

Published by the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities
"Helping people to live, learn and work in our community"

Book shares family's journey of love, resilience

As he sifted through the scattered photos – there were hundreds, along with videos, letters and school art projects – Michael Ramsey realized he had a bigger job than just organizing his family pictures.

"This was his legacy," Ramsey said of his son Eric, now 36. "And it was the way to tell his story long after I was gone. Sitting there in the living room, that's when I started writing the book."

Beside Me is a tribute to Eric, one of the triplet sons born to Ramsey and his wife, Sharon, less than a year after the couple had a baby daughter. All three boys were born with heart defects that required surgical repair.

Eric also became ill with viral meningitis, delaying his cardiac procedure and triggering complications so severe he came within hours of death. He emerged with cognitive disabilities and struggled to communicate. "About the only thing he did was just stare at himself in a mirror," Ramsey said. "He was able to walk, but he didn't speak."

And then one day, when he was around 12, Eric bounded ahead of his parents in a grocery-store parking lot. "Hold on, we'll be there," Ramsey remembers saying. Eric stopped, turned around and said, "Beside me?"

From that moment on, his language steadily improved. "He was just thriving," Ramsey said.

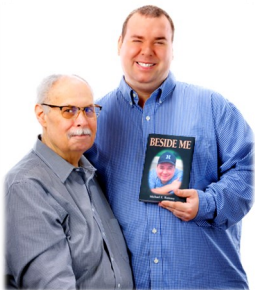
Though his developmental disabilities did not disappear, Eric found ways to excel. He couldn't play football, so he opted for water boy and social mascot. At Hilliard Davidson High School, he became "the kid who knew exactly when the football team was on a roll," Ramsey said. "He'd turn around and encourage the spectators and the whole team got involved."

Eric was named Senior of the Year and received the senior class "Heart of the Lion" award.

He remains active in Hilliard Special Olympics, loves movies and Broadway shows and his Indiana Jones-style hat. He's close to his brothers and sister, and shares a home with his parents in Dublin. In 2012, Eric helped his family found *Beside Me*, a day habilitation center for adults with disabilities.

Ramsey, a former radio broadcaster, is now retired "and enjoying my time as Eric's wingman." He hopes his son's story will be seen as one of love, perseverance and resilience. "I knew that somebody, somewhere down the road, was going to have to remember this."

Beside Me is available through Barnes and Noble and Amazon.



Provider Fair returns to state fairgrounds Sept. 2

The 2025 Franklin County DD Provider and Community Resource Fair is set for Tuesday, Sept. 2, in Kasich Hall at the Ohio Expo Center.

Hours are from 1 to 7 p.m.

The free event allows people with disabilities, families and caregivers to connect in-person with dozens of service providers and community-resource organizations.

- Admission and parking (in front of Kasich Hall) are free; food and drinks can be purchased from Schmidt's.
- Franklin County DD service coordinators will be on site to assist.
- Kasich Hall is fully accessible and will be equipped with a universal changing table.
- Visitors should plan on spending at least one hour. Individuals and families receiving services can contact their service coordinator or reach out to Anne Russell at 614-342-5550 or anne.russell@fcbdd.org for information.
- Providers who want to participate should contact Joni Sparks at 614-342-5964 or joni.sparks@fcbdd.org for details.

Ceremony honors West Central Class of 2025

As the gymnasium filled with applause for her son, Athena Wilkins basked in an unexpected joy. After so many years of worry, Myreon was notching a big milestone. Both he and his mom were all smiles.

"I'm grateful," Wilkins said. "God allowed my baby to see 18, to grow up, and to graduate. That means so much."

Myreon was among the 19 members of the West Central School Class of 2025 honored this spring during the school's 47th annual graduation ceremony. Families, caregivers, teachers and school staff all were vital to the students' success, Principal Rebecca Holthaus said.

