ten programming status with the National Institute for Recreation Inclusion (NIRI). Six new community inclusion programs have been added to the department’s calendar this fall raising the total number of annual program offerings to 19, making MMI’s recreation therapy program one of the nations best. “The NIRI ranking is for programs which offer a combination of therapeutic recreation and inclusive recreation programs in their community. You have to provide both types of programs to be considered” said Dr. Michael Crawford, RT Director. Inclusive recreation programs (those that take place in natural community settings) and therapeutic recreation programs (center based services that require special staffing ratio’s, equipment and support) ideally need to co-exist and operate in a continuum of services for participants. “Community inclusion programming is very expensive to do, both in terms of staffing ratios, admission fees, concessions, and transportation. Without additional grant money and new patrons we wouldn’t be able to provide enough access and consistency to make a real difference in the community” commented Dr. Crawford.

A fifty thousand dollar grant from the GWR Sunshine Foundation has allowed for the formation of two new social clubs for children with autism spectrum disorders. This grant is allowing us to work with the Westside Community Public Schools, so both middle school and senior high students will have their own bi-monthly activity and sports club to participate in on the weekends. The grant also provides for one-to-one individual social skills and leisure education training during the school day. A former student intern, Jessie Woolhiser, has been hired to coordinate the individual and group services for the year. Said Ms. Woolhiser, “This is a wonderful opportunity for students with autism as the clubs membership also includes typically developing peers from the same school, giving kids who wouldn’t normally do things together an opportunity to get to know each other in a fun environment.”

A six month pilot grant from the Enrichment Foundation of Omaha has also provided funding for four new adult recreation programs. These services have included a chaperoned overnight vacation experience to Kansas City, a weekend social dining club, supplemental funding for the departments tandem bike program, the “Wheel Club” as well as one-to-one leisure coaching opportunities inside of regular YMCA programs. “The KC vacation trip was amazing” said Kelley Coutts, assistant director of RT. “None of these adults had ever been on an out of town overnight vacation. Their reaction to the trip was so satisfying to see.” While the pilot grant concludes early in 2006, the department will be eligible for a second round of funding, and hopes to continue to expand these new services for adults.

A combination of private foundation and family support has led to the creation of the “Wheel Club”, a tandem bike program designed to allow riders unable to ride...
without assistance to experience city parks and trails. The Armstrong/McDonald Foundation of Arizona has provided $31,500 to purchase the specialized bikes built for two, some of which can cost up to $5,000. In addition, a $20,000 program endowment from the Soares family of Omaha, provides needed operating money. “Our goal for this program was really threefold” said Dr. Crawford. “First, we wanted to find something active for our participants to do in the community. So often these participants are relegated to passive programming and spectating. Second, we wanted to be in the community in natural environments, and third, we wanted to find something that family members could do together.” This fall the “Wheel Club” held three Sunday afternoon events including an open house at MMI and park/trail rides at Elmwood and Toll Parks. “Family participation has been excellent, with Mom and Dad frequently being the co-rider and siblings often riding their own two wheelers beside our three and four wheel tandem bikes. We averaged over 25 participants for each event this fall and people can’t wait for the spring weather to come” said Dr. Crawford. Goals for the Wheel Club’s continued growth and success include additional funds for more bikes, operating money and a support vehicle. Eventually the club hopes to operate out of a dedicated box truck which will allow for easier access to various park and trails around Omaha.

**Get Ready to Walk and Roll for Disabilities in 2006!**

The second annual winter mall walk is scheduled for Sunday, February 19, 2006. Co-sponsors for this years event include the Westroads Mall, KGOR radio, the University of Nebraska Heisman Trophy Winner, Eric Crouch, and Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey. The goal of the event is to raise money for future adult recreation programs at MMI. Last year’s event raised over $13,000 and included pledges for individual walkers and rollers as well as gifts from various corporate and private donors. “Last year’s event drew over 350 participants and the goal for this year is to field no fewer than 500,” said Karol Warchola, administrative assistant to MMI recreation therapy. The parent advisory group to MMI recreation has been meeting monthly for the last 3 months to get ready for this year’s event. This year the focus is to build the event by asking volunteers and families to form teams. For more information as well as registration and pledge forms, please contact Karol Warchola at 559-5771.

