



## An Adoptive Father's *Journey*



The Venturo family (l. - r.): Maureen, Alanna, Alex, and Eric.

December 1, 2004. It's a date Alex Venturo, a school teacher from Haledon, New Jersey, will always remember. It's the date he began his journey as an adoptive father.

One day, after attending a church service, Mr. Venturo noticed a flyer that was hidden behind a cluttered collage of various other postings. It read: Are you interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent? Mr. Venturo was curious, and figured he'd attend. After all, it would probably be a large meeting; he could just slip in the back of the room and take in some information before heading on his way.

However, when he came to the meeting later that night, it was in the small library of the church, and he was the only one there! The organization holding the meeting was Children's Aid and Family Services, and the staff was happy to see Mr. Venturo. They described the agency and the process of fostering and adopting a child. Mr. Venturo went home that night and talked to his wife and daughter about the possibility of opening their heart and home to a child that needed a permanent place to live.

They all agreed they were ready for this commitment, and Mr. and Mrs. Venturo scheduled a follow-up meeting at which they received an application. It included questions about their personal history and medical background. The Venturos began their training with the agency in May and completed it in July.

In the fall, the Venturos were ready to visit two of the agency's group homes. The agency staff encouraged them to get to know the children, and to think about which child would fit in their family the best. They visited the homes, interacting with the children for a few months, throughout the holidays. One particular child stuck out in their mind — Eric. He seemed friendly in conversation, and they had a gut feeling he could be the one.

Eric's early childhood was filled with abuse and trauma, and when he was 3 years old, he was taken into foster care by the State.

Eric was in several temporary foster homes during the next few years. Finally, Eric arrived at the agency's group home for boys at the age of 9.

After visiting Eric for the next several months, the bond between Eric and the Venturos grew, and in June 2006, they asked if he wanted to join their family. He said yes.

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I'm thrilled to report Children's Aid and Family Services had a remarkable holiday season, with many organizations and individuals new to the agency getting involved by leading gift drives.

Often, the children who come to the agency have suffered such severe abuse and neglect that they haven't had much in the way of family celebrations during the holidays. In fact, this time of the year may be extraordinarily lonely for them. The agency's staff works hard to ensure the children enjoy holiday activities, and it is usually while in the agency's foster care that the children first experience holiday decorating and gift giving. I thank everyone who took the time to buy the children the gifts they wanted, and helped make the holiday special for them.

This year is starting out on a busy note, with preparations underway for the agency's annual spring gala.

Our "Beach Party" gala, on Friday, March 28, 2008, at Hackensack Golf Club, promises to be our most exciting fundraiser yet. Major sponsors, including Irwin Franchise Capital Corporation, Applebee's, BD, Boiling Springs Savings Bank, Commerce Bank, Mutual of America, Prestige Lexus, TD Banknorth, Toys"R"Us, Inc., and Wyeth have already signed on. I offer special thanks to the agency's Event Committee for working hard to make this an unforgettable evening to benefit the agency's vulnerable children and families. For more details, please see the back cover of *Turning Points*. I hope to see you there!

Robert B. Jones, Ph.D.  
President & CEO

## Anne and John Oros Receive Award

Ridgewood residents Anne and John Oros, long-time foster parents for Children's Aid and Family Services, received a National Family Week (NFW) Advocacy award. Mr. and Mrs. Oros serve as tireless advocates for children with special needs, particularly on behalf of babies born to drug-addicted mothers.

Mr. and Mrs. Oros have cared for seven foster children since joining the agency (they also fostered several children prior to this), and are currently nurturing an infant and a toddler. They have also adopted one of the infants they fostered. Further, Mrs. Oros provides support and guidance to new foster families, as well as respite care to their foster children. Mr. Oros has been recently appointed by Governor Jon Corzine to serve on the New Jersey Taskforce on Child Abuse and Neglect. Mrs. Oros also serves on a committee for the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.



