



Summer 2008

Beckwith Hall

"Making important choices...Leading empowered lives."

Over the last quarter of a century, nearly 175 students with disabilities who needed personal assistant services have utilized the unique residential and educational programs and services of Beckwith Hall to access the academic resources of one of the nation's finest public universities, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In this edition of the Beckwith Hall Newsletter, we will update you on the initiatives that we have undertaken to build upon our legacy of success and to sustain our leadership in educational supports for students with the most severe disabilities. The concept of "A Year of Firsts" endeavors to describe the exciting events, advancements and/or milestones that occurred during the year, and the steps that we anticipate taking in the year ahead as we continue to diligently pursue the improvement of Beckwith's programs and services and the realization of the Beckwith motto, "Making important choices... Leading empowered lives."

I hope that you enjoy this 2008 edition of the Beckwith Hall Newsletter, and that you'll contact us if you would like more information about programs and services of Beckwith Hall or the Illinois Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services. Of course, we would really enjoy assisting you in scheduling a visit, so that you could witness firsthand our pioneering support services and innovative plans for the future.

Brad Hedrick, Director
Disability Resources and
Educational Services

A Year of Firsts

By Patricia B. Malik, Ph.D., Director

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Well done is better than well said." We celebrated Beckwith's 25th anniversary in April 2007. When we began our 26th year of operation in August of 2007 we could have decided to bask in the warmth of the anniversary glow of all that had been accomplished and simply talk about the future. However, as I reflect on this past year I am pleased that we were able to take action and continue to challenge each other.

One would think that after 26 years of service provision there would be few surprises and fewer "firsts" to occur, but we are talking about Beckwith Hall programs and services and this has been a year of many firsts. You will have the opportunity to hear about many of these within the pages of this annual newsletter. Highlights of the "firsts" celebrated this year include:

- Seven new Beckwith residents in fall of 2007. This was the largest incoming cohort group of new Beckwith residents outside of the first year Beckwith opened. As this newsletter goes to print, we anticipate at least ten new residents in fall of 2008.
- University of Illinois President Joe White visiting Beckwith staff and students, and staying to have lunch with us. This is the first time in recent history that an Illinois president had lunch at Beckwith.
- The groundbreaking ceremony which took place October 26, 2007 for the new residence hall scheduled to open fall semester 2010. This residence hall will include new space for Beckwith programs and services, and is the first partnership between University Housing and the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES).
- Kevin Fritz receiving one of eight congressional internships sponsored by Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation and the American Association of People with Disabilities for summer 2008. He worked with Senator Barack Obama. In addition, Kevin was re-elected as an Illinois Student Senator. Both of these accomplishments are firsts for a Beckwith resident.
- Three residents, Michael Briede, Kevin Fritz and Alex Whiteland signing leases and moving out of Beckwith for the next academic year. Kevin and Michael have signed leases for apartments on campus, and Alex is moving into Illini Towers. It is the first time that three Beckwith residents have transitioned into other residential environments in the same year before graduating from Illinois.
- Use of an independent study format for some residents toward meeting their Transitional Disability Management Program (TDMP) goals. Outcomes of the independent studies were resident directed presentations about personal assistant management, accessible apartments and career development. This is the first time that Beckwith residents led presentations for other residents related to TDMP goals.
- Our first non-Beckwith Community Health intern spring semester 2008. Mary Atkins brought much energy and new insight to our program as she had never been associated with Beckwith as a resident or staff before her internship.
- Paige Lewis, Disability Specialist, and Katherine Johnson, Associate Director did their first joint professional presentation at the ILLOWA AHEAD Regional Conference in April, entitled "Promoting Academic Success for Students with Severe Physical Disabilities through Residential Support Services."
- Ryan Cozad, the first live-in personal assistant to receive a University of Illinois Outstanding Student Employee of the Year Award. Ryan was nominated by Beckwith residents for this prestigious award.
- Finally, we established our first Beckwith motto, "Making important choices . . . Leading empowered lives" as reflected in the masthead above.

Many people associated with Beckwith Hall worked diligently in order for so many "firsts" to occur this past academic year. It is another year of celebrating many individual and programmatic accomplishments. Benjamin Franklin would be proud.

