

Summer 2007

# Beckwith Residence Hall

In August 2006, the University of Illinois passed a very significant milestone in its distinguished history of accommodating postsecondary needs and interests of students with disabilities. More specifically, the start of the Fall 2006 term marked the 25th anniversary of the opening of Beckwith Hall, a pioneering facility whose programs and services continue to serve as a national model for transitional residential support services and programs for students with severe physical disabilities. Since 1982, Beckwith has housed 151 students, 87 percent of whom earned Illinois degrees. In addition, 90 percent of Beckwith residents who earned degrees since 1995 have obtained employment within a year of graduation or entered graduate or professional schools.

In this edition of the *Beckwith Hall Newsletter*, we celebrate the success of a gift from an Illinois farmer that made Tim Nugent's vision of a transitional residence hall a reality, the University's unparalleled commitment to serve the educational needs of persons with severe physical disabilities, the extraordinary private gifts that have been provided to support Beckwith programming and services, and most importantly, the remarkable accomplishments of Illinois students with disabilities. I am certain that you will enjoy the articles describing, from student perspectives, how they have benefited from their Beckwith experience, as well as a recap of the 25th Anniversary Celebration events held on campus in April of this year.

As always, if you have any questions or would like additional information about our programs and services for students with disabilities, please do not hesitate to contact us. Better yet, schedule a visit!

Brad Hedrick, Director  
Disability Resources and  
Educational Services

## Director's Perspective

By *Patricia B. Malik, Ph.D., CTRS*



One of my favorite sayings is a Chinese proverb that states, "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it." This is printed on a card that sits on my desk. Each time I look at it, I am reminded of the many people, both past and present, who have been involved with Beckwith Hall. Many of these people, whether residents with disabilities or staff, have been told that they couldn't do something, yet when given the right supports and opportunities they have proved their critics wrong.

As I come to the completion of my second year as director of Beckwith Hall, I can honestly state that it has been an amazing year. In addition to the day-to-day operations of Beckwith, staff was involved in a multitude of projects within and outside the building. Paige Lewis and one of our seniors, Carmen Sutherland, attended and presented at the "Aspire, Achieve, Empower: First National Conference on Mentoring for Youth with Disabilities," hosted by Partners for Youth with Disabilities in Boston. Their presentation, which focused on the mentoring and transition programs at Beckwith Hall, was extremely well received. Katherine Johnson was appointed to the Chancellor's Campuswide Committee on Access and Accommodations. Susann Heft, DRES Resource Facilitator, and I presented at the "Fall Conference of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation in San Francisco." The title of the presentation was "Comprehensive Postsecondary Transitional Services that Enhance the Health, Independence, and Employment Success of Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities: The University of Illinois Model." When we weren't involved with day-to-day issues at Beckwith Hall or educating and networking outside of Beckwith, we were working on other projects.

We developed and implemented an infectious disease plan along with other units on campus, implemented the second phase of the mentoring program, supported our second community and health intern, hosted the campus Inner Voices production of "Depression - The Musical...(sort of)," continued to work with University Housing on the proposed new residence hall for Beckwith, hosted two programs with Illinois Department of Human Services personnel, Sue Johnson-Smith and Bob Galbreath, on independent living, and successfully celebrated Beckwith's 25th anniversary with a weekend of events in April that were educational and social (see highlights within this newsletter). Finally, Amanda Brown, one of Beckwith's linen maids, was a finalist for the Chancellor's Distinguished Staff Award.

It has been an outstanding year for many Beckwith residents as well. You will meet many of them through the articles they wrote for this newsletter. Kevin Fritz, a freshman from Pennsylvania, was elected as an Illinois student senator. Costa Nikolaidis once again competed internationally in bocce ball, and one of our live-in PA staff, Kelly Scott, was selected for an intensive summer program in Kenya. As you can see, many people associated with Beckwith Hall achieved personal and professional goals this year. The Chinese proverb "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it" is alive and well at Beckwith Hall!