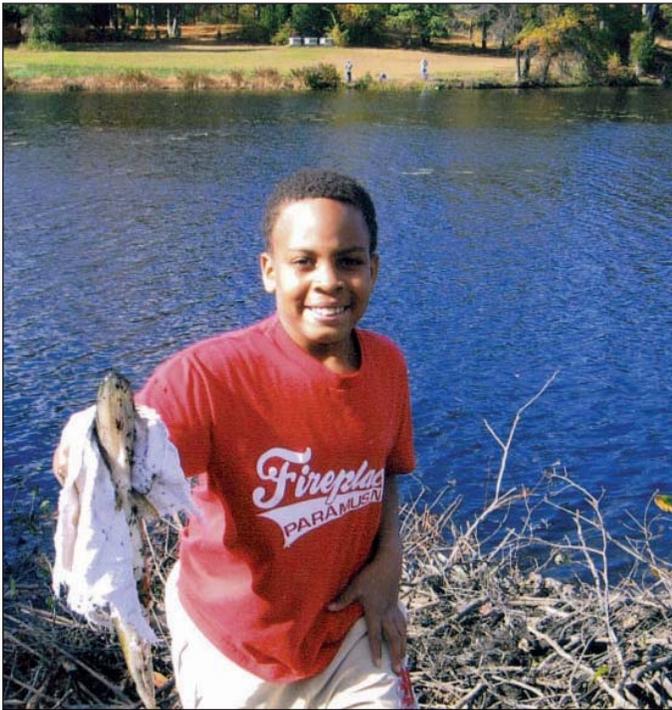
Anne and John Oros being presented the National Family Week Advocacy award by Bob Jones, Ph.D., president & CEO of the agency.

Hundreds of communities across the country participated in NFW during the week of Thanksgiving, a time when many families traditionally celebrate their connections with one another. "NFW: Connections Count" embraces the premise that children live better lives when their families are strong, and families are strong when they live in communities that connect them to economic opportunities, social networks, and services.

"I was thrilled to present this award to Anne and John, who have certainly earned it for their strong support and advocacy of some of the most vulnerable children in New Jersey," said Bob Jones, Ph.D., president & CEO of the agency.

## Caregiver Support Group

Adult children and caregivers of aging family members are invited to join a free support group that meets every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. at the Northwest Senior Center, 46-50 Center Street, Midland Park, NJ. Come join other caregivers and learn about the many services that are available to seniors. Please call Sheila Brogan at 201.447.5695 for more information.



Eric reels in a big catch.

During June and July, Eric visited the Venturos' home for increasingly long periods of time, and in August he joined them on vacation in Maine. An agency staff member drove him there. In August, Eric moved in with the Venturos permanently. Eric's adoption was finalized in September 2007.

Mr. Venturo described Eric as a "perfect guest" during the first few months in his new home, but this soon changed. Luckily, Mr. Venturo had anticipated this. "The agency trainings were extremely helpful," says Mr. Venturo. "They prepared me for negative behaviors and difficult situations."

As is often the case with children who have been previously abandoned or abused, Eric began testing the Venturos, to see if they were different from all the other adults he had previously encountered. He would often act out, or pretend to run away. "One thing I learned through my experience as an adoptive parent was that I could

really handle the challenge," says Mr. Venturo. "Even though I hit some rough patches with Eric, I learned I could stick with it. I was able to love him even when he acted up."

Eric has shown considerable improvement since living with the Venturos. He used to have trouble managing his feelings and would often get aggressive. Now he can talk in a more controlled manner and he handles his emotions better. For instance, he's started to learn anger management strategies, such as just leaving a situation if he gets upset.

"The more time he spends in our home, the better he has become," says Mr. Venturo. "Just living day in and day out with us provides stability for him."

*There are many older children like Eric whose only wish is to be part of a permanent, loving family. For more information about adopting a child, please call Kristen Brady, our Wendy's Wonderful Kids coordinator, at 201.226.0300.*



Eric and Alanna enjoying a fishing trip.

“Adopting an older child is tough, but it’s very rewarding. You see this kid come into your home having had all these bad things happen to him; kids like Eric have all these strikes against them. What I’m trying to do is be a stabilizing force in Eric’s life. I want to be the one person that didn’t give up on him.”

~ Alex Venturo

## Agency Honored with 2007 Adoption Excellence Award



Kathy Russo, clinical services administrator, and Dana Fried, research development coordinator, NJARCH, at the Adoption Excellence Awards.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded Children's Aid and Family Services with a 2007 Adoption Excellence Award at a ceremony in December in Arlington, Virginia. The agency was recognized for the contributions it has made in providing adoption and other permanency solutions, such as reunification with other birth family members or with long-term foster parents, for children in foster care.