"Our graduates are a shining example of that collaborative effort," said Holthaus, who retired in June from her position at the transition-age school.

Franklin County DD Superintendent/CEO Dot Yeager served as master of ceremonies and Steve Carr, a former West Central principal and retired Director of Special Education at South Western City Schools, was the featured speaker.

"Never stop advocating for your children," said Carr, who also had a son with disabilities. "No one knows your child better than you."

Jennifer McLeon said her daughter, Zoe, thrived at West Central. "I only wish that she'd started here sooner," McLeon said. "What she's done here in that relatively short amount of time has been amazing."



2025 Graduates

Aaliyah Allen
Khamani Bailey
Giovanni Chuop
Ahmed Disuki
Ilham Haji
Dominique Kelly
Devin Kirk
Omar "Dani" Limon
Zoe McNeil
Sendy Molina
Gerardo Morales-Roblero
Bishaaro Mursal
Gabriel "Gabby" Needham
Trevor Pickell
Kaleb Samson
Daniel Seymour
Mi'Esha Thompson
Shamell White
Myreon Wilkins

Agency welcomes new West Central School principal

Amy Comford, an occupational therapist who has spent almost all of her 30-year career in schools, has joined Franklin County DD as principal of West Central School and Transition Services.

Comford replaces Rebecca Holthaus, who retired in June.

"Amy is a conscientious and dynamic leader. Her enthusiasm for our students and their families and support of our staff is contagious," said Joe Petrarca, Director of Educational and Shared Services at Franklin County DD. "She is a welcome addition to our team!"

Comford most recently served as supervisor of the Occupational and Physical Therapy Department at Columbus City Schools. She also led the district's assistive technology team, which positions her well to help guide tech efforts at West Central, Petrarca said.



A Hilliard resident, Comford was employed by Hilliard City Schools from 2005 until 2017, working with students of all ages with various physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities.

She's eager to work closely with the teens and young adults at West Central. "I've been missing having more interaction with students and families," Comford said. "I enjoy the diversity; I enjoy learning about different backgrounds. It's a good way to end out my career, being with kids and families again."

Kim Hauck retires as director of DODD

Kim Hauck, who served the developmental disabilities community as a direct-support professional, county board staff member and state employee before being named director of the Ohio Department of Disabilities, retired on June 27.



She had led the state agency since 2022.

"The decision comes after much thought and reflection," Hauck said in a memo to the community. "It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve in this role and to work alongside so many committed partners who share a deep dedication to supporting people with developmental disabilities."

Hauck said that, during her 34-year career, she has witnessed substantial progress for people with developmental disabilities, including strengthened services, expanded community options and a focus on improving lives.

Teen honored with Archie Griffin Sportsmanship Award

Racing around the track, which she does at a blistering pace, Aviva Pearce feels free. Worries and troubles can't catch her.

"I do love it," the 14-year-old said. "It takes away all my problems."

Aviva was recently selected by her school as this year's winner of the Archie Griffin Sportsmanship Award, the highest honor a middle-school athlete can receive in Ohio. She has been the MVP of her Pleasant View Middle School track team, and she does well academically.

Aviva also happens to have autism.

"I really do think she should be acknowledged for her accomplishments," said Aviva's mom, Aja Farris. "I'm elated and proud."

Learning that her daughter would be accepting the Archie Griffin Award "was just euphoria," said Farris, a firefighter with the Columbus Division of Fire. "We literally went out and bought gowns. We were overdressed, and we loved it."

Kevin Yuhás, Aviva's service coordinator at Franklin County DD, said he's never worked with such a successful, focused young athlete. "I think the training that she's doing now – weight training, running – it helps her feel calm. Competing does wonders for how she views herself," he said. "She's found this thing that's her thing."

Always an energetic child, Aviva had been a gymnast. "Then she came up to me and said, 'Mom, I'm done with gymnastics. I want to run track,'" Farris said. Aviva excels in the 100, 200 and 400-meter dashes, and set a new school record in the 400-meter dash.