Mother and Daughter Adjust to Life at Beckwith

A Daughter's View

by Jade Urcina

It seems like only yesterday that I arrived at Beckwith Hall. I did not know what to expect. I was both nervous and excited. The first thing that struck me was how nice everybody was. There were several residents sitting outside the front doors when I came down the sidewalk. Every one of them introduced themselves and made me feel very welcome. I knew then that I was in store for a great year.

What I like best about Beckwith is the camaraderie between residents and the support the staff provides. Pat, Paige, and Katherine made it clear from the beginning that I could go to them with any problems that I experienced. Luckily, I have not had to take them up on that offer. Karlo and Nicole, the resident advisors, were very helpful in getting the new students familiar to Beckwith and the campus with the help of the mentors.

My favorite part about being here is hanging out with the other students. Whether we're in the dining room, watching television in the lounge, going on a movie outing, or just visiting in each other's rooms there is always a good time to be had. Getting used to the class load during the first few weeks of school was a little stressful and overwhelming. If I felt a meltdown coming on there was always another student there to lend an ear and offer reassurance.

I must give a special shout out to my PAs. I must admit that I was totally embarrassed about having someone, other than my mom, take me to the washroom or give me a bath. I got over that right away because nobody but me thought it was a big deal.

From the floaters who come quietly in the middle of the night, to Cliff, Karla, and Ordena who keep the place in order and clean, to Kerry who will make pretty much any food you request, Beckwith is a great place with great people.

I look forward to being with the group outside those front doors in the fall to welcome in the next group of Beckwithians.

A Mother's Perspective

by Toni Urcina

If someone had told me, eighteen months ago, that my daughter would be going to college, away from home, and living in a dorm I would have told them they were crazy. Jade had only been away from home overnight twice in her whole life and that was when she was very young.....and it was only to grandma's house!

It was one of Jade's physical therapists that first introduced the name Beckwith Hall to me. She had been a resident advisor (RA) at Beckwith the first year it opened and was confident that the facility could meet Jade's needs. She gently, yet unrelentingly, prodded me to look into it.

Quite often opportunities arise that just can't be passed up so even though I was skeptical, I decided to take Jade and visit Beckwith Hall. That was almost exactly one year ago. Jade, myself and Tina, my daughter-in-law, (who was along for moral support) met with the staff. I know that I must have looked like a deer caught in headlights during that meeting. Confident that there was no way that they would be able to handle Jade's needs, I began to list the things that she could not do for herself, "She can't feed herself." Their response, "No problem." "She can't dress herself." Again

their response, "No problem." "What about bathing, toileting, turning over in the middle of the night?" "No problem." Pat, Paige, and Katherine were wonderful, knowledgeable and very sensitive to my anxiety.

As we got into the car to return home Tina said, "You didn't hear a thing they said did you?" She was right, I was completely freaked out about the possibility that Jade would live away from me. During the three hour drive Tina proceeded to recap the entire meeting for me. I

remember toward the end of the trip she summed up by saying, "Basically they've 'been there, done that' and you need to get over it and sign Jade up."

Jade is about to complete her freshman year at the University of Illinois as a resident of Beckwith Hall. With her new independence I have watched her blossom into a confident young adult who enjoys having the freedom to make decisions for herself. Thanks to the atmosphere at Beckwith she has developed a social life that, up until now, I had only dreamed of for her.

Throughout this process we have been surrounded by the extraordinary and much-appreciated support of the staff. I thank them for all their attention and efforts in helping our family with the transition. I'll take this opportunity to publically thank those floaters working the midnight to 8:00 am shift for patiently taking my phone calls, every two hours, checking to make sure Jade was ok for the first three weeks!

The experience at Beckwith Hall has been exciting, rewarding, and life changing. I encourage any other parents who are apprehensive about college and residence hall life for their son/daughter with a severe physical disability to check out the University of Illinois and Beckwith Hall. As Roosevelt once said, "You have nothing to fear, but fear itself."



Take an Opportunity and Run with It

by Kevin Fritz

Well the time has come again. Spring has sprung and summer will be here before we know it. As I finish my sophomore year and my time at Beckwith, I take with me memories that will last a lifetime. Friends were made, good times were had, but most importantly, independence and leadership were established. I have so much confidence now! I really am not afraid to try anything. Last year the PAs and time management were two big issues for me to overcome. This year, it was putting myself out there and taking a risk. It paid off!