## Beckwith Student Government: President's Message

*by Costa Luke Nikolaides*

We are at the dawn of a new age...no, just kidding. Really though, many Beckwith students are at the beginning of new experiences: jobs, graduate school, summer internships, etc. This is my third year at Beckwith Hall, and things are as lively as ever. Living at Beckwith has been a wonderful experience. It has allowed me to meet many new people and make many new friends. I had many friends in high school mainly due to the frequent interactions that I had in class, and I have known most of these people since I was very young. I was worried when college started because I quickly found out that the chances for in-class interaction with classmates were rare. I was not used to starting conversations with new people unless it was about school, so I felt completely out of place. Fortunately, Beckwith's small size gave me a chance to repeatedly talk and joke with the same people. Having friends at home and Beckwith allowed me to loosen up with my other classmates.

This year has been a little different for me because it was my first year as Beckwith Student Government (BSG) president. BSG's function has mainly been to create social events that all dorm members can attend. With regard to that, it has been a good year. We had

a campfire, an entertainer for Halloween, a trip to a haunted house with extensive help from Kevin Fritz, and a group outing to HomeTown Buffet. However, when I started with BSG, I had hopes of getting our dorm more involved with service projects in our community. To that end, I registered a Beckwith team in Relay for Life. Our name was the "Rollin' Relayers," and I am pleased that many students got involved in either fundraising or actively participating. Since this was our first project, I set our fundraising goal low at \$250. I was pleased that we ended up with a total of over \$350. As I will be returning as BSG's president next year, I look forward to that being the first of many service projects to come. I hope that the students participating did so not only because it was a great cause, but also because it was a great opportunity for all of us to do something together. The more we get involved in our community, the more exposure Beckwith gets, and the more people we get to meet outside of Beckwith. In the future I hope to open many more community involvement opportunities to everyone at Beckwith. On that note, good luck with these new beginnings. Thanks for the awesome job with Relay for Life and everything else this year!

## Grateful for Odelius Award

*by Costa Luke Nikolaides*

I am very thankful to have been chosen to receive the 2006 Matthew Allan Odelius Award. This award is given in commemoration of Matthew Odelius, a former Beckwith resident who felt that involvement in community was a key component of his life. I admire Matt's willingness to be a leader and his motivation to dedicate his time to helping others. I hope that my past and future actions make me truly worthy of receiving this award.

I am a junior at the University of Illinois, majoring in psychology and philosophy. After I finish here, I plan to attend law school so that I can become a lawyer (please do not take back the award). I have been fortunate to find several groups which have helped me to get involved with the campus community. One of these groups is Student Helpers, of which I was the public service head. This group has allowed me to be introduced to many causes like "Up 'Til Dawn" and Relay for Life. Another group I am in that allows me to serve my community is "Coalition Against Coke Contracts." This group has opened my eyes to the injustices which the Coca Cola Company practices. Our group hopes to make these atrocities known to the general public. We have also worked hard to encourage the University of Illinois to stop doing business with Coke due to its unethical practices. Since I WILL BE a lawyer, I intend to use my education and my experiences with these groups to help battle injustices large and small. I hope any success I have will make this University proud, and will show the awesome capabilities of all people who have disabilities.



*Costa and Dennis Odelius*

## Transitional Disability Management Plan Evolves

by *Paige Lewis, M.S.*

Many accomplishments were achieved within the Transitional Disability Management Plan (TDMP) this year. Individualized plans correlated with these specific life skills: improving disability and life management skills, personal assistant management, self-advocacy, Beckwith Residence Hall living, wellness and healthy lifestyles, and careers/internships.

Guest speakers were utilized for independent living issues. Sue Johnson-Smith and Bob Galbreath, both affiliated with the Illinois Department of Human Services addressed a variety of areas regarding the various services available, how to apply or access those services, and other very relevant topics pertaining to living outside of Beckwith Hall. A follow-up next year will be a representative from Social Security Administration addressing students on various aspects of benefits available to them based on their current or future financial status.

The resident advisors (RAs) coordinated the wellness and healthy lifestyle module. A presentation called “Depression - The Musical...(sort of)” was performed by Inner Voices spring semester. Inner Voices is a group sponsored by McKinley Health Center, the Counseling Center and the Theatre Department at Illinois. The RAs facilitated a “mocktails” activity addressing responsible drinking. Residents also attended workshops held at DRES regarding the careers/internships module. Finally, a panel discussion facilitated by our intern, Carmen

Sutherland, of students with disabilities and personal assistants addressed critical perceptions of job responsibilities, employer/employee relationships, and other questions from both perspectives. This panel reinforced the skills learned in the PA management module.