Yuhás said Aviva's family is close-knit and dedicated to helping her thrive. "There's a lot of strength in the family, and they're very supportive of each other."

Seeing Aviva find her niche means so much, Farris said. She told one of the coaches, "My daughter is good. And she's going to be great."



Parenting course a plus for Early Childhood families

From grocery-store meltdowns and bedtime battles to hitting and biting, young children often seem to specialize in difficult behaviors. And parents can feel even more challenged, if not outright overwhelmed, when their children also have a developmental disability or delay.

"A lot of times I just don't go places," said one mom of preschool-age twins. "It's just too hard."

But there are ways to make life easier, and she and a handful of other parents and caregivers whose children attend Franklin County DD Early Childhood Education programs are learning new strategies and approaches.

They recently took part in a Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) course led by Debi Hill of Nationwide Children's Hospital. The free parenting discussion classes, arranged by Franklin County DD social worker Beth Warner, help families deal with problems in ways that encourage positive behavior.

"When we started this, my arms were covered in scratches and bites," one mom said. "Now, that's happening so much less."

Another said she's grateful for the support and friendship of others in the class. "Just feeling less alone helps," she said.

The classes were such a success that Warner already has another course scheduled. And veterans of the first plan to continue meeting. "It's just super cool that an ongoing support group developed from this," Warner said. "That was wonderful news."

For more information, email elizabeth.warner@fcbdd.org



Community Star Awards set for Wednesday, October 8 at The Boathouse at Confluence Park - new venue!

2025 Community Star Awards
Wednesday evening, Oct. 8
at the Boathouse at
Confluence Park

To register for the event,
please use the link below to
eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2025-community-star-awards-tickets-1493553722389>



The 2025 Community Star Awards will be held on Wednesday, October 8. The annual event, sponsored by the Citizens Committee for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, takes place at **The Boathouse at Confluence Park**, 679 W. Spring Street, Columbus.

The committee invites supporters to gather for an evening of fun, dinner and to celebrate this year's winners.

Social hour begins at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and the awards program from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Cost is \$50 per person with all proceeds benefiting the Committee. Zayne Harshaw and Blue Spectrum band, winner of the 2024 Columbus Blues Alliance Blues Challenge, will provide the entertainment.

Register online by September 19: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2025-community-star-awards-tickets-1493553722389>

For assistance with registration, please contact Beth Cimprich at ARC Industries: bcimprich@arcind.com or by phone at 614-479-2500.

Registration open, scholarships available for TechSummit

A limited number of scholarships are available to support people with disabilities and family members who register to attend the 2025 TechSummit, set for Sept. 12 at the Conference Center at OCLC in Dublin.

The event provides opportunities to learn about current and emerging technology solutions to help people with developmental disabilities who want more independence in their lives.

Keynote speaker is Rylin Rodgers, Disability Policy Director for Microsoft.

To learn more or register, visit <https://nisonger.osu.edu/technology-project/techsummit2025/> or scan the QR code on the image.



Good For You

Notable achievements in the Franklin County DD community

We're deeply grateful for all the decades of service provided by the School-Age and Early Childhood staff members who recently retired (or soon will) from Franklin County DD. Together, they represent many lifetimes of dedicated care to children and young adults with developmental disabilities and delays, as well as their families. Thanks hardly seem sufficient. Happy trails and all the best to:

West Central School/School-Age program: Diane Capretta (secretary), Jennifer Crawford (adapted physical education instructor), Rebecca Holthaus (principal), Shanon Mason (instructor assistant), Johanna Nitz (occupational therapist), Eileen Steele (speech language pathologist), Lynn Watkins (instructor), and Cindy White (instructor assistant).

Early Childhood: Carol Beverage (instructor), Pamela Harvey (physical therapist), and Ann Horton (physical therapist).