I will return to the Illinois Student Senate and as Vice Chairman for my second term, and I've added a new title behind my name: Director of Arts for the Illini Union Board. These positions not only allow me to strengthen my programming abilities, but I also get the chance to teach and learn all about our political system. Aside from attending weekly meetings and performing office hours, where I provide support and services to students, I can really take a stance for people with disabilities by drafting resolutions that ultimately better the campus environment for all students. Have you ever heard of the saying: "If you can't beat them, join them?" Well, I prefer "If you can't beat them, lead them," and that's exactly what I did.

When I enrolled at the University of Illinois, I had no idea that such opportunities of leadership would be within my grasp. We all want to belong, but for me, an out-of-state teenage boy unable to care for himself on his own, acceptance was really my key to sanity. My little support group of friends who understood me for me and not my wheelchair stayed back in Pennsylvania. I was literally all alone...but I didn't let that stop me. Who knew that a whiney little high schooler would one day aspire to a leadership role such as this? Beckwith staff and students are to thank.

Additionally, I applied for a Congressional internship sponsored by Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation and the American Association of People with Disabilities for this summer. I was totally amazed when after several interviews I was chosen to be 1 of 8 awardees out of over 200 initial applicants. My assignment will be working with Senator Barack Obama. I'm so honored as Senator Obama chose me himself, partly because he liked my insight on health care reform. Plus, I have been asked to spear head

renovations of his office so it is more ADA compliant. This is the most phenomenal opportunity to really prepare me for my future in law and health. I already have my housing and PAs arranged, so I'm ready to take it all in. Look for me on TV!

Moreover, I was also the 2008 recipient of the Matthew Allan Odelius Award, which commemorates a former Beckwith resident. It is presented annually to a student with a physical disability residing at Beckwith that has demonstrated leadership in student organizations while balancing academics and other commitments. I maintain a rigorous academic schedule consisting of health administration, business, and informatics studies. The truth is, as the 2008 Odelius Award recipient I feel privileged that

others felt that I emulated Matthew Odelius's ambition and vision that students with disabilities are deserving of a chance at life. Being a leader is not someone who is labeled as "most capable" but instead, I believe a leader solves problems, embraces change, and welcomes the ideas and opinions of others.

Last and most important is my moving out! Yes, it will be sad to leave, but I am so excited to say that I will be living on my own! This is such a big deal to me! Beckwith's programs and staff encouraged me to try to be independent through my disability management plan and it really paid off. I

think that everyone that lives at Beckwith is capable of moving out. All you have to do is assess, organize, and evaluate the possibilities. Thank you Pat, Paige, and Katherine... the three of you have helped to mold me to become who I am today.



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Beckwith Hall Year in Review

During the 2007-2008 academic year, we experienced many firsts. As they say, a photo says a thousand words. Here is a brief look at some of the events that took place this year.



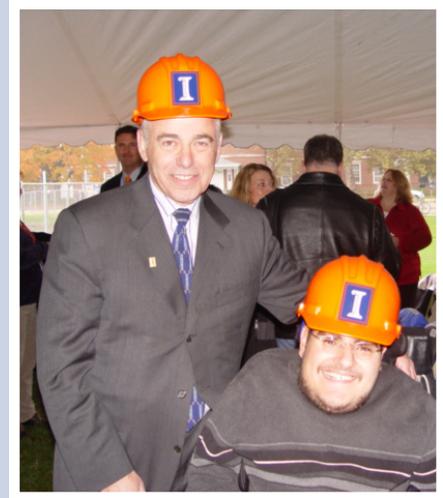
Paige, Katherine and Pat serving as the A-Team (Avian Flu Team) at Halloween.



