

Inspiration

news & events at Blythedale Children's Hospital

Spring 2021

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Blythedale Marches Forward with Major Facilities Projects

Five ribbon cutting ceremonies in nine-and-a-half years and counting! A remarkable feat for a safety net hospital. > continued on page 3

Kirk's Connection: Joyful Baby Recovers from Near Drowning



First-birthday memories are usually filled with family, friends, balloons and big pieces of cake. That was not the case for Kirk and his family. Instead, there were chest compressions, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and a frantic drive to the emergency room.

In August 2020, the joy-filled, healthy little boy was found unresponsive and without a pulse in a pond at his first birthday party.

"His dad saw him face up and we threw him in the car. I drove and dad

performed CPR," said Catherine Herrmann, Kirk's mom. "He ended up being flown to Westchester Medical Center and was in the ICU for two weeks."

The rapid response of Kirk's parents and medical professionals saved his life after a cardiac arrest from near drowning. But, he had sustained an anoxic brain injury. The lack of oxygen to Kirk's brain resulted in seizures, neurological deficits, difficulty swallowing that necessitated

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Letter from the CEO

Dear friends,

I hope this note finds you and your loved ones healthy, happy and hopeful. Spring often brings with it a fresh perspective and the promise of new opportunities. While our community and our nation struggle to heal from unspeakable loss and heartache suffered throughout the last year, 2021 brings much-needed hope and reason for optimism.

Here at Blythedale, we are moving forward with the fourth phase of our \$143 million master facilities plan. This ensures we can serve even more medically fragile children who require our highly specialized care.

We are grateful for the speed with which our staff was vaccinated against COVID-19. And because of our diligence in following all precautions, our Day Hospital program and School have remained open for in-person learning since July 6 of last year.

As always, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your support and friendship. Together we are building a brighter future.

Sincerely,



Larry Levine
President & CEO



Tips for Communicating When Families Disagree on the COVID-19 Vaccine

As COVID-19 vaccine eligibility expands nationwide, some families are struggling when relatives refuse the shot, yet still want to visit and spend time with kids who aren't able to receive the vaccine yet.

How do you handle this situation while still protecting your children? What do you say?

Dr. Linda Drozdowicz, M.D., Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist at Blythedale Children's Hospital and Assistant Clinical Professor at the Yale Child Study Center at the Yale School of Medicine, offers the following suggestions:

- Remember that, theoretically, you love your family members and try not to let anger take over the conversation. Your goal is to figure out a solution that works.
- You and any other co-parent involved make the final health decisions for your children, even if other people do not agree with you.
- Use "I" statements and not "you" statements. Explain your concerns and the reasons for your decision, without inviting debate into the decision itself. For example, "I am worried about the unknown long-term effects of this disease in children. That is why I am not allowing my children to interact with unvaccinated people without certain precautions."



- Decide what conditions you would consider safe and acceptable in order for unvaccinated relatives to interact with your children (i.e. video visits, outdoor/indoor masked visits, etc.). Communicate alternatives to your relatives so that they know you want to make things work, but only in a way that you feel safe with.

Dr. Drozdowicz is board certified in Psychiatry with expertise in child and adolescent psychiatry, anxiety and mood disorders, and working with parents to help kids and families cope with a variety of subjects. She was recently featured in the LA Times and Inside Edition after the Capitol attacks, providing caregivers with recommendations on how best to comfort and engage children in productive dialogue.

She joined Blythedale's medical staff last year as part of an exciting clinical affiliation with Yale School of Medicine, funded through the generous support of the John L. and Hope L. Furth Child Psychiatry Endowment Fund.

Construction (cont.)

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And so, Blythedale Children's Hospital has much to celebrate with the opening of yet another new space. In April, the Hospital officially cut the ribbon on its new \$5 million administrative suite. The 11,164-square-foot "Oval" houses a number of important Hospital support services, including Human Resources, Volunteers, Development, Marketing & Communications, Environmental Services, Finance/Accounting, Payroll, Employee Health, Health Information Management, Patient Accounts, and the Medical Staff support team.