MMI’s very own Brett Kuhn, Ph.D. teamed up with Jo Frost, star of TV’s “Super Nanny” (pictured at the left), in New York City for a national media tour of morning radio and TV shows, sponsored by the National Sleep Foundation and Pampers. Their appearances were to help parents learn about the important health benefits of sleep, and to provide insight and tips so families can enjoy more restful nights.
New Grants

**Wayne Fisher - Autism Spectrum Disorders:** Functional Analysis of Autism - received $1,209,457, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

**Maurice Godfrey - Molecular Genetics:** Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) - received $1,300,000, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

**Lisa St. Clair - Education and Child Development:** Evaluation of Educare of Omaha - received $49,545, funded by Educare.

**Brad Schaefer - Genetic Medicine:**
Hunter’s Syndrome - received $70,367, funded by Pharmanet.
Adherence to National Clinical Guidelines for Down Syndrome - received $10,656, funded by the University of Oklahoma.

**Wayne Stuberg - Physical Therapy:** A Biomedical Device for the Evaluation of Sitting Postural Development for Infants with Motor Disabilities - received $24,680, funded by the Nebraska Research Initiative.

MMI’s Adopt-A-School Activities

**JP Lord Halloween Party**

Again this fall, members of MMI’s support staff helped celebrate Halloween at JP Lord’s annual party. Christy Williams, Melanie Schrack and Jennifer Bridger handed out glow sticks to all of the kids as their party was beginning, and also helped with the judging of their costumes. Thank you to Christy, Melanie and Jen for all of your help!

Fund-raising Efforts

Each year, MMI’s support staff organizes various fund-raising activities for MMI’s adopt-a-school, JP Lord. Last December, the MMI support staff completed a cookbook titled, Panda Delights. Recipes for the cookbook were gathered from staff and faculty from both MMI and JP Lord. The proceeds from the cookbook sales benefit JP Lord and have allowed the support staff to purchase $25 gift certificates from Bakers for three JP Lord families over the holidays, and purchase seven toys from Do-Re-Me & You for the kids to use in their daily activities. If you have not purchased a copy of the cookbook, please contact, Pam Ferrick at (9-4368 or pferrick@unmc.edu) or Janet Henry (9-7368 or jhenry@unmc.edu). The cost of the cookbook is $10.

Upcoming Events

The Munroe-Meyer Women’s Guild will hold its 39th annual Garden Walk & Faire on Sunday, June 11, 2006 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (rain or shine). Enjoy six tour locations, with Metro Community College (Ft. Omaha Campus) being this year’s Garden Faire site, which will host several gardens of its own. Please visit our website at [www.mmigardenwalk.com](http://www.mmigardenwalk.com) after April 1, 2006 for upcoming information, or call the Munroe-Meyer Institute at (402) 559-6460. Garden walk tickets are: $12 in advance, and $15 the day of the event.
Dr. Piazza received her doctorate from Tulane University. She completed her pre-doctoral internship and a post-doctoral fellowship at the Kennedy Institute and the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. After her training, Dr. Piazza continued as a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and the Kennedy Krieger Institute where she served as the Director of the Severe Behavior Unit, the Chief Psychologist of the Neurobehavioral Unit, and the Director of the Pediatric Behavioral Sleep Clinic. In 1996, Dr. Piazza was appointed the Director of Training for the Department of Behavioral Psychology. In 1997, she was appointed the Director of the Pediatric Feeding Disorders Program. In 1999, she moved to Atlanta to initiate the Pediatric Feeding Disorders Program at the Marcus Institute. She also served as the Director of Training for the Marcus Institute. Dr. Piazza is a former Associate Editor and is currently the Book Editor of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. In 2002, Dr. Piazza was named a Woman of Distinction by the Chron’s and Colitis Association. She also was identified as the most productive female researcher in the areas of behavior analysis and behavior therapy in the 1990’s. Currently, Dr. Piazza is a Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and the director of the MMI pediatric feeding disorders program.