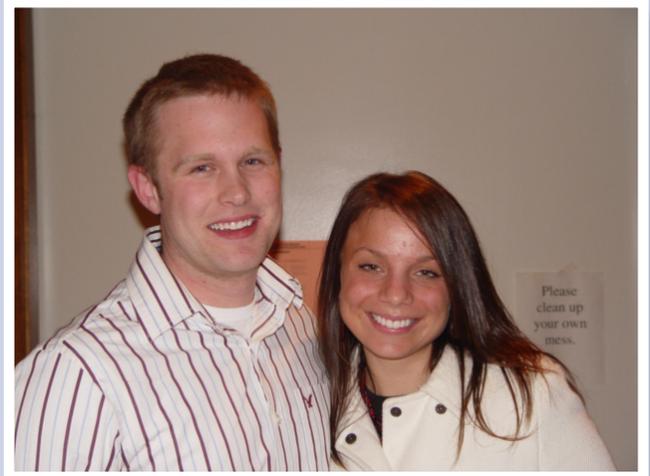
Hugo, Kushal, Katy & Patrick enjoying the U of I men's basketball team and supporting Coaches for Cancer.



Hugo and Rachel trying out our new wireless connection.



Chancellor Herman with Costa Nikolaides, president of Beckwith Student Government, at the groundbreaking ceremony for a new residential living center scheduled to open fall 2010.



Ryan Cozad and his fiancée Lauren Dutkanych at his celebration for being runner-up for Outstanding Student Employee of the Year at Illinois.



Ron Mulvaney from Illinois Department of Human Services spoke on the work incentive program.



Kushal (a.k.a. the chick magnet) at Halloween.



Rakesh, Lucas and Patrick, all personal assistants enjoying the ice cream social.



President Joseph White talking to Patrick during lunch and tour of Beckwith Hall.



Officer Ortiz from University of Illinois Police presenting on self defense, and keeping safe during Unofficial St. Patrick's Day and beyond.



Jade Urcina and Deana McDonagh at the Disability + Relevant Design Exhibition. Jade is one of 21 students with disabilities that collaborated this past fall with industrial design students to develop product concepts for everyday living under the direction of Professor McDonagh.



Beckwith Residents enjoying a warm spring day.

Resident Advisor Perspectives

by Nicole Kaffe



Coming to Beckwith in August, I was nervous but excited as well. This was going to be a year of firsts for me: my first year in graduate school, my first time being an RA, my first time working with students who used wheelchairs, and an unexpected first time breaking a bone. I don't know how everyone else felt, but for me this has been one of the greatest years in my life for firsts!

I have met people and developed friendships that I know will be long lasting. I know that I came into this experience wanting to help the residents at Beckwith through their college years, many for the first time, since I had been through it. Honestly, I really did not think that I would learn as much as I have. I hope that I have helped some people through problems, but I just want to let everyone

know that they have helped me through my problems as well, especially with my broken arm. I have never met such selfless, empathic, and caring individuals. The first week, so many people offered their help in so many ways that it really made me realize that I have some amazing friends at Beckwith and I am sorry to see the year coming to an end.

I may not miss living in a dorm room or eating take out every night, but I am going to miss the people that I lived with and the conversations we had. It's going to be hard not to be able to walk down to someone's room and procrastinate for hours. I just want to thank everyone for letting me be a part of their lives.

Changed for Good

by Mary Atkins

*I've heard it said
that people come into our lives for a reason,
bringing something we must learn.*

*And we are led
to those who help us most to grow, if we let them.
And we help them in return.*

As my senior year at the university comes to an end I can think of no better way to describe in words my experience here at Beckwith than the lyrics of the song "For Good" by David Archuleta. From my experiences at the U of I, I have learned many valuable skills through my extensive studies, academic professors, and mentors—but it was not until I came to Beckwith that I felt as if my college experience was complete.

I was led to Beckwith during my observation hours for my chosen career path as a physical therapist. During these experiences I had the amazing opportunity to meet and connect with several students who shared their stories of Beckwith with me during our time at the DRES gym. When it came time to pick my senior year internship I immediately thought of Beckwith, and knew it would be the perfect place to spend my last semester.

Beckwith is a community that welcomes and embraces all individuals, and it is a place that has

welcomed me, becoming my home away from home. Each day I am inspired by the perseverance and commitment each individual brings to their academics and fellow relationships. With whatever challenges life may bring there is always a helping hand within these walls and someone to uplift my spirits and offer encouraging words of advice. The focus is always on pushing one's own threshold, and believing in ability first.