The Peer Mentoring Program was extremely successful this year, as new students felt that their transition was easier and mentors voiced their sense of accomplishment through their role in that transition. The mentors spent four days developing relationships with new students prior to other students arriving. They participated in their structured orientation program, addressed concerns, and gave tours of campus and the Champaign-Urbana community. An additional three days of orientation for all students completed the initial phase of the program. Informal interactions and guidance were ongoing for the remainder of the year.

The last two years our mantra has been increasing one’s personal responsibility. It has become apparent that to truly facilitate a smooth transition into a post-secondary institution and environment, one needs to transition from feeling “entitled” to various resources/services to learning how to advocate for themselves. Therefore, TDMP modules will shift their focus to assisting with skills necessary to transition from entitlement to empowerment.

Enjoy the next several articles that highlight students in various phases of their tenure at the University of Illinois and Beckwith Hall.

## A Whole New World

by *Kevin Fritz*

As the only one who uses a wheelchair in my hometown, coming to a place full of them was a big shock, but also a relief. For once, I did not stick out. No one stared at me as if I had 35 eyes! I could be myself, which made me feel safe and normal. I have learned a lot this past year from everyone I met. I think the confidence I gained was a key point for my development as a college student and a Beckwith resident.

At first, it was hard for me to get used to being cared for by others my own age. Nevertheless, after a quick talk with Muffi and Carmen, two of the mentors, I felt much better. It was nice knowing people with experience about the less common experiences like PAs and time management. Now, hiring (and sometimes firing) PAs is a piece of cake. I have learned to be careful, but also confident about scheduling and handling my care.

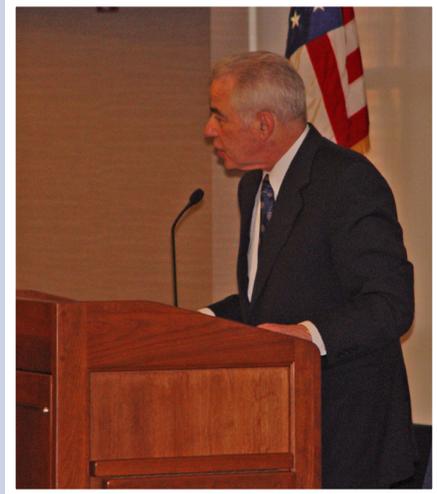
I have also received great pointers from the staff and residents about clubs and activities to join outside of Beckwith. I think that everyone should join at least one club on campus. It helps build character, development, and it allows you to meet new people. After all, because of it, I am a proud member of the student senate and the assistant director of a play. Prior to coming here, I do not think I would have had the confidence to go out there and get as involved, but thanks to everyone’s continued support, I did it!

So, as I finish my freshman year with a decided major (finally!) and many new friends, I want to thank everyone at Beckwith for pushing me and giving me the strength to get out there and be myself! I hope as a mentor next year, I can do the same as so many others have done for me.



# Beckwith Hall 25th Anniversary Celebration

This past April Beckwith Residence Hall welcomed former students and staff back to campus to celebrate the facility's 25th anniversary. The special weekend included interactive sessions to promote Disability Awareness Month, the annual Michael J. Ellis Distinguished Lecture on Disability Science and Practice presented by Carl Suter, a reception and banquet at the Alice Campbell Alumni Center, and an informal open house at Beckwith Hall.



Chancellor Richard Herman addresses the audience at the banquet.



Reo Wilhour and Mike Lubber reconnect after 20 years.



Mike Cafferty and Jonathan Ko discuss the legal profession during the open house.



Katherine Johnson, Brad Hedrick, and Susann Heft enjoy the commemorative DVD at the open house.



Brad Hedrick and George Stupp visit during the reception.



Ji Hae Lee with Mike Dzienciol, an exhibitor for United Access at the interactive display.



Leon and Amy Campos with Kerry Zimmerman looking at photos during the open house.



Cindy and Garrett Timbie with Matt McClure at the reception.



Kay and Grant Davis during the banquet.



