

'Zinger Bug Zoe' Helps Children and Adults Understand Autism Disorder

By Paul Gingras

"The book is fabulous," said the Reverend Wayne Foote of St. Ignace, referring to "Zinger Bug Zoe: Living With Autism," a children's book designed to help children and adults understand Autism Spectrum Disorder. It was written by his niece, preschool teacher Gayle Betz of Eaton Rapids.

Autism is a neurological problem, which is increasingly understood in the medical community, leading to more diagnosed cases every year. People with autism have trouble understanding and responding to the world around them.

Using careful rhymes and energetic, colorful drawings, the book is helping both children and adults understand autism.

After people read the book, "I've had people say 'Now I understand,'" Mrs. Betz said, a reaction that makes her proud.

One of the unfortunate realities, she explained, is that information about autism published in the medical community is not geared for the average person, causing confusion for parents and teachers who want to understand the condition.

Library Seeks Funds for New Endowment

Investment Will Fund Future Programs, Needs

Any person who gives a \$1 donation to the St. Ignace Public Library will actually be putting \$3 into the library's piggybank for educational programs and technology, thanks to a new library endowment matching fund program.

The St. Ignace Public Library, Friends of the Library, and the Community Foundation are working together to establish the fund, which will eventually be used to expand library programs, maintain Community Room furnishings, and add to technology offered at the library, said Friends of the Library President Sherri Wheeldon.

"We'll be able to use the funds for expanding popular programs like Movie Night, which we added for the first time in October, make sure we have the proper furnishings in the Community Room, and keep providing up-to-date technology, like the new projector we bought this past fall," Mrs. Wheeldon said.

The public library board must raise \$5,000 to launch its endowment fund, and is now seeking public donations. It already has a commitment for a matching grant of \$1,050 from the Ernie Harwell Libraries Endowment Fund, which was announced in December, and a commitment from the Friends of the Library to match public donations dollar for dollar, up to \$1,000, effectively tripling public donations that come in. The library board hopes to attract donations from residents who want to make a lasting gift for educational programs at the library. The first \$1,000 of public donations will be matched by the two grants, netting about \$3,000 of the \$5,000 needed to establish the fund.

An endowment is an invested fund that uses only the income from the investment to pay for projects. The original fund itself remains intact, continuing to earn investment dollars for future projects. The St. Ignace Area Community Foundation has set aside a fund earmarked for the Library Endowment Fund, and will hold those funds in escrow until \$5,000 in donations is reached.

The endowment will be guided by the library's seven-member board of directors, said board chair Linda Monville, which will use the funds for the betterment of the library under the direction of librarian.

Donations to the project are tax deductible.

Mrs. Wheeldon said donations can be made at the library, or to any Friends of the Library member. Checks can be made payable to St. Ignace Area Community Foundation, SIPL Endowment Fund, and sent to P.O. Box 151, St. Ignace Michigan 49781.

Library board members are Mrs. Monville, Paul Grondin, Renee Vonderworth, Jean Nitz, Hart Plumbstead, Margaret Peacock, and Mary Maurer.

At right: Author and teacher Gayle L. Betz of Eaton Rapids poses with her daughter, Zoe, who is the subject of a children's book on autism entitled "Zinger Bug Zoe: Living With Autism." Mrs. Betz is the niece of the Reverend Wayne Foote of St. Ignace. (Photograph courtesy of Gayle Betz)

The main character, Zinger Bug Zoe, is modeled after Mrs. Betz' 11-year-old daughter, Zoe, who has severe autism. With specialized training, Zoe has managed to overcome many of its symptoms, and much of this training was conducted by her teacher, Kerstyn Green, who appears in the book as Kerstyn Kay.

The book was written to honor her daughter, Mrs. Betz said, as well as to acknowledge the teachers and staff in the Eaton Intermediate School District (EISD), who have helped Zoe.

One aspect of autism that Mrs. Betz seeks to help the public



understand is that, although people with the disorder can appear completely normal, their brains function much differently. They are often hypersensitive to light and sound.

"A touch may feel like needles," she explained. "And they can see the flickering of fluorescent lights so well it can actually hurt their eyes."

People with autism often experience sensory overload, she said, and sometimes they react by yelling or throwing themselves down. When young children do so, it may be incorrectly perceived as bad behavior, but therapy, not stern discipline, is the answer, she explained.

The book contains 26 pages of rhymed material, geared for preschool through fourth-grade students.

