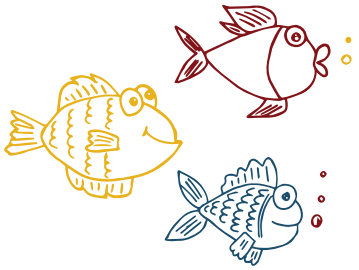
FALL 2026:
APPRECIATING EVERY VOICE, CELEBRATING EVERY VICTORY

Preparing students for THE PHOENIX CENTER CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE *life beyond the classroom*

est. 1991

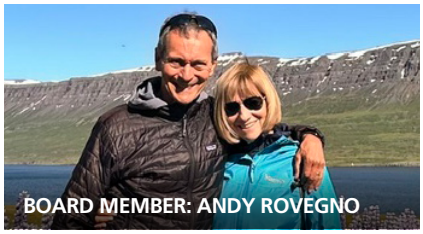
FOCUS ON PHOENIX



What's Inside

HONORING THE LASTING IMPACT OF LAUREEN PROTOMASTRO

TPC TURNED 35 IN SEPTEMBER


BOARD MEMBER: ANDY ROVEGNO

SPREADING HOPE AND HARMONY

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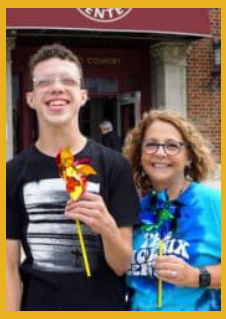
A Message FROM the Executive Director



Dear Phoenix Center Family,

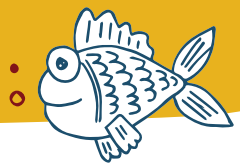
As we begin our 36th year, our mission remains our primary purpose: to serve our students and their families by helping them uncover their full potential. It is my honor, as Executive Director, to continue this legacy of educational excellence.

This year, our theme is *Appreciating Every Voice, Celebrating Every Victory*. This focus highlights our deep gratitude for one another, our students, and their families, while honoring every step and accomplishment along the way. The Phoenix Center's strength lies in our rich diversity of ideas, backgrounds, and experiences. Every educator, staff member, student, and family brings something invaluable to the table. We are deeply committed to listening closely, valuing everyone's perspective, and ensuring everyone feels heard and included as they bravely reach for and achieve their goals.

Growth isn't just marked by giant milestones—it's built on daily wins. Whether it's a breakthrough moment with a student, the successful implementation of a new strategy, or supporting each other through a tough day, we are making a conscious effort to recognize and honor progress, big or small. This theme beautifully complements our longstanding commitment to the FISH! Philosophy, as our dedicated staff extend kindness, respect, and presence to our students, their families, and each other every day in our collective effort to make a lifelong positive impact.

Working together with our dedicated staff, parents, and school districts is at the heart of our mission. This crucial partnership allows us to discover the unique gifts and talents of each student and prepare them for a successful life beyond the classroom.

With gratitude,
Julie Mower, M.A.Ed,
Executive Director



The mission of The Phoenix Center, working in partnership with families and community, is to develop the potential of each student with developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum ages five through 21 and to provide customized, unique, and individualized programs aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Promoting the development of the whole student, we care for, educate, and empower our students and graduates so that they will develop life-centered skills which will prepare them for life beyond the classroom.

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Honoring the Lasting Impact of Laureen Protomastro

Among the many individuals who have shaped the heart and spirit of The Phoenix Center, few left as profound a mark as Laureen Protomastro. Following her peaceful passing on June 29, 2026, we take time in this issue to reflect on her 30 incredible years of service and the enduring legacy she leaves behind.

Before her retirement in 2024, Laureen served our community in such vital roles as a Special Education Teacher, Intake Coordinator, and TPC's founding Transition Coordinator. Her deep knowledge of special education, combined with her innate ability to match students with vocational opportunities outside the classroom, embodied TPC's mission of preparing students for life beyond the classroom. Without her guidance, this program would not be what it is today.

Her work as Intake Coordinator was equally vital, as she helped bring so many students into our community. For many years, Laureen worked tirelessly to welcome new students, while simultaneously supporting graduating students and their families.

