

# NUTLEY SUN

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



### Beyond the classroom

School helps with community-based instruction for special needs students to gain shopping experience. **PAGE, 3**



Nutley American Association of University Women members Nina Del Collo, left, and Joanna Conrad, right, with daughter, Katarina, who participated in AAUW's recent Tech Trek at Stockton University. COURTESY OF NINA

## 7TH-GRADERS GET NATIONAL RECOGNITION

**OWEN PROCTOR**  
STAFF WRITER @OWENPROCTOR1

Two seventh-graders at Nutley's Walker Middle School were picked to take part in some prestigious endeavors recently.

On Oct. 12, Katarina Guimary shared

her Tech Trek science camp experience with the Nutley chapter of the American Association of University Women.

The hands-on STEM camp, designed to develop interest, excitement and self-confidence in girls entering eighth grade, entails a weeklong residence at Stockton University in Galloway, N.J.,



Rubino Ryder Team



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### NUTLEY

Glass enclosed front porch is perfect segue into gorgeous Victorian vestibule & staircase. Open floor plan for living & entertaining area. New kitchen w/ granite & wood cabinets, still maintains the integrity of the period. Three bedrooms, master bedroom w/ French doors. Spacious yard with outside electric for pool or decorative lighting. Additional amenities. Windows have been updated, with exception of the original stained glass on staircase. Close to school, center of town.

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# Special needs students gain shopping experience

## School helps with community-based instruction

OWEN PROCTOR

STAFF WRITER @OWENPROCTOR1

Mayra Pastore cut her son's hair for years, and any trips to a grocery store, department store or restaurant required another pair of hands to help with Danny.

When her son aged out of the Bloomfield School District's elementary special needs program, she decided to send him to a private institution in 2010. Since then, Danny has attended The Phoenix Center, where he has benefitted from its community-based instruction, or CBI, she said.

"As he has grown, he has learned independent vocational and life skills," according to Pastore. In addition to home chores such as making his bed and folding clothes, the 19-year-old can now get a haircut, go out to eat and shop with less assistance.

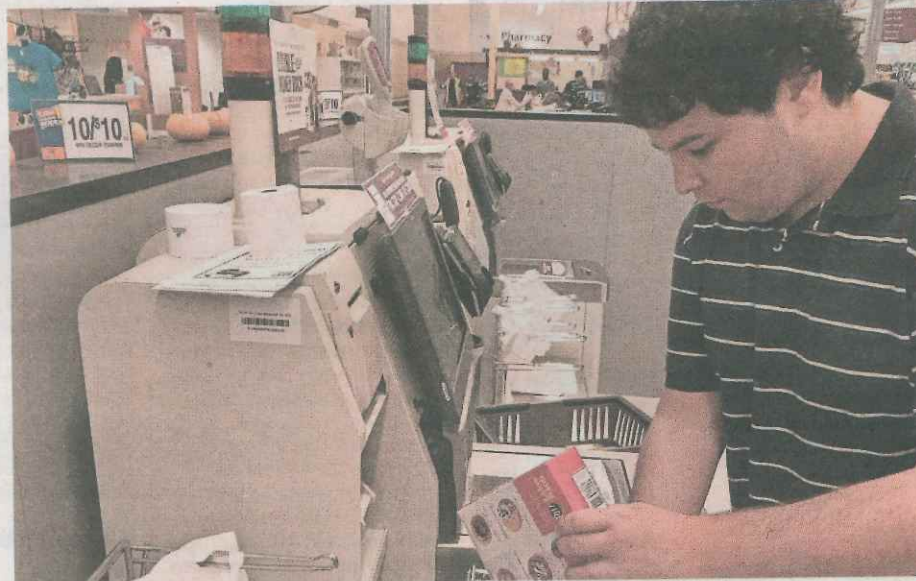
Danny, who is non-verbal autistic, helps her reach items on the higher shelves. He communicates via an iPod, a device that has served him the best through the years, his mother noted.

"They're daily living skills that we all take for granted, and I never thought he could do," she said of his personal growth. "Since he was 2 to 4 years old, we were told when he's 21, he'll 'fall off a cliff, and you're not going to be able to do anything with him.'"

### Beyond the classroom

The Phoenix Center, a nonprofit special needs school, started in 1991 in Woodland Park. Today, it operates in St. Mary's Church's former parochial school in Nutley.

A total of 140 students are enrolled from 61 towns and eight New Jersey counties.



Terry from The Phoenix Center checks out at the Stop & Shop in Clifton. OWEN PROCTOR/NORTHJERSEY.COM

When a school district qualifies a student for an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, a child study team has to find the appropriate education experience and accommodations for that student's specific needs, if the district cannot provide those in-district.

The school district pays tuition to The Phoenix Center, which also raises money through fundraisers, grants and donations.

"One of our main goals at The Phoenix Center is to prepare our students for life beyond the classroom," executive director Julie Mower said. "We'll practice the skills in the classroom, modify shopping lists to meet the students' individualized needs, and then bring them out into the community to practice those skills and make sure those skills are generalized."

"We make sure the classroom comes to life in the community," Phoenix Center co-founder and Executive Director Emeritus Geraldine Gibbia added.

"They need this more than anything in the community to help themselves and

their families," Transition Coordinator Laureen Protomastro said.

### Getting ready

For 16- to 20-year-olds, CBI starts in a classroom on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Using smart boards, Amanda Burner and Anthony Genchi prepare students for a trip to Stop & Shop or Target, both just across the border in Clifton. The classmates make shopping lists and recap store departments, as well as identify food items, shopping carts and check-out areas.

"You have to practice, practice, practice," noted Gibbia. Basic tasks have to be taught, such as operating a shopping cart, finding food, patiently waiting in line, using a conveyor belt, bagging and paying.

CBI Co-Manager Marc Restaino said the classroom teachers electronically track the students' progress daily.

Each student has a paraprofessional to assist in the classroom and in the

store. Students with sensory concerns may wear headsets. Some use equipment to help them talk.

### In store

After class, the students are immediately bused to the stores in real time with real money.

"They do a fantastic job with them," Stop & Shop Assistant Manager Eileen Sullivan said of The Phoenix Center employees.

The Butler resident also notices the impact on other customers, who will ask about the students if they are not there.

"People sometimes step back before they realize the students can do the same things they can do," Sullivan observed.

"One parent said, 'It is wonderful to have people want to see my child,'" Protomastro added.

Parents sometimes send their money and a grocery list from home, but the center usually provides a money allotment per classroom. Food bought by the center can be used for school activities, such as a cooking class.

Younger students also participate in CBI once a month, said Mower. Activities may include going to a park and other community trips to acclimate them to the general population.

### Employability

"The community-based instruction leads right into the employability piece," Mower noted. Some of the older students already are employed, working with a job coach, who is also kept abreast of the student's progress in school.

Danny was due to start work on Oct. 16 at Zinburger in Paramus, according to his mother, who said he'll ease in, working an hour a week.

"Getting our students ready to be in the community, bringing them to their highest level of independence, and employability are [some of] our main goals," affirmed Mower.

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