The Adoption Excellence Awards program was established by HHS in 1997 to recognize outstanding accomplishments in achieving permanency for America's children waiting in foster care.

"It is a privilege to be one of just 15 organizations throughout the country to receive this award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services," said Bob Jones, Ph.D., president & CEO of Children's Aid and Family Services. "Our agency is honored to receive national recognition for our work of providing vulnerable children with permanent homes."

For more information on the awards, please visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov>.

## Art Auction Benefits the Agency

The Franklin Lakes Newcomers & Neighbors Club recently hosted an art auction, with a portion of the proceeds benefiting the agency's Boarder Babies program — in which individuals or families provide foster care for infants whose mothers are unable to care for them — and the Baby Basics program, which provides weekly supplies of nutritional formula and diapers to low-income families with infants.

The auction took place at Portobello Restaurant in Oakland, New Jersey, and featured a selection of fine art as well as sports memorabilia. The event was a great success, and the Club donated \$12,000 to Children's Aid and Family Services.

"We are delighted to sponsor this art auction," says Nina Sharma, board member, The Franklin Lakes Newcomers & Neighbors Club. "Our goal is to help raise awareness and funds for Children's Aid and Family Services' Baby Basics and Boarder Babies programs, while having lots of fun doing it."

The Franklin Lakes Newcomers & Neighbors Club was founded in 1967 to develop friendships and strengthen community spirit in the Franklin Lakes community. For more information, visit [www.flnewcomers.com](http://www.flnewcomers.com).



Liz Mason, Madinah Grier, and Bob Jones of Children's Aid and Family Services with Franklin Lakes Newcomers & Neighbors Club members Nina Sharma, Kathie Schwartz, Jakki DeLuca, and Anna Gassib at the art auction.

“We're extremely grateful to The Franklin Lakes Newcomers & Neighbors Club for raising money from this auction to benefit two of our most vital programs.”

~ Liz Mason  
Executive Vice President



# Holiday Wrap-up

This past holiday season proved to be one of our biggest, thanks to the generous donations and gifts from many individuals and organizations. We kicked off the season with a special “Breakfast with Santa” at the Paramus Park Shopping Center, and celebrated all month with great events including parties for the children living in treatment and group homes, as well as those attending Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center, and in our Baby Basics program.

“We’re extremely grateful to everyone that donated to this year’s holiday gift drives,” says Liz Mason, executive vice president. “Many of the children in the agency’s care have never experienced the joy of the holidays before, and simple things, like receiving the gift they’ve asked for, make a world of difference to them.”



1 and 4. “Breakfast with Santa” at Paramus Park Shopping Center. (Photos © William Neumann Photography). 2. The Paramus Police Reserve at the holiday party they hosted for children living in the group homes. 3 and 6. Children enjoying themselves at the Treatment Homes Holiday Party. 5. Manny Correa, of Web474 Graphics, led a gift drive for the children at Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center.

*Children’s Aid and Family Services offers a profound thank you to the many generous individuals and organizations that donated gifts to the children, and/or donated to our 2007 Holiday Appeal.*

# Continued Success at *The Depot*

A SPECIAL  
CRAFT & GIFT SHOP

It's no small achievement to become a destination store, particularly in a busy retail environment like Bergen County. Yet after 43 years, The Depot, an all-volunteer gift and craft shop, continues to attract new customers with its one-of-a-kind merchandise and attentive, personal service.

As a result of its success, the volunteers contributed more than \$200,000 to Children's Aid and Family Services in 2007!

Staffed by 120 dedicated volunteers, The Depot is the largest all-volunteer women's exchange in the country. It helps skilled women and senior citizens who need to generate income through their arts and crafts. It offers exquisite handmade items from more than 200 consignors, as well as one of the largest selections of Vera Bradley handbags and accessories in the area. All proceeds benefit the agency.



Volunteers ready to check out customers at The Depot (l. - r.): Dot Hildebrand, Heidi Kay, co-director, and Maria Macfarlan.



Heidi Kay in the Infant Room.

Heidi Kay, who has volunteered at The Depot since 1990 and has served as co-director since 2006, says, "The Depot has a reputation for quite different merchandise because of its crafters, and we strive to keep the store visually appealing. Displays are changed on a regular basis by our talented room managers, who are also volunteers, and as a result, there is always a new look."