Blythedale is in its fourth and most recent phase of its master facilities plan which began with the construction of a replacement inpatient hospital building with all new patient care rooms. The beautiful state-of-the-art facility opened in December 2011, followed by the expansion of the Day Hospital in 2013, and the relocation of the Stavros Niarchos Center for Speech & Audiology to modern facilities in 2014. Blythedale filled a critical need in New York State by building a new pediatric long-term care facility in 2016, thanks to the generosity of the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation. The Hospital kicked off its final phase of construction with the



Above: One of the newly renovated rooms on the Hospital's Brain Injury Unit; On the cover, pictured, left to right: Charlie Lewis, Lendlease; John Flanagan, Blythedale Vice President of Operations; Rich Steimel, Lendlease SVP; Larry Levine, Blythedale President & CEO; Sandee Ramlall, Lendlease Project Manager; Jill Wegener, Blythedale Chief Nursing Officer; Scott Klein, M.D., Blythedale Chief Medical Officer; John Canning, Blythedale Chief Financial Officer

expansion of the number of beds on its Traumatic Brain Injury Unit, New York State's only certified pediatric brain injury unit.

By moving the administrative functions into the new Oval, the Hospital can now start construction on a much-needed new pharmacy that will more than double in size. In addition, work is underway to significantly expand the Therapy Village where physical and

"Blythedale has invested \$143 million (2009-2022) in facilities, patient care technology, and infrastructure to match the outstanding care provided to medically complex patients," said the Hospital's President & CEO, Larry Levine. "Because of our financial discipline and stewardship, combined with our generous donors, we have been able to accomplish so much without incurring significant debt."

"In fact," he continued, "Blythedale

"Our end goal is to improve the patient experience. When the construction is over and the workers, architects and engineers leave, we know we will have something exciting and transformative for our patients, families, staff, and community. It's all part of the Blythedale Difference."

occupational therapy services take place. The expansion of this new space has been supported by a \$2 million gift, courtesy of a generous donor and friend to the Hospital who wishes to remain anonymous. And just before the summer starts, construction will begin to modernize the Simulation Lab, which will more than double the space for parent and caregiver training.

has one of the lowest debt service coverage ratios when compared to other hospitals within New York State. By having minimal debt, the Hospital will not be saddled with significant mortgage payments going forward. That's why philanthropy is so vital."

John Flanagan, Blythedale's Vice President of Operations, has been the point person to oversee Phase 4

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At left: John Flanagan, Blythedale's Vice President of Operations, surveys progress in the Hospital's new Therapy Village.

Kelly Clarkson, Rob Thomas, Johnny Rzeznik & More Headline WCBS-FM's Virtual Holiday Benefit for Blythedale

For the last 29 years, Scott Shannon has broadcast his final radio show of the year live from Blythedale and has raised more than \$4 million for the Hospital.

This past December, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the beloved in-person, holiday tradition hosted by WCBS-FM's *Scott Shannon in the Morning with Patty Steele* was held virtually to protect the health and safety of Blythedale's medically complex population.

But rest assured, there was no shortage of love and magic as Scott and Patty brought an all-star line-up to entertain the kids and hospital staff via closed-circuit TV.

Listeners enjoyed performances



by singer-songwriter/actress/author/TV host Kelly Clarkson, Matchbox Twenty lead singer Rob Thomas (back for his 21st consecutive appearance), Grammy nominated singer-songwriter Johnny Rzeznik of the Goo Goo Dolls, Billy Joel's longtime saxophonist Mark Rivera, and Tim McLoone with Holiday Express. Santa and Mrs. Claus also made an appearance, assuring Blythedale's patients that, despite the pandemic, they would be stopping by the Hospital to safely deliver presents.

This year's event raised nearly \$80,000 for Blythedale's Traumatic Brain Injury program.

"This is always everyone's favorite day of the year at the Hospital, and we are thrilled to be going virtual dur-

ing this challenging time that prevents us from celebrating in person," said Blythedale President & CEO Larry Levine. "Scott has truly transformed countless lives through this annual benefit. We are so grateful to everyone at WCBS-FM and all the artists who give so generously of their time to brighten the holidays for our kids."

Many thanks to those who so generously donated sandwiches, treats and coffee for Blythedale staff and patient families to enjoy during the virtual show, including Artuso & Sons Bakery (Thornwood), Duck Donuts (Mamaroneck), Silvio's Restaurant & Pizzeria (Thornwood), Rockland Bakery and Starbucks (Mount Kisco).

