

# Bulletin

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## REACH Academy Seniors Start Internships at Westchester Institute Of Human Development Under New Grant-Funded Training Program



**All Smiles:** Project SEARCH students and staff outside the Westchester Institute of Development at Westchester Medical Center on the first day of the new internship program

REACH Academy recently launched a new vocational education and training program at the Westchester Institute for Human Development that includes daily internships for five seniors at the Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla.

Though less than two months old, the program is already having a dramatic impact – on students and staff – and it may result in one or more seniors being hired by the Medical Center after they graduate.

Like most apparent “overnight

success” stories, of course, many hours of planning, effort, and collaboration took place long ahead of any accomplishments.

The story began last May, when Kerry McKenna, a CSE counselor at Clark Academy, took the lead in writing a grant proposal to the state’s Developmental Disability Planning Council for funding to implement a Project SEARCH program for GNC students.

Project SEARCH, a nationally-acclaimed organization, provides education and training to young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through innovative workforce and career programs. Its primary goal is to see graduating students secure competitive employment.

Providing effective vocational training for disabled students has long been a goal for St. Christopher’s and GNC schools, and

*(continued other side; see Interns)*

## St. Christopher's Vets Mark November 11

Veterans’ Day took on new significance for St Christopher’s this year when three staff members and one staff member’s grandson, all former soldiers, formed a Color Guard to conduct the first Veterans’ Day flag raising in recent memory on the Jennie Clarkson campus.

About 50 students and staff witnessed the tribute. The U.S. Coast Guard had recently donated the flag to St. Christopher’s.



## St. Christopher's Readies For January Opening at New Windsor Campus

Plans are moving apace for the January 30 opening of the Kaplan Career Academy at St. Christopher’s New Windsor campus, formerly McQuade Children’s Services center.

In December, the agency hosted two open house events to recruit residential and education staff and meet with parents and children interested in St. Christopher’s residential program or in day school enrollment at the Kaplan Career Academy.

Dr. Robert Maher, St. Christopher’s CEO, said he expects the campus’s cottages to open a week before school begins so that residential students can get comfortable in their surroundings. **An opening ceremony for state and local officials and other dignitaries is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 24 (or, in case of snow, Jan. 25).**

While some renovation work remains, much work has already been finished, said Dr Maher. Among the major projects completed was the installation of underground fiber optic cabling linking all buildings to the campus network and the Internet. The only remaining signs of this large undertaking are the pathways of newly planted grass or fresh pavement where work crews had dug the cable trenches.



Dr. Edward Placke, GNC schools superintendent, (center) and Horace Turnbull, COO of St. Chris, (right) meet with prospective staff over lunch at the December 6 open house.

The physical plant aside, much attention is also being placed on designing residential and clinical programming to meet the needs of student population St. Christopher’s expects to serve. “We will need to focus a lot of energy on transitional programming,” said Horace Turnbull, chief operating officer, “since we will be receiving many students as juniors or seniors who will need training that prepares them for life after high school.

“It is simply not enough to make sure students get their diploma. We have to prepare them to succeed at what comes afterward, whether that’s college, vocational training, or competitive employment.”

## Marching Band Performs for State University Football Game in Albany and Gets A Guided College Tour



**The Cobras March – and the Dogs Scrimmage:** St. Christopher's marching band warms up the crowd before kickoff as the Albany Great Danes faced the Bulldogs of Bryant University

Never silent nor stationary, St. Christopher's award-winning student band, the Marching Cobras, made its first-ever appearance at the State University of New York in Albany in November, performing in both pre-game and halftime shows as the UAlbany Great Danes football team faced the Bulldogs of Rhode Island's Bryant University.

The band's performances capped an exciting weekend excursion for GNC students that included a Friday night bowling outing in the Albany suburbs, an overnight hotel stay and, on Saturday morning prior to the game, an escorted tour of the university campus by St. Christopher's staff member and UAlbany alumnus Sheldon Gomes.



Students relax the night before their performance at the local lanes

"Albany will remember the Marching Cobras," said band leader Terrel Stowers in an email distributed to staff at school during the week following the trip. He said the pre-game program, "helped to set the atmosphere for what would be an exciting game. At halftime the band once again went onto the field and gave a spectacular performance. The crowd was excited and truly enjoyed the entire show."

Mr. Gomes "did a great job showing the pride and the culture

of the campus," to band members, said Mr. Stowers.