Across three decades, her combination of gentle guidance and fierce advocacy transformed the lives of countless students and provided steady support to their families. She championed every student who walked through our doors, ensuring they were empowered to reach their full potential.

Her lifelong devotion to our students and mission continues to inspire our work every day.

TPC Turned 35 Last Month!

Born in September 1991, The Phoenix Center is officially a Millennial, and a Virgo at that. (Organized, detail-oriented, and deeply committed to doing things right? Sounds about right.) We celebrated our 35th birthday at the Gala with cake, candles, and a room full of over 200 people who love this school. Happy 35th, TPC – here's to many more!

FOCUS ON BOARD MEMBER

ANDY ROVEGNO

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED IN SUPPORTING SPECIAL EDUCATION?

My cousin Warren was born with special needs when I was 10. Doctors said he wouldn't live past ten, which made a big impression on me. As the years passed, I watched his family's love and support, along with special programs, keep him active and at the center of family life. Warren rode in the sidecar of his brother-in-law's motorcycle and became an honorary member of the American Legion Riders. He passed at sixty-eight. His life wasn't easy, but he was happy and brought joy to everyone around him. That experience showed me the importance of advocacy and of helping people maximize their abilities.

WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A BOARD MEMBER AT TPC?

I reconnected with a high school friend, Kevin, and former teammate who was married to Dr. G. Small world! Dr. G. offered my daughter, a special education student, an opportunity to spend time at TPC during summer break. Friendships developed, I saw TPC in action, and Dr. G invited me to join the board.

WHAT DO YOU THINK SEPARATES TPC FROM OTHER SCHOOLS?

The staff is fully engaged with students and consistently brings creative approaches to learning. The mission is visible in the individualized curriculum and in the range of activities available, from sports to performing arts to life-centered skills. The Friends of TPC Foundation complements the mission by funding extracurricular activities, technology upgrades, and vehicles.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE TPC TRADITION OR ACTIVITY?

The Holiday and Spring Concerts. Every student is featured and gets to show what they can do. It is always exciting to watch parents take in their child's progress. I often hear how much TPC means to a family.

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF DURING YOUR TIME ON THE BOARD?

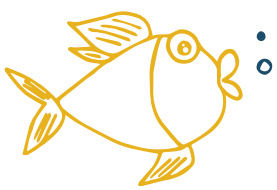
Over the course of 16 years, I have served as Board Treasurer, Executive Committee Member, and Finance Committee Chair. While Committee Chair, we strengthened internal controls, created a budget presentation format to help explain financials to the full board, developed an Investment Policy Statement, and participated in strategic planning.

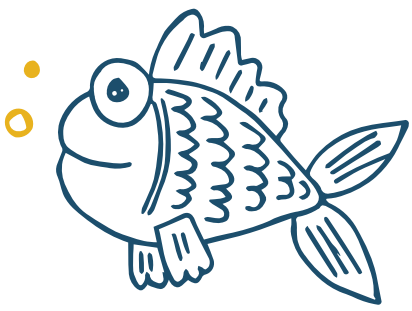
WHAT DO YOU HOPE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES TAKE AWAY AFTER GRADUATION?

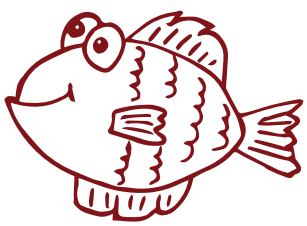
I want them to feel that TPC gave their child the best possible foundation, and that they leave prepared for life after school. I also hope they become advocates for TPC and find ways to give back. We already have graduate parents serving on the board who are great examples of that, and I hope they inspire others.

TELL US ONE THING MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU.

I was editor of my high school, Bergen Catholic's newspaper. The sports reporter my senior year, Bill Madden, was later inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.







Spreading Hope and Harmony

Pinwheels for Peace Brings Smiles to Our School!

On Friday, September 18th, we celebrated Pinwheels for Peace, a global art project where participants "plant" pinwheels in support of the International Day of Peace. Students, staff, and volunteers came together to "plant" vibrant pinwheels across our school grounds, creating a powerful visual symbol of unity and peace.