Construction (cont.)

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construction. "We've been fortunate to be able to bring back our architects from E4H, and dedicated project managers, Lendlease," he said.

E4H has served as the architects at Blythedale since the very beginning of the Hospital's master facilities plan. They've designed every aspect of

the child-friendly facility to support the unique needs of medically fragile children and their families. Lendlease has been Blythedale's project management and construction firm throughout, providing superb service while being particularly sensitive to minimizing disruption in a hospital setting.

"Construction at a hospital takes meticulous coordination and planning,

transparent communication and flexibility to reassess," Flanagan, "Our end goal is to improve the patient experience. When the construction is over and the workers, architects and engineers leave, we know we will have something exciting and transformative for our patients, families, staff, and community. It's all part of the Blythedale Difference."

Blythedale Bookworms Build Libraries, One Story at a Time



Here at Blythedale we understand the importance of reading... and reading often! Blythedale Bookworms launched in 2019 through the Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy program in an effort to encourage bedside reading during hospitalization and to build the libraries of our patients and families. Books were given out at the bedside for families to enjoy together and keep, in hopes these resources and enjoyment for reading will follow them home.

Through our Blythedale Bookworms initiative, we have successfully placed developmentally appropriate books in the hands of more than 250 children since the initiative began in 2019.

In February, Blythedale Bookworms partnered with the Hospital's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force for a celebration of Black History Month. The initiative featured titles with diverse protagonists and highlighted important figures from American history with stories recorded by luminaries in our very own Blythedale community.



A Celebration of
Blythedale
children's hospital

Commemorating 130 Years of Excellence

SAVE THE DATE!

**Tuesday,
October 26, 2021
6:00 pm**

*For event details, please visit
www.blythedale.onlinegalas.com*

Join us as we honor:



Manny Chirico
Chairman,
PVH Corp



David R. Pedowitz
Senior Portfolio Manager &
Managing Director,
Neuberger Berman
Former Board Chair, Trustee
Blythedale Children's Hospital

For early sponsorship opportunities or more information, please contact Special Events Coordinator Toni Marie Favata at tfavata@blythedale.org or 914.831.2454.

Kirk (cont.)

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a feeding tube, and painful involuntary muscle spasms.

"It put him in a perpetual spasm. Every five minutes he would do this arch-tensing pattern, which was very stressful. He wasn't sleeping at all," said Herrmann.

After less than a month, Kirk was transferred to Blythedale Children's Hospital. He was admitted as an inpatient to the Brain Injury Unit, the only dedicated post-acute Pediatric Brain Injury Unit in New York, for intensive rehabilitation and medical management of his complicated condition. In addition to treating children and adolescents recovering from near drownings, the Unit also specializes in Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), post-infectious diseases such as meningitis and Anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis (ANMDAR), brain tumors and stroke.

"It's the kind of place that many people don't know about until something happens to your child and then, we're there for you," said Dr. Kathy Silverman, D.O., Unit Chief, Pediatric, Adolescent and TBI Units at Blythedale Children's Hospital. "We have a great team of well-trained individuals that have worked extensively with brain-injured patients. Together, we helped get Kirk stable so he could begin work with our excellent therapists."

As Blythedale's interdisciplinary team eased Kirk's spasms and found a medical equilibrium for him, the youngster was able to rest, begin



healing and reconnect with the world.

"They were very encouraging of us all working together to give Kirk the most support possible," said his mom. "I was considered an integral part of his recovery which felt very empowering."

Kirk slowly began to show improvements. The smiling, laughing and playfulness he was known for was returning.

"He can sit and play, roll around, creep on his hands and knees, pull himself up into standing and even take a few steps with my help," said Karen Conti, senior physical therapist at Blythedale. "Kirk is just so eager to play that it makes me feel good to see him relaxed and happy. Our goal is to get him back to his previous level of function."

In occupational therapy sessions, Kirk increased his sensory and motor responses through exploring, reaching and grasping for toys while relearning how to connect with his environment in a meaningful way.

