The Bernie Wohl Center of Goddard Riverside opened its doors last year with the promise of becoming one of the Upper West Side’s premier spaces for arts, culture and education for young and old alike. The modern and intimate space lived up to that promise on April 19th.

Tap dancing great Savion Glover gave the first ever dance performance at The Bernie Wohl Center, thrilling the standing room only crowd. The auditorium vibrated with the rhythm of Savion’s intricate footwork. Dancing on a special platform on the stage, Savion showed the audience, filled with neighbors, staff and youth from our programs, the true artistry of hoofing. Savion made his debut in the Broadway musical Tap Dance Kid, starred in and choreographed the smash hit, Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk, and holds the credit as the live captured dancing motion behind Mumble the penguin in the Disney film Happy Feet.

One of his dancing buddies and co-star in Happy Feet Two, Marshall Davis, joined him for a surprise visit and they treated the audience to a highly charged tap exchange.

After the performance, Savion perched himself on the edge of the stage to chat with the young people in our after school program, many of whom are in the dance club. They peppered him with questions. “What was it like to dance with Gregory Hines?” “Best experience I had and I am very grateful,” responded Savion. “When did you start dancing?” “Seven.” “Did you go to after school?” Savion told the adoring crowd that his mom always kept him and his older brothers involved in something in the community, like tap dancing, boy scouts and basketball. He remarked that he went to a community center like the one they go to, and the kids applauded.

When one child asked if he had ever been turned down, Savion became reflective. “Yes, my mom took me to an agent and he said, ‘You stink.’ ” He left crying, but later in life realized that if “you want to do something and if you want to express yourself, just go ahead and do it.” Savion looked intently at the children and said, “Don’t let anybody say, ‘You can’t do it.’ ”

He explained to the young audience that hoofing is a particular kind of tapping that is all about expression and the transference of rhythm to your feet. He told them that when he and Marshall were dancing it was like a conversation, but humbly remarked that Marshall left him speechless. When asked how he learned to tap, Savion started to walk around the auditorium. “You hear that? You are already tapping. You tap every day and you don’t even know it.”

When Savion was a very young boy, he met Lon Chaney, who changed his life. “I was playing drums at this dance studio, and I just followed Lon Chaney into his dressing room; I had never seen anything like it.” It is very likely that the group of young people inspired by Savion that night came away with a similar feeling.
Speaking Out and Speaking Up for Youth, Seniors and Tenants

Goddard Riverside has always seen its role as not only a service provider, but a voice for those whom we serve. Working in the advocacy field means amplifying the voices of our many constituents, and it certainly has been a busy season for petitions, banners and bullhorns.

The most pressing issue has been the proposed NYC budget cut that would eliminate 47,000 slots from child care and after school programs. Goddard Riverside staff and participants have been active in the Campaign for Children which has spearheaded an organized response. Who gets funding is largely based on the wealth factor in zip codes. Goddard Riverside operates four early childhood centers and one after school program in 10024, a zip code deemed too affluent for programs to provide children with educational opportunities that lead to success in school and allow parents to keep their jobs.

From rallies at city hall to phone calls, letter writing and rallies across the city, the Campaign has been relentless. Many parents expressed their anxieties at a Town Hall Speak Out on April 25 which drew more than 125 parents, educators, staff and youth to Goddard Riverside's Bernie Wohl Center. “If we lose these slots, where will our children go?” asked one parent. Advocacy aimed at the Mayor and City Council will continue until the city budget is voted on in late June.

Other voices were heard outside of Goddard Riverside’s Senior Center on Columbus and West 88th Street. On April 18, in conjunction with the Real Rent Reform (R-3) campaign, rent controlled tenants (mostly seniors) held a press conference demanding a change to how their rent increases were calculated —“Abolish MBR (Maximum Base Rent”), was the cry! The R-3 campaign and the our SRO Law Project will be organizing tenants to attend the upcoming Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) hearings in June.

The advocacy at Goddard Riverside is led by the Family Council. There have also been three NYS budget forums held at Goddard Riverside so far in 2012 with elected officials.

Remembering Audrey Gross

The Goddard Riverside community was saddened in March to learn that one of its loving and dedicated volunteers passed away. Audrey Gross was a woman of endless energy, wit and compassion. During each Book Fair season for 25 years, Audrey could be found packing and unpacking books, making sure volunteers had breakfast, and enthusiastically managing the cookbook table. From Friday morning set-up to end of day Sunday clean-up, Audrey was there to work, always soft-spoken and friendly, leading by example. “One of the amazing things about Audrey is that she just knew how to work and get things done,” recalled Amy Mintzer, Board member and Weekend Committee Co-Chair. “She was constructive, even-tempered and selfless.”

At our Christmas holiday dinner, you could also find Audrey at the helm, having earned the right to serve in the prestigious role as official holiday turkey carver.