Located in a seven-room house at **22 Prospect Street in Midland Park**, The Depot showcases unique home goods, including elegant serving sets, vases, tea pots, baby clothing and toys, a large selection of Vera Bradley handbags and accessories, and an impressive display of ornaments and decorations during the holiday season.

Another factor in the store's continued growth is the remarkable devotion of its volunteers. "The Depot is so important to all of us because it supports children and families," Ms. Kay said. "The volunteers have a profound sense of commitment. Working here is truly a labor of love."

Volunteers typically donate three and one-half hours every other week either 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m., or Thursday evenings 4:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

The Depot is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and until 7:30 p.m. on Thursdays until the end of June. It is open half days in July and closed for the month of August.

Regular hours begin after Labor Day. Extended holiday hours begin the day after Thanksgiving. For more information, call **201.444.6120**, or visit the store online at <http://thedepot.cafsnj.org>.



Some of the unique home goods found at The Depot.

## 2007 "Angels in Adoption" Honored



**Patricia and Raymond Dansen** of North Haledon, **Ronald and Jonelle von Autenried** of Park Ridge, **Maria and Miguel Perdomo** of Teaneck, and **Dana Fried** of Morris Township, were all selected as 2007 Angels in Adoption.

They were honored at the ninth annual Angels in Adoption gala in Washington, D.C.

Each year, members of Congress select individuals, families or organizations from their home states that have demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of children in need of homes. U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell nominated the Dansens, U.S. Rep. Scott Garrett nominated the von Autenrieds, U.S. Rep. Steven Rothman nominated the Perdomos, and U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen nominated Ms. Fried.

The Angels in Adoption awards are sponsored by the Congressional Coalition of Adoption Institute (CCAI), a non-partisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about the



Back row (l. - r.): Raymond Dansen, Ronald von Autenried, and Miguel Perdomo. Front row (l. - r.): Dana Fried, Patricia Dansen, Jonelle von Autenried, and Maria Perdomo.

tens of thousands of foster children in the United States in need of permanent, safe, loving homes through adoption.



Bob Jones, Ph.D., president & CEO of the agency, and his grandson, Benjamin, at Hoop-A-Paluzza.

## Hoop-A-Paluzza Update



The sixth annual Hoop-A-Paluzza fundraiser was a terrific success, with more than \$130,000 being raised for the agency's Boarder Babies infant foster care program.

"We're thrilled to have been a beneficiary of this important event and receive such a generous donation to help underwrite this vital program," says Liz Mason, executive vice president of the agency.

An all-volunteer organization since its founding in 2002, Hoop-A-Paluzza has raised more than \$1,500,000 to aid children's charities in New Jersey.

For more photos of this event, visit [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org), go to press room and scroll down to November 20, or visit [www.hoopapaluzza.org](http://www.hoopapaluzza.org).



## Save the Date

The Volunteer Appreciation Event is Thursday, May 15. More details to come in the next issue of *Turning Points*.

# Join us for a Beach Party splash!

Mark your calendars! The agency's signature fundraising gala is on Friday, March 28, 2008, at the Hackensack Golf Club in Oradell, NJ. The event will benefit vulnerable children and families.

This year's "Beach Party" will include themed entertainment, a wide assortment of culinary treats, open bar, DJ, raffle, and silent and live auctions with one-of-a-kind items to bid on, including stays at luxurious vacation homes.

Just a few of this year's sponsors include Applebee's, BD, Boiling Springs Savings Bank, Commerce Bank, Irwin Franchise Capital

Corporation, Mutual of America, Prestige Lexus, TD Banknorth, Toys"R"Us, Inc., and Wyeth.

Please join us for an evening of fun and fundraising! Tickets for the gala start at \$150 and online registration is available. Visit our website at [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org) to purchase your tickets and for additional event information.

If you would like to lend your support through a sponsorship, ad journal booking, ticket purchase, to contribute an item to the auctions, or as a volunteer, please call Madinah Grier at 201-261-2800.



**The mission of** Children's Aid and Family Services is to preserve, protect and, when needed, provide families. Motivated by compassion for vulnerable children, young adults, frail elderly and their families, we provide high-quality and innovative services that meet their social, educational and emotional needs. Since 1899, the agency has been recognized as a leader in adoption and specialty therapeutic services for children who have been severely traumatized and abused. For more information, please visit [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org).



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