According to the university website, more than 2500 spectators attended the game, giving the Cobra's marching, musical act one of its largest audiences since beginning to perform for outside groups.

While UAlbany unfortunately came out on the losing end of a thrilling, come-from-behind contest – it was the Great Danes only defeat in their conference games this season – the weekend was a winning experience for both band members and staff.

The nearly 300-mile round trip and hotel stay proceeded exactly as planned. Mr. Stowers noted the assistance of agency staff Nealon Green and Letisha Lewis in providing round-the-clock supervision, as well as the work of Jonelle Ballard in "contacting parents and helping them to understand the impact that the trip would have on the students."

"We look forward to growing a relationship with the Albany campus not only so we can have a place to entertain," but also to instill a value for higher education among St. Christopher's students, Mr. Stowers wrote in his post-game message. "The students had the time of their lives. I look forward to the future and what awaits the Marching Cobras."

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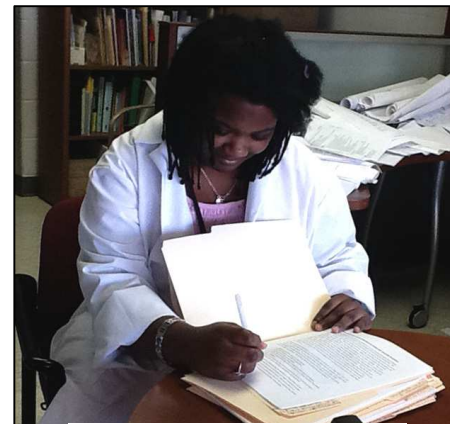
## Interns...

Project SEARCH was seen as well-matched to the agencies' existing educational, residential, and transitional programming.

The proposal was successful, the Council awarded St. Christopher's a multi-year grant to launch a Project SEARCH program, to be implemented with the support of the Westchester Institute for Human Development, a 200-person organization whose broad mission includes promoting well-being among people with disabilities.

WIHD is based on the grounds of Westchester Medical Center, less than a 15-minute ride from the Jennie Clarkson campus, where REACH students' residential cottages are located.

Planning for the program started during the summer and was completed in early fall. A key element involved WIHD coordinating with Westchester



Student intern Kimberly King

Medical Center to create internships in medical and administrative departments where REACH students would get daily training and experience in a real-world work setting. WIHD would also provide a classroom at its facility so that students could spend the entire school day on the WMC campus, moving easily between the classroom and their internships.

The students selected to take part (Eli Finkelstein, Kimberly King, Cletis Leo, Omar Reyes, and George Whitehead) are seniors who have completed the course work for their diploma (either a local or IEP – individualized education plan – diploma) and need a vocational component to meet their graduation requirements. Donna Pasini, a REACH Academy teacher, Laurie Dellolio, a teaching assistant, and Todd Jenkins, a job coach with St. Christopher's, were selected to lead the first class of seniors in the program.



Student intern George Whitehead

St. Christopher's Project SEARCH program started for students on Monday, Oct. 31. Now, on a typical school day morning, the students ride by bus from the Clarkson campus to the WIHD facility. Work begins in the classroom with transitional



Student intern Eli Finkelstein

training, instruction in life skills, or study of subject matter pertaining more directly to the internships.

Later, students are taken to their internships, which are in one of three fields: clerical work, assistive technology, and outpatient medical services. In addition to the teachers and job coach, other staff from St. Christopher's and WIHD train and supervise students in the internships.

Afterward, students return to the classroom to discuss or review what they did or learned at their "jobs." At the end of the school day, students board the bus for the ride back to Jennie Clarkson.

While the program is only several weeks old, St. Christopher's staff and other officials are already noticing significant results. "The students are doing good work, I mean really good work, and they are very dependable," said Naomi Brickel, the project coordinator in WIHD's Transition Resource Center.



Student intern Omar Reyes

"They bring a lot of positive energy with them. It's extremely fulfilling to see them functioning so well. It is inspiring for us to be involved with them."

Ms. Pasini said the internships are not only giving students real-world experience, it's giving them confidence and self-esteem. "You can see it in their attitude and even their body language. They stand up straighter."

George Whitehead, who has been interning in outpatient medical services, has performed so well that the Medical Center may consider hiring him after graduation. "There were no expectations that the internships would lead to something permanent at the medical center. That isn't their purpose," said Ms. Pasini, "but if it works out that way for George, it would be wonderful."