Thank
You

Thanks to all the staff members who contributed to the Franklin County Operation Feed Campaign, benefitting the Mid-Ohio Food Collective. Franklin County DD raised more than \$3,300 and collected nearly 100 pounds of food, enough to provide 8,526 meals to community members in need!

Career Milestones

35 Years

Shanon Mason
Eugenia Ray

30 Years

Christopher Meek

25 Years

Catherine Berner
Julie Manyo
Mary Beth Poe

20 Years

Christina Conrad
Amy Frick
Patti Sanieel-Banrey

15 Years

Lindsey Cooper
Maureen Halaiko
Megan Middleton
Jessica Miller
Stephanie Perez

10 Years

Taylor Carter
Ivett Domalewski
Meghan Dus
Carey Humphreys

5 Years

Erin Brown-Lewis
Katie Clay
Allison Foster
Clorissa Potts
Julie Voss

Franklin County Flyers soar at Summer Games

Nearly 100 Franklin County Flyers joined other athletes from throughout the state for the 2025 Special Olympics Ohio Summer Games, held in June at the Ohio State University Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium.

Special Olympics Ohio also is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and during Opening Ceremonies honored former Franklin County DD Superintendent/CEO Jed Morison as part of the 2025 inaugural class for its Hall of Fame.

Morison, who retired in 2023, helped launch Special Olympics Ohio. A celebration and induction ceremony are planned for October 11.



Calendar

July 2025

- 17 Franklin County DD Early Childhood Education - **Johnstown Road** and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through at 5:00 p.m. (while supplies last) in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, contact Sarah Gillilan at 614-342-5803.
- 24 Franklin County DD Board meeting, at 5 p.m. at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus. Board member in-service begins at 3 p.m. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details.

FCBDD Board Meeting Link:
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSU>

August 2025

- 13 Franklin County DD Early Childhood Learning Community (ECLC) and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through at 4:30 p.m. at ECLC, **4141 Rudy Road**, Columbus, 43214. For more details, email Gretchen Uhl at gretchen.uhl@fcbdd.org
- 21 Franklin County DD Early Childhood Education - **Johnstown Road** and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through at 5:00 p.m. (while supplies last) in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, contact Sarah Gillilan at 614-342-5803.

Dateline

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The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities does not discriminate in employment or services on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, or disability.

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www.fcbdd.org



Community invited to SOS autism clinic grand opening

Success on the Spectrum (SOS), a new autism therapy clinic in Whitehall, is hosting a beach-themed, sensory-friendly event to celebrate its grand opening.



Families, partner organizations and other members of the community are invited to visit from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Saturday, July 26, at SOS Whitehall, 1021 Country Club Rd.

REGISTER HERE!



SOS Whitehall is an autism therapy franchise operated by ARC Autism Services, LLC, a new subsidiary of ARC Voyagers (formerly ARC Industries). The clinic specializes in therapy for children with autism age 18 months to 18 years, including ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy.

Founded in 2015 in by Nichole Daher, a parent of a child with autism, SOS has dozens of locations throughout the United States. The ARC-owned clinic in Whitehall is central Ohio's first.

Free tickets for the grand opening are available at:
<https://bit.ly/441R8jz>

Can't make it but still want a tour?
Email asmith@arcind.com

Action alert: Tell Congress not to cut DD programs



Action Alert!

Tell Congress to protect programs for people with developmental disabilities



The proposed federal budget recommends drastic cuts or elimination of funding to Disability Rights Ohio, the Ohio State University Nisonger Center and the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

These programs provide vital services – education, dental care, rights investigations and more – that help more than 40,000 Ohioans live safer, healthier, more independent lives.

There's still time to make your voice heard.

Call, email, write a letter, or send a message to your member of Congress urging them to fully fund disability programs and reject cuts.

Learn more or submit a message here:
https://secure.everyaction.com/3m4Mh5xAbkWFUIqvKoQK_A2