Although, I started this semester as an intern aiming to help others grow, I believe it is now me that has been helped and changed the most. From this experience I will take so much more than a work experience, I will take with me friendships and memories that I will never forget. Beckwith has unknowingly instilled in me the motivation and inspiration to overcome any challenges and obstacles life may bring. As my college years come to an end so does the song "Because I knew you I have been changed for good."

"I have learned many valuable skills through my extensive studies, academic professors, and mentors—but it was not until I came to Beckwith that I felt as if my college experience was complete."



by Karlo Marcelo

Coming to Beckwith, I expected a lot of firsts - along with tons of awkward moments and uncomfortable situations. I've never really interacted with people who use wheelchairs, let alone living with 20 of them.

The day leading up to move-in day was filled with anxiety. What do I say? How do I act? Where do I look? Is it bad to stare? Is it bad to ask questions? Can I joke about it, or should I not? Should I help or wait to be asked to help? What have I gotten myself into? GET ME OUTTA HERE!

But then I met our die hard Cardinals' fan on the 2nd floor. The first day he started cracking jokes on me - making fun of my love for the Cubs AND the White Sox. Then my neighbor started blasting hip-hop music. And then random people started rolling

into my room and somehow every single one spotted the Gilmore Girls DVD collection that I tried to hide behind my TV - I didn't hear the end of that for a few weeks.

Next thing you know the worry, anxiety, and uncertainty all flew away. I was just an RA in a dorm filled with students. The mentors came in and made me feel very welcome and at home. The energetic underclassmen always brought a smile to my face. And the crazy upperclassmen that kept me on my toes and are great peers and friends that I can talk to and relate with.

I can say without reservation that Beckwith is now my home away from home. I love it here. And even though people now either doubt me or threaten me if I don't do it, I have no doubt I will be here a lot next year to visit and hang out. COUNT ON IT!



My Beckwith Experience

by Ryan Cozad

As my junior year at U of I was coming to a close, I really thought I had experienced much of what this fine institution could offer. One day a friend of a friend brought up Beckwith Hall in conversation, and my first response was, "Huh?" Similar to many students, Beckwith Hall was a brand new place that I'd never heard of before. Intrigued by the stories I heard, I decided to swing by one afternoon to see what this place was all about. After a 30 minute tour and meeting tons of new people, I found myself filling out an application for employment. Little did I know that the visit would lead me to where I am today, working as a live-in personal assistant and serving as the Beckwith Student Government treasurer.

Starting from my first impression and everyday since, I am learning that Beckwith Hall is so much more than a residence hall for students with physical needs; it is a community of fun, generosity, and support. Everyone ranging from building staff, to residents, to personal assistants contribute to an atmosphere that is unmatched by any other residence hall on campus. I have grown to depend on this community in the good times and the bad. Whether going through one of life's ups or its downs, the Beckwith family will collectively respond with the encouragement necessary to continue. We overcome obstacles as a team. Laughter echoes through the halls—especially during meal times—as bizarre debates, hilarious stories, and friendly banter are commonplace. Beckwith Hall is the kind of place that one cannot wait to get to, and cannot stand leaving.

With my time at the U of I dwindling, the opportunity to live and work at Beckwith Hall is establishing itself as one of the most impactful points in the last four years. My Beckwith family inspires and supports me to be my best everyday. This experience has nurtured both a sense of and a respect for individuality. I was surprised and humbled to learn that I had been nominated by residents and staff of Beckwith as an Outstanding Student Employee of the Year. Out of 12,000 student employees on campus, I was chosen as the runner-up. It is a distinguished honor bestowed upon me and one more reason why I will never forget my experience this year at Beckwith Hall.

Although I will pack up my things and walk out the front door, I will never completely leave Beckwith Hall. The friendships acquired and the lessons learned will forever influence the person I become. If I could leave one piece of advice to prospective residents, parents, employees, policy makers, or the like, it would be this: being involved in Beckwith Hall is an opportunity that must be taken advantage of. If my experience serves as a template, Beckwith Hall will not only change you in the present, but will have a lasting influence far into your future.



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. You may also contact the DRES Student Services Office by phone at (217) 333-4603 (v/TTY), or send email to disability@illinois.edu.



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