Team members at S&P Global, who were participating in their Global Volunteer Week, sponsored this fun event. We are grateful to our friends at S&P Global for including TPC in their week of service. Having corporate partners who invest real time and energy into our students' environment makes a lasting difference.

This connection was made possible by Matthew, father of TPC student Simone. The S&P volunteer team, led by Matthew, Head of Public Finance, and Laura, Managing Director of Education and Not-for-Profits, worked side-by-side with TPC staff to make the morning memorable. Through S&P's generosity, students planted pinwheels and received some sweet treats along the way.

Seeing dozens of pinwheels spinning in the breeze was a heartwarming reminder of what can be achieved when families, community members, and corporate partners come together for a common goal. Thank you to everyone who pitched in to make this day a highlight of our school year!

50/50 Raffle

Our 50/50 Raffle is Back. And This One Really is a Win-Win!

Every ticket purchased helps The Phoenix Center invest in computers, laptops, iPads, Chromebooks, and other technology that supports hands-on learning, communication, and engagement for our students. And for one lucky person? Half the jackpot!

Want to win big while making a real difference? Grab your tickets today for $50 each, or bundle 3 for $100! Every ticket supports TPC and keeps our students connected to top-tier technology. Take advantage of the 3-for-$100 deal to triple your chances to win! The drawing is Tuesday, November 17th at 10:00 a.m. in the TPC Cafeteria. You do not need to be present to win.

How to Enter

Click or scan here

Scan the QR code and mail your completed form or call/email to participate:

Betty Astacio: 973.542.0743 ext. 305 or bastacio@thephoenixcenternj.org

Thank you for being part of our community. Good luck!

Brewing Something Special at The Phoenix Center

In honor of National Coffee Day (September 29) and International Coffee Day (October 1), we wanted to shine a light on one of TPC's most exciting new programs: The Brew Crew.

The Brew Crew is a student-led vocational program made up of 10 to 12 Phoenix Center students, co-facilitated by speech and occupational therapists. Each week, students prepare, sell, and deliver iced coffee to staff throughout the building. What a great pick-me-up to end the day!

What makes this new program so impactful is that the students have a hand in every decision: what product to make, which ingredients to buy, how to design the order forms. Those forms were created to accommodate learners of all levels, allowing each student to independently read, interpret, and follow the steps needed to fill every order. Following a full year of planning, the program successfully launched last spring. Now students prepare and deliver iced coffee to staff twice a week as an end-of-the-day boost.

The results speak for themselves. Students show up with pride and enthusiasm. They are building real, functional skills: communication, social participation, executive functioning, and vocational readiness. These are not simulated tasks. This is the real thing.

Visit **thephoenixcenternj.org** to see the recent NJ.com and News12 features on the Brew Crew!

WHY NOT SUBSCRIBE TO TPC?

You subscribe to your phone plan, your streaming services, your gym, your apps. Most of us are already spending $10 to $50 a month on things we barely think about.

What if one of those subscriptions supported TPC instead?

A recurring monthly donation is one of the most meaningful ways to help our students, year-round. It is tax-deductible, automatic, and it adds up in ways that make a real difference. No event ticket required!

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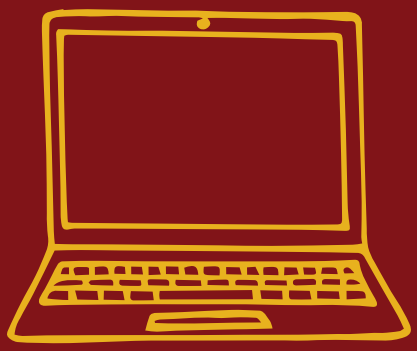

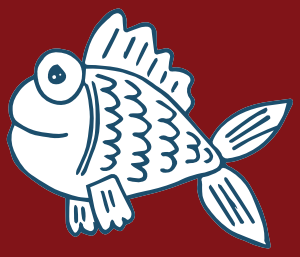

GONE PAPERLESS

A QUICK NOTE

The Phoenix Center's newsletter has gone paperless. That means we need your email address. If we do not have it on file, we may lose track of you, and we really do not want that!

To continue receiving updates, stories, event announcements, and news from The Phoenix Center, please scan or click the QR code and submit your preferred email address.

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