

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

SEED foundation opens eyes, offers support to special needs kids



Photos provided

By Diane Claytor

Picture it: a classroom of third-graders, all wearing socks on their hands and trying to button a shirt, lace a shoe or open a piece of candy. Or fourth-graders cutting paper with their nondominant hand, feeling discouraged performing what seems to be a laborious exercise.

Diverse Ability Awareness, a program brought to Lafayette schools by SEED, the Special Education Enrichment Development Foundation, is designed to teach the students what it's like to have fine motor difficulties. "The kids experience the frustration special needs children often feel, as well as the sense of accomplishment when the task is completed," explains SEED co-president Elsa Troy-Slovik. "They cheer enthusiastically when there is success. It's the most powerful way to develop empathy."

This is only one of many outstanding programs sponsored by SEED, a nonprofit organization benefiting diverse learners in the Lafayette School District. A community foundation run by volunteers, SEED works in collaboration with the school district, providing funding and programs both inside and outside the classroom. "Our primary goal is to help make a difference by providing support and resources to families of children with special and diverse learning needs, as well as offering training programs, materials and funding for the educators who work with these children," states Cathy Kauder, SEED board member.

According to Troy-Slovik, approximately 10 percent of students nationwide qualify for an individualized education program. The special needs classification is very broad; it includes learning disabilities and difficulties, emotional and physical disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism, among others. Families with children experiencing any of these special needs often feel isolated, confused, or disillusioned with what's available to them and their children.

SEED was formed in 2006 by a small group of Lafayette parents searching to increase

support and services for families whose children have special learning needs. When the organization began, its attention was on early intervention through eighth-grade students; as children have aged, the need to continue the program has become apparent. Consequently, SEED High School began recently, focusing on the requirements of special needs students in the Acalanes Union High School District.

In addition to the Diverse Ability Awareness program, which is also offered to adults, SEED has a selection of supportive, educational and fun programs available to special needs children and their families throughout the community. While SEED's bylaws state that in-school activities are limited to Lafayette schools, parent programs are open to anyone — and with an active database of approximately 800 names, these programs attract people from throughout the area. "Families with special needs kids are looking for resources and a supportive community," Kauder notes. And with SEED, they've found it.

For parents, there is a free monthly breakfast, which is an excellent way for parents of special needs children to meet others in the same boat and share ideas, thoughts, resources and concerns; there are movie nights, where a meaningful documentary is screened and followed by a discussion; parent educational programs ("our lives were changed by the Positive Parenthood behavioral class ... the leaders understand the unique challenges that special needs families face..." wrote a recent attendee); a SEED book club, featuring Lafayette mom and author Laura Shumaker discussing her book, "A Regular Guy: Growing Up with Autism," is meeting on Feb. 28. There is an annual fundraising auction and dinner (this year on May 18) and regular parent forums, all designed to educate families and offer them support and opportunities to socialize with their peers.

Among the most popular of SEED's programs are the communitywide events. "Our children are often isolated ... they're frequently bystanders,

sive, accessible birthday parties, complete with entertainment, birthday cake, games and a treasure chest filled with trinkets. They can invite their friends from school, their siblings come ... just like any birthday party." The next one is scheduled at the Mor-

aga Commons' All Access Playground on Saturday, March 16.

"What SEED does is really broad," Troy-Slovik says. "It feels so good to know we're not alone ... to have our concerns heard and to know we have each other."

TOWN HALL THEATRE COMPANY
MAIN STAGE

BROOKLYN BRIDGE

by Melissa James Gibson
directed by M. Graham Smith

February 28-March 23, 2019

TOWNHALLTHEATRE.COM
925.283.1557
3535 SCHOOL ST. LAFAYETTE, CA

GET AHEAD IN MATH THIS YEAR



WHEN MATH MAKES SENSE, YOU SUCCEED!

MATHNASIUM
The Math Learning Center

GRADES K-12

Pre-Algebra • Algebra 1 & 2 • Geometry
Pre-Calculus & Calculus
SAT/ACT Preparatory
Individualized Instruction

HOMEWORK HELP FOR ALL LEVELS

Flat Monthly Fee

Drop-in any time, no scheduling needed!

1 WEEK FREE TUTORING & HOMEWORK HELP

Must present coupon. New students only.

3435 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette
(Golden Gate Way at Mt. Diablo Blvd.)
(925) 283-4200 www.mathnasium.com



Info: seedlafayette.org

BELONG WITH US

Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church

mvpcc