She did all this by the side of her loving husband, Norman Gross, a long time GRCC board member and friend. Their devotion to each other and to their volunteer work was an inspiration and joy to all of us.
Deena Hellman Wins PASEsetter Award

GRCC’s own Deena Hellman (right), Director of the Star Learning Center was recently honored at an event which recognizes excellence in afterschool education. A recipient of a 2012 PASEsetter Award from The Partnership for After School Education, Deena Hellman leads GRCC’s efforts to provide vital tutoring and educational services to young people at low or no cost. 350 children from grades 2 to 12 come in year round for tutoring in subjects from arithmetic to zoology. Her biggest challenge is matching the more than 300 volunteers with a student for weekly tutoring sessions. “For some students, those two hours of undivided attention are the only two hours a week that are centered just on them,” says Deena.

To volunteer at the Star Learning Center, please contact Deena at 212-799-2369 x303.

Movement Speaks

Older adults from our Senior Center danced with joy at a performance culminating a ten week program that celebrated dance for wellness, expression and community. The program was created by artistic director, Naomi Goldberg Hass.

Softball Season!

Goddard Riverside softball, sponsored by William F. Ryan Health Center, Food City Supermarkets, Mani Marketplace and Ivan Pharmacy, kicked off on April 17. 48 young boys and girls ages 8 to 13 participate.

You’re on the Bus to College – Now What?

“I handed my two huge plastic bags filled with my clothes and stuff to the bus driver, hugged my mom and then boarded the bus. I was going to college! Imagine, me going to college, the first ever in my family to do so.” That’s how Jenna, a GRCC Options student, began her speech to high school seniors anxious to hear some first-year tips from the alums before beginning their own college journey. Jenna gave listeners her version of “College 101”: an honest account of what it was really like to go to college.

GRCC’s Options college program has developed a model of getting teens into college who otherwise may not have the support or resources to even think about applying. Yet, despite the success of sending more than 6,000 off to college since 1986, we are also committed to the success of the young people once in college. Our philosophy has always been, “At Options, the door is never closed.” According the U.S. Department of Education, only 4 in 10 students receive a four year degree within six years. These young adults are more likely to come from families with lower incomes and levels of education. This trend places obstacles to obtaining economic freedom and career success, with college graduates working in large US cities earning nearly double that of high school graduates.

The program has always kept the door open for students to return for help with financial aid renewals, finding resources on campus, or help with transfers from 2-year to 4-year programs. In recent years, we have been piloting a retention program for students who face the most obstacles to pursuing a college degree (e.g. those in foster care, who are homeless or involved in the justice system). This has included weekly phone check-ins and other supports as needed.

Now we are adopting a program model for college retention and success developed by On Point For College of Syracuse, NY. This will allow us to extend our support for students through graduation.

While we all recognize the importance of students graduating from college, NYC has not yet solved the issue of access to college. You can’t graduate if you never enroll. Tens of thousands of students still face significant barriers to college enrollment. Options has taken on this issue with expanded training. In the fall, the Options program is launching a comprehensive six-day training course for 1,600 professionals at the City’s 400+ high schools. This means having an Options-trained counselor for every 100 public high school students by the end of the next three years.

Options is seen as a leader in the effort to provide needed counseling and training. But Options is also working as an advocate, to raise awareness about the need for better college access and success programs in New York City, and beyond. This past December, in collaboration with Citi Community Development, Options convened a group of stakeholders in the college access and success field to address, “Building College Readiness, Access and Success in New York City in the Next 365 Days.”

In order to meet the growing demand for its services, Options is on the move, initiating expanded and enhanced programs for training and college success, and will be physically moving to a brand new home, on West 110th Street, this summer.
Calendar

Gala
Capitale
Monday, October 29th

26th Annual Book Fair
593 Columbus Avenue
Friday - Sunday, November 16th-18th
For more information or to purchase tickets: www.goddard.org or call the development office, 212-873-6444.

For the Love of Reading:
World Book Night with Anna Quindlen

“To bed w/ visions of the kids, parents & seniors I saw swarming #WBNamerica book giveaway at @GoddardRiv: ‘Free? Really?’ one girl asked”, tweeted Anna Quindlen, renowned author and National Chair Person of World Book Night. On this special day, April 23, in England, Ireland and the U.S. books were given out free to celebrate reading and the love of books. In the U.S. that translated to 30 titles and 500,000 books. Carl Lennertz, Executive Director of World Book Night U.S. and long-time Goddard Riverside Book Fair committee member, named Goddard Riverside a distribution site. Carl and Anna were on hand to give out books to our program participants, staff and neighbors. Of course the kids grabbed the Hunger Games but other books flew off the table, such as Little Bee, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks and The Stand, among others.

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The 26th Annual Book Fair arrives this Fall and we begin the season with our gala, honoring Michael Jacobs, President and CEO of ABRAMS Publishing. The gala will be held at Capitale on October 29th. Last winter ABRAMS published the 6th book in the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series and the launch party was held at the Bryant Park skating rink, benefiting the programs of Goddard Riverside. The book sale this year, as always the weekend before Thanksgiving, is November 17 and 18. Don’t miss it, mark your calendars!

Anna Quindlen with Josh Marwell, Goddard Riverside Board Member, and Carl Lennertz

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Support our spring appeal! Help grow community Donate Now!
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