In the book, Zoe is a bug with wings that lives in Tweedledee, and Mrs. Betz illustrates the autistic sensory overload by showing Zoe grimacing at the joyful expression of another bug.

Mrs. Betz writes, "...deep inside my little bod a 'zingy' feeling sits. If someone touches me or talks, I have a zinger fit!"

Interspersed with rhymed explanations of autistic behavior, Mrs. Betz weaves Zoe's need for friendship into the story. Other "bugs" want to be Zoe's friend, she reveals, but they are unsure how to approach her; they stand at a distance with their antennas pulled back.

The role of education in the life of an autistic child is another major

theme, which is represented by the presence of Kerstyn Kay, who teaches Zoe how to control her yelling fits.

Mrs. Betz has presented the book to several classes in Eaton Rapids, and the response from children has been profound, she told *The St. Ignace News*.

She is amazed at the intelligent questions posed to her by very young children, who often want to know how Zoe's brain works, compared to their own, she said.

The book ends with the line, "Being different is OK, but Zoe needs friends, too. Can you be one?"

Children have replied with a hearty, "sure!" she added. Now that they understand her condition better, several children have told Mrs. Betz that, if they knew a child like Zoe, they would talk to her, even if she didn't respond.

Professional cartoonist and illustrator Dawn Baumer of Eaton Rapids drew the pictures for the book. After interviewing three illustrators, the relationship with Mrs. Baumer "just clicked." Her

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Posters To Commemorate Bridge Anniversary

As part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Mackinac Bridge, four commemorative posters marking the event are available for purchase. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) made the announcement Friday, January 26.

"On November 1, 1957, the Mackinac Bridge began serving Michigan residents by connecting our beautiful peninsulas," said Kirk T. Steudle, MDOT director. "Over time, the bridge has become a beloved Michigan landmark. We have captured some incredible images of the bridge that we would like to share with the public to commemorate this milestone."

The posters are \$4 each and are available by phone, fax, or mail, although they will not be made available in stores, reported MDOT. The Mackinac Bridge Authority, which manages bridge operations, is an agency under the umbrella of MDOT.

Two of the posters are in a landscape format, with one poster in color and the other a black and white print. They are 30 inches wide by 12 inches tall and depict three photographs of the bridge. A third poster is a color photograph of the bridge taken at Bridge View Park in St. Ignace and features five historic photographs along the bottom of

the 16-inch-wide by 30-inch-tall print. The fourth poster is the official celebration logo and is 15 inches wide by 30 inches tall.

Limited quantities of the posters are available, reported MDOT.

The \$4 per poster charge covers printing, handling, and sales tax. A \$3.77 cost per poster is available to nonprofit organizations. The posters can be ordered by calling (517) 322-1395. Orders must be paid with check or credit card. To view the posters and to print out an order form for mail or fax, visit the MDOT Web site or go to www.michigan.gov/mackinacbridge.



This is one of four posters available from the Michigan Department of Transportation that marks the 50th anniversary of the Mackinac Bridge. (Photograph courtesy of the Michigan Department of Transportation)

Upcoming County Road Projects Approved

By Karen Gould

State and federal funds totaling \$3.1 million will be used over the next six years to improve Mackinac County roads, and, among other projects, work on Swede Road and Simmons Road will now take place earlier than originally planned. The Mackinac County Road Commission project schedule was approved by the three-county Rural Task Force and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Friday, January 26. The other two counties in the task force, Luce and Chippewa, also received approval for their projects during the Sault Ste. Marie meeting.

Approved road projects for 2007 include H-40 in Hudson Township, East Lake in Brevort Township, Simmons in Marquette Township, Mackinac Trail in St. Ignace Township, Swede in Clark Township, Black Point in Brevort Township, Sandtown in Portage and Garfield townships, Krause in

Garfield Township, and pavement markings countywide.

In 2008, road projects include Swede in Clark Township, Sandtown in Portage Township, H-40 in Hudson Township, Black Point in Brevort Township, Pointe LaBarbe in Moran Township, and East Lake in Brevort Township.

Road projects for 2009 include Sandtown in Portage Township, H-40 in Hudson Township, Black Point in Brevort Township, Swede in Clark Township, South Curtis in Portage Township, Charles Moran in Brevort and St. Ignace townships, and Naubinway in Garfield Township.

Road work for 2010 includes H-40 in Garfield Township, Black Point in Brevort Township, Three Mile in Marquette Township, Swede in Clark Township, South Curtis in Portage Township, and Gros Cap in Moran Township.