Joe Konitzki and Carl Suter share a laugh during the reception.



Kat Madayag and Maureen Gilbert getting caught up at the open house.

Carmen Sutherland and Beckwith PAs visit with Hadley Ravencroft, a representative of PACE Center for Independent Living, during the interactive display.



# Resident Advisor Perspectives

by *Kristen Thompson*



As an undergraduate, I distinctly remember telling one of my friends who was going through an RA selection process, “That’s a job I could never do.” Four years later, I find myself in the unfamiliar territory of a large university AND the land of being an RA, not to mention that I had little experience with people who have disabilities. After attending the small college in my hometown, I was ready for new experiences that couldn’t be had at home. Beckwith and

the University of Illinois have definitely given me experiences and opportunities that I’ve never had before! When I arrived, I was overwhelmed by the size of the campus and number of students. Beckwith has been helpful in my own transition into graduate studies at Illinois. Beckwith is a place that has familiar faces and listening ears, a community and place of belonging that would be hard to establish as a new graduate, transfer, or first-year student. I learned quickly that Beckwith is more than just a dorm. It is a community, a family, a place that even staff who don’t live here call home.

Beckwith is a place that is also just plain fun! I will never forget our fall bonfire at Kaufman Lake, roasting marshmallows and hearing from those who were there, “I’ve never roasted marshmallows,” or “I haven’t been to a campfire since fifth grade.” The Beckwith potluck dinners have also been favorite events of mine. Good food and desserts always bring out a large Beckwith crowd! Beckwith also challenges its residents, but more than that, it is a supportive environment that allows everyone who encounters it an opportunity to grow. Beckwith has an amazing staff that places the interests of its students as the highest priority. I am truly honored and grateful to be working in an environment with such integrity. Beckwith has shown me that being an RA is a job that I CAN do, and the experience has given me memories that will never be forgotten!

by *Laurie Arieux*



Nervous, excited, and unprepared were all words that flashed through my head on the first day that students began moving in. As I slowly met each one, I remember thinking “What have I gotten myself into?” New state, new school, new program, and now a job I had no prior experience in. However, those feelings have long since faded. I have become more comfortable with my position and everything that goes along with it than I ever thought I would. I also

became a part of the Beckwith family, where everybody knows everything about everybody and no life event goes unnoticed. Whether it is a birthday celebration, helping someone getting ready for her first date when everything went wrong, or a big test that day, it was never overlooked.

So, when I moved in here I got several big brothers who teased me about everything from being from Iowa to my movie selection, and a lot of children, whom I imposed all of my wisdom on, whether they wanted it or not! I learned a lot from my fellow dorm-mates too. Whether it was some slang words that a country girl didn’t know or some obscure scientific theory that I pretended to understand. There is no limit to the knowledge that I have gained. I could never have done any of this without Pat, Katherine, Paige and Kristen, who were always there when I needed them and the PAs who worked so diligently throughout the year. Thanks for all the laughs!

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## I’m Ready Now

by *Carmen Sutherland*

Well, it’s been five years since I first came to Beckwith – a lifetime ago. I remember so many things – from the tears of homesickness my first few weeks here to this year when I realized I wanted my parents to leave so that my space could be mine again, and everything in between.

Now I’m off to graduate school for rehabilitation counseling. I don’t know where yet, but I know that I will no longer call this building home, and there’s only one thing to say about my time here; thank you.

This place has taught me so much. I have not only learned how to be independent and take control of my life, but I have also learned what I want to do with it. Someday I too want to work with college students with disabilities and help them become confident adults who are proud of themselves and know that they can take on the world. In fact, one of my dreams is to open a dormitory similar to Beckwith somewhere else in the country so that people with disabilities have some choices about where to go to college. I hope that if I do this, my dorm, like Beckwith, will

be a place where all of the students feel connected to each other, where they can say things that they truly cannot say anywhere else, and where they feel safe and respected.

One of the possible highlights of my college experience was having the opportunity to co-present at “Aspire, Achieve, Empower: First National Conference on Mentoring for Youth with Disabilities.” I not only was able to share my perspective of the assets that Beckwith has to offer, or be the “live example” as I explained in Boston, but I was in the presence of the pioneers of this field. It was an enlightening experience that I will not soon forget. I had such incredible opportunities to network, but what amazed me most were the professionals coming up to me, interested in what I had to share. It only reaffirmed that the direction I was going in my life was exactly what I wanted.