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**Getting to Know You**

**Annie Bird**

*Job title:* Coordinator, Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders.

*Department:* Administration.

*Years at MMI/UNMC:* 1 year.

*Hometown:* Wahoo, Nebraska.

*The best part of my job is:* Helping families.

*Tell us about your family:* Husband, Ken; 3 sons; 1 daughter-in-law; and 2 grandsons; one Chocolate Lab; and one Bichon.

*If I could have two or more careers, I would:* Do exactly what I have done for the past 30 years, and be an elementary principal.

*The accomplishment I am most proud of:* Raising three sons to be thoughtful, loving and independent young men.

*If I had to carry my most prized possession on my back, I would take:* Since my family is not a “possession”, it would have to be my albums of photos, encompassing a pretty wonderful lifetime.

*My favorite book and/or movie is:* Talk Before Sleep.

*Not everyone knows that I:* If I told, then almost everyone would know!

*My favorite way to relax is:* Go to a movie or do counted cross stitch (I know boring, boring, boring).

*I most admire:* My husband for his genuine kindness.

*Three adjectives that best describe me are:* Friendly, tenacious and chronically late.

*My greatest pet peeve is:* Mean-spirited people.

*If I could interview anyone - living or dead - it would be:* My mother - with her death came the irreplaceable loss of stories, information and tradition.

*One day I’d like to:* Have a granddaughter.

*A defining moment in my life was:* Telling my children that I was seriously ill. But the “real” defining part was promising them that I’d be well again, which I am!

*If I could convince people of one thing, it would be:* Because life is so unpredictable, it is vital to live everyday to the fullest, be kind to those around you, and appreciate the small, wonderful things in life.
Bridges For Families

by Mark Smith and Shirley Dean

Well, it’s been a busy year for pretty much everyone at the Institute! We continue to participate in activities directed at building the capacity, improving systems of support, and advocating for people with disabilities across the age-span along with their families. One major addition to this effort, was the addition of Shirley Dean, as the newest Consumer/Family Coordinator this past May.

We have both worked to provide support to individuals with disabilities and their families across a number of activities. Examples include Mark’s technical assistance activities with the Early Development Network and participation on the leadership team for the Together for Kids and Families grant, the Real Choice C-PAS and Quality Council grants, and the Maternal and Child Health Needs Assessment. Shirley has provided training on a number of topics, including Health Care Transition Planning, Americans with Disability Act, and Issues in Serving Adults with Disabilities. She is participating in the Workforce Development ADA Partners Group and continues to work on the development of the Transition Clinic for teens transitioning from pediatric to adult health care.

We have both continued to actively promote legislation and policy supportive to our constituents here in Nebraska through the Nebraska Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities and nationally through the AUCD network, the National Down Syndrome Society, and DEC, amongst others. We also have provided information and support on consumer and family concerns to our students through our LEND program and Project DOCC, where family trainers work directly with Pediatric Residents on rotation at the Institute on issues of chronic care of children with special healthcare needs and disabilities. We have continued to provide resource and referral services to consumers of Institute services and from the community at large. It has been a very busy and productive year.

Looking to 2006, there are a number of exciting new opportunities that we will be involved in. First and foremost, we will be developing a Leadership Training curriculum for family- and self-advocates that we plan to pilot later this spring and summer. This has created much interest amongst our colleagues and stakeholders across the state, and we anticipate significant outcomes in terms of increasing capacity in this area. Inside the Institute, you may recall seeing some mailings of pertinent information on disability-related topics from us. It is our intention to make available routine information updates “from the field” in terms of policy and practice in advocacy and disability-related topics in general. We intend to develop some “mini-training” opportunities on similar concerns, providing the chance for Institute departments to get informational updates at department staff meetings as the need may arise.

We want to take the opportunity to wish all of you the Happiest New Years!