In 2011, road projects include South Curtis in Portage Township,

H-40 in Garfield Township, H-42 in Portage Township, Three Mile in Marquette Township, Swede in Clark Township, and Gros Cap in Moran.

Road projects on the schedule for 2012 include Worth in Moran and Brevort townships, H-40 in Hudson Township, Borgstrom in Hudson Township, Mackinac Trail in St. Ignace Township, Simmons in Marquette Township, and Naubinway in Garfield Township.

In a separate program, the road commission also works with townships on supplemental road projects, funded jointly by the county, road commission, and the townships, with the county and the road commission matching up to \$10,000 for work on specific roads.

Before Mackinac County's proposed project list was approved by the task force, the road work schedule was discussed at a public meeting in St. Ignace Monday, January 22. Road commissioners listened to township representatives and residents voice concerns, and then commissioners made several modifications to the first draft of proposed projects. A special meeting was held three days later to make additional changes to the schedule before it was presented to the task force and MDOT.

During the public meeting, commissioners moved the work scheduled for Simmons Road from 2012 to take place in 2007. In another matter regarding the road, Marquette Township Supervisor John Kronmeyer and township resident Barb Foster said the sides of the road are higher than the center, so there is no place for water to drain.

Road Commission Manager

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DNR Reports Fish Virus Now Found in Lake Huron

An aquatic virus that has been predicted to infiltrate the entire Great Lakes system has reached the waters of Lake Huron as far north as Cheboygan, where, researchers learned last week, it has been present since at least 2005. Re-testing stored fish samples collected in 2005, fisheries officials have learned a fish disease called viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) has spread in Lake Huron, infecting whitefish, walleye, and Chinook salmon, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced Thursday, January 25. Recent analyses of fish sampled from northern Lake Huron have confirmed the existence of the virus in the Cheboygan area, in lake whitefish and walleye samples from the Thunder Bay area, and in Chinook salmon samples from the Swan River egg-take station near Rogers City.

VHS causes disease in fish but does not pose any threat to public health. It was detected for the first time in 2005 in Great Lakes fish species in the U.S. and Canada, and fisheries officials have predicted it will eventually infiltrate the entire Great Lakes system, threatening the fishing industry. It is not known how VHS was transferred to the Great Lakes region or how long it has been in the waterways of the Great Lakes, the DNR reported. Many biologists believe it reached the Great Lakes in the ballast water of ocean freighters.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture banned interstate fish shipments from the Great Lakes last fall, in an emergency measure to keep the virus from spreading, but modified the order after protest from the fish industry that pointed out Great Lakes fish are already being tested for VHS. The modified order allows properly documented fish shipments.

"The continuing march of VHS

through the waters of the Great Lakes is a major challenge to our agency and our management options," said DNR Director Rebecca Humphries. "These new discoveries are extremely unfortunate and further highlight the problems created by the constant introductions of new diseases from outside of the Great Lakes region, the speed with which they can spread, and the threat that such pathogens pose to our natural resources."

DNR officials have been in contact with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services, alerting them to the new confirmations of VHS in Lake Huron fish. Fisheries officials are now working to outline steps to slow the spread of the virus, and no immediate policy changes have been announced on the federal level.

VHS was detected in lake whitefish from the Cheboygan area after re-analyzing samples collected in 2005 during a survey for bacterial kidney disease (BKD).

"It is not unusual for us to collect fish that have unknown viruses, which typically require a significant effort to properly identify," said Gary Whelan, fish production manager for the DNR. "Once we had indications of VHS in other samples of fish from Lake Huron, this sample was retrieved from storage and fully analyzed by Dr. Mohamed Faisal at Michigan State University."

Samples from the Thunder Bay area were collected last fall during a mortality event that included lake whitefish and walleyes.

"At the time, we suspected that the cause of the mortality might be related to VHS," said Kelley Smith, chief of the DNR Fisheries Division. "Because the fish were so badly decomposed, however, it is still not certain that VHS caused

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Kiwanis Club Donates to Boardwalk



Pastor Michael Lane, president of St. Ignace Kiwanis Club, presents a check for \$5,000 to Debbie Evashvski of St. Ignace's Downtown Development Authority. The funds will be used toward expenses for the downtown boardwalk being installed near the light-house on the old rail dock.

Quality Time at the Library



Audrey Pearson, 3, enjoys some quality coloring time with volunteer Evelyn Wilson Saturday morning, January 27, at the Les Cheneaux Community Library in Cedarville. Miss Pearson is a regular at the library, making weekly visits with her parents, Laurie and Chris, Mrs. Wilson said.