Right now I am getting a whole new view of Beckwith and a lot of practical experience in

“Beckwith-esque” dorm life administration. I have had the pleasure of serving as the Beckwith intern for the spring semester. I have learned many things that I didn’t know before, as well as gained a greater understanding of things of which I was previously aware. I know that the lessons I have learned as an intern and a student will serve me greatly in the future.

In short, because of my many and varied experiences at Beckwith and how they have allowed me to grow as a person, a woman with a disability, and a professional, this dormitory will always have a piece of my heart and it will always be a part of who I am. As I said in the beginning, the only appropriate response to that is “thank you.”



## Beckwith—Never a Dull Moment

by Jonathan Ko

The platypus is an odd creature that seems to make no sense. Some people think the oddity of the platypus demonstrates that God has a sense of humor. Others believe that, secretly under the cover of darkness, beavers and ducks mate. Either way, religious people and scientists agree that these furry, egg-laying, duck-billed, beaver-tailed creatures are freakish mammals that have mammary glands but no nipples. Personally, I think platypuses or platypode, are lovable despite being different. Being different is not bad, but I did not always think so.

I am different. When I came to Beckwith, I viewed being different in a negative light. My experience at Beckwith has taught me that ‘normal’ is

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boring (and fascist). Different can be fun, lovable, and even inspirational. Everyone at Beckwith is inspiring, whether able-bodied or living with a disability. I see the amazing things that people at Beckwith accomplish and I am in awe. There are athletes that compete internationally, PAs that can throw five students in bed and still have time to do homework, and honestly, I am impressed with anyone that earns the nickname “Strike Force” or “D.J. Ladies Man.”

Occasionally, circumstances can be frustrating, but the Beckwith community gives support and helps students overcome difficulties. Other students facing similar problems offer advice. Friends often lend a

hand. Sometimes late night counseling is just a few doors down the hall and to the left. I have learned “different” can be more difficult and complicated, but “overcoming adversity” can be rewarding (and good for applications requiring a personal statement). As much as Beckwith provides help, it also dishes out the tough love.

Beckwith teaches independence and fosters understanding to both able-bodied students and students with disabilities. Kind-hearted PAs must learn to say no, and students who want help learn

to stop hitting on the floaters. Students who have never had close encounters of the live-in kind learn that there are boundaries

and that some questions should not be asked even in the privacy of the bathroom. Ultimately the Beckwith experience prepares students for the real world, and if MTV had a few extra cameras we would be famous.

In conclusion, I am planning my escape from Beckwith in December. If successful, I will graduate with a J.D., more confidence, and a unique experience with life lessons that cannot be learned anywhere else. In addition, if I graduate there is a chance that I will start a wildlife foundation to protect the habitat of the platypus.



## Beckwith Mission

Beckwith Hall opened in 1981 to accommodate the residential needs of students with disabilities who require the help of personal assistants to perform basic activities of daily living. While aiding students in the management of their activities of daily living (transferring in and out of wheelchairs, dressing, grooming, bathing, etc.), Beckwith also offers individualized training designed to help students learn to independently manage their disability-related needs and, whenever possible, transition to mainstream community housing. The ultimate goal of Beckwith Hall programming is to make it possible for graduates to go anywhere their lives and career aspirations take them, confident that they can manage their own needs.

Beckwith is much like any other university residence hall in that it has a dining hall, student government, laundry room and a campus location along the Division's bus route. In addition, Beckwith offers the unique convenience of private sleep-study rooms with adjacent semi-private bathrooms. A computer lab with four workstations, voice activation systems, and a wide range of peripheral assistive input devices are also available.

For additional information about Beckwith Residence Hall, or for an alternative format of this document, please visit our website at [www.disability.uiuc.edu/services/beckwith](http://www.disability.uiuc.edu/services/beckwith). You may also contact the DRES Student Services Office by phone at (217) 333-4603 (v/TTY), or send email to [disability@uiuc.edu](mailto:disability@uiuc.edu).



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