Speech and feeding therapy sessions had similar successes for Kirk. Shortly after his initial admission to Blythedale, Kirk had a gastronomy tube inserted to help with feedings

and medicine. Three months later, the infant was able to taste food by mouth while vocalizing and babbling to make pre-linguistic sounds.

Just before New Year's Eve, Kirk was discharged as an inpatient from Blythedale. He was taking almost all of his nutrition by mouth and his parents had successfully completed the Hospital's parent/caregiver training on how to care for their medically complex child.

Just before New Year's Eve, Kirk was discharged as an inpatient from Blythedale. He was taking almost all of his nutrition by mouth and his parents had successfully completed the Hospital's parent/caregiver training on how to care for their medically complex child.

"My family and I are extremely grateful for all the hope and support Blythedale gave us," said Herrmann. "Whether emotional or physical support - there was never a limit put on it."

Days after ringing in 2021 at home with his family, Kirk was back at Blythedale as an outpatient to build upon the gains he made, but this time, he wasn't the only one that underwent a major improvement.

Blythedale's Brain Injury Unit, Kirk's home-away-from-home during recovery, had been part of the Hospital's new \$27M construction project. Eight beds were added to increase capacity and provide much-needed services to more patients in a timely fashion.

"When you work with patients like Kirk and see the progress that the kids like him on the Brain Injury Unit make, it's like getting to see a miracle," said Dr. Silverman. "Blythedale is best known for being able to take care of children with severe medical complexity and intense rehabilitation needs. It is one of the few places in this country that can provide both."



BAC Takes Care of Parents to Heart

The Blythedale Advisory Council - a group of young professionals who are committed to Blythedale's mission and want to make a difference in the lives of children with complex medical con-



ditions - have been busy brightening the lives of many at the Hospital.

Members held a virtual Valentine's Day event via Zoom and decorated cards for parents of patients. The heartfelt notes were distributed to parents along with flowers and other goodies donated by the group in collaboration with Blythedale's Child Life department.

Now the dedicated committee is

turning its attention to its annual 5K event. Last year's event raised more than \$40,000, and this year is shaping up to be another great success. Details are below on how you can join us this year!

Interested in learning more about the BAC? Contact Special Events Coordinator Toni Marie Favata at (914) 831-2454 or tfavata@blythedale.org

JOIN THE FUN... with the Blythedale Advisory Council (BAC)

This year's 5K supports Blythedale's Parent & Caregiver Training Program!



Saturday, May 22
Everywhere & Anywhere
9:00 am - 6:00 pm
\$25 registration (includes a free event tee shirt if registered by 5/7)

THANK YOU TO OUR TITLE SPONSOR:

INSIGHT
 PARTNERS

** Sponsorship opportunities available!*



Learn more: www.blythedale.org/BACVirtual5K



95 Bradhurst Avenue
Valhalla, NY 10595

Inspiration is designed to inform our friends in the community about the programs and activities of Blythedale Children's Hospital. If you know someone who would like to be on our mailing list, or if you have ideas for future issues, please let us know.

Call **Connie Cornell** at 914-831-2570 or email to ccornell@blythedale.org.

Visit us at our website
www.blythedale.org

Ada Goes Home, for the Very First Time!

After posing for pictures with a sign that read, "After 408 days, I'm finally moving in with my parents!", 14-month-old Ada headed home for the very first time.

Born extremely premature at 23-weeks gestation, and weighing only one pound, Ada battled significant respiratory complications and complex feeding issues. But Ada, her family and her clinical team at Blythedale didn't let the odds stand in the way of her thriving, with her neonatologist, Dr. Dennis Davidson, referring to her as a "rockstar."

When asked what advice she would give to parents in a similar situation, Ada's mom Laurena said simply, "Never lose hope." We will miss you, Ada!



SAVE THE DATE

**2nd Annual Blythedale
Advisory Council Virtual 5K**
Saturday, May 22, 2021

Visit www.blythedale.org/BACVirtual5K to learn more!

**BNC Insurance Fall Golf Classic
for Blythedale**

Thursday, September 23, 2021
Fenway Golf Club, Scarsdale, NY

A Celebration of Blythedale
Tuesday, October 26, 2021

Visit www.blythedale.onlinegalas.com

For additional information on any of these events, please contact Toni Favata at (914) 831-2454 or tfavata@blythedale.org