



Meeting the Needs of Students with Brain Injury

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## Education... for a Lifetime

# GPA today

News and information about Garfield Park Academy

Fall 2010

### Profile of Success: Ernie Perez



Garfield Park Academy graduate Ernie Perez on a visit to School

By his own admission, Ernie Perez was a tough kid. Looking back, Perez says he could have easily ended up behind bars like so many of the kids he grew up with.

But rather than life behind bars, today Perez is setting his own bar. And he sets it higher and higher every day.

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## Meeting the Educational, Social, and Behavioral Needs of Students with Traumatic Brain Injury

14 year-old Lydia (not her real name) was referred to Garfield Park Academy when her public school teachers noticed that she seemed "like a different kid." She was disorganized, and unable to focus. Easily frustrated, she would 'melt down,' yelling and throwing her books. She was often at the school nurse, complaining of a headache or exhaustion.

To meet her, you would not know that Lydia has Trumatic Brain Injury (TBI), but like nearly 40% of the students referred for special education, she does.

Dale Starcher, Ph.D., the Director of Clinical Services at Garfield Park Academy and a member of the New Jersey Association of School Psychologists, says that TBI is often called the "silent epidemic" because it is extremely under-identified in students.



Traumatic Brain Injury can be caused by physical trauma, or may be acquired as a result of an accident or illness. It can impact all areas of a child's life, so it is common for students with academic problems as a result of TBI to need

cognitive, behavioral, psychological and social supports - in addition to academic support - in order to address all areas of weakness. GPA's nursing, social work, and psychology staffs are mindful of all the symptoms associated with Traumatic Brain Injury.

One of the biggest challenges, according to Starcher, is the frequent behavioral challenges associated with brain injuries. "Often, students show changes in their personality, and may have anxiety, and depression," said Starcher. "Some students develop a quick 'trigger' - with increases in

## EQUUS Foundation Donates to GPA



For the 4th consecutive year, Garfield Park Academy has received a grant from the EQUUS Foundation to provide Equine Therapy to its 140 students.

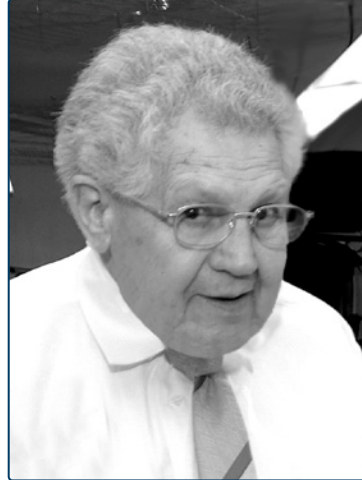
The EQUUS Foundation provides direct financial support for therapeutic riding programs for individuals with physical, emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities; life threatening or other serious illnesses; and underserved, economically disadvantaged and “at-risk” youth.

The \$5,000 grant, combined with other donations, will allow GPA to bring horses directly to the campus on a weekly basis, allowing all students to be part of the program. “We are honored to be the only school in New Jersey to receive this prestigious grant,” said Dr. Steven Morse, Executive Director.

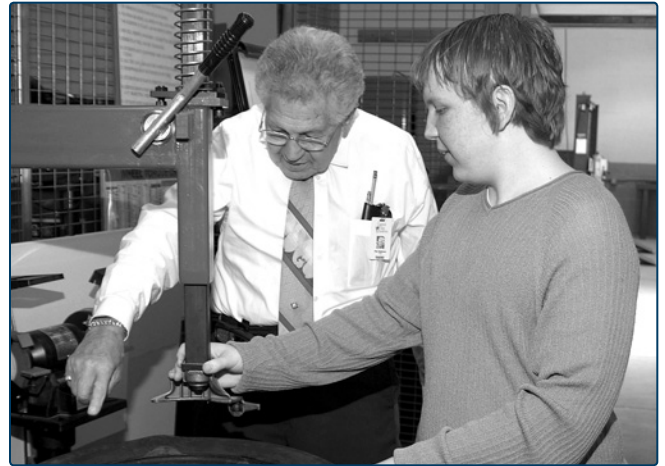
## Pasqual Galeone: A Driving Force Behind GPA’s Automotive Technology Program

Every day, 88 year-old Pasqual (Pat) Galeone arrives to work at Garfield Park Academy wearing a jacket and a tie. Galeone, a retired boxer and auto mechanic, is the director of GPA’s automobile technology program, where he supervises

instruction for more than two dozen teens and young adults who are interested in exploring a career in auto maintenance.



Pasqual Galeone,  
Automobile Technology Program  
Director



Galeone has been in the field of automotive services for more than 65 years. According to Dr. Steven Morse, Executive Director of Garfield Park Academy, the program’s building once housed a swimming pool, but under Pat’s supervision, it was transformed into a fully equipped, state-of-the-art facility, with two garage bays, a lift, a classroom and a storage area.

Tony Marchetti, Coordinator of the Automotive Department at Camden County College is an evaluation team leader with NATEF, the organization that certifies school automotive programs. As part of his work, Marchetti gets to visit a lot of schools.

Marchetti says Galeone is a real advocate for the industry, and an excellent mentor

to the young men at Garfield Park Academy. “Most guys his age are eager to enjoy retirement, but Pat is still going strong. He really enjoys his students and is a great influence on them.”

“To my knowledge, Garfield Park Academy is the only school of its kind serving this population through an automotive program,” said Marchetti. “If ever someone was deserving of recognition as a hero and mentor for our industry, Pat Galeone is that person.”

Dr. Morse expects the program at GPA to be fully certified later this school year, allowing the program to issue ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) Certification to students, thereby opening the door to good jobs in the field of automotive repair and service.

## Profile of Success: Ernie Perez *continued from cover*

Now 22, Perez is a Private in the United States Army. Having completed basic training, Perez is now preparing to work in an armored HUM-V, using computer coordinates to help guide battles and missiles.

Perez credits his success and confidence to the education he got at Garfield Park Academy, which he attended from 6th grade through his graduation at age 18.

“They have much smaller classes and more teachers and staff who helped me through the obstacles I faced – not just academic, but the social and emotional stuff too. I know I did far better at Garfield than I ever would have done in public school,” added Perez.

***“Perez is a great example of how students can turn around when given a rich student staff ratio and GPA’s unique therapeutic supports and services”***

Perez took classes in business, automotive technology, and culinary arts, along with the traditional high school curriculum. He recalled the school’s unique motivational system, and how it pushed him to follow rules and work hard. “I knew if I kept it together, I could earn privileges and go to the school store to choose things I wanted. That helped me see that good behavior really could pay off. It taught me to be patient and it kept me going.”



Ernie Perez with Garfield Park Academy Executive Director, Dr. Steven Morse.

But according to Perez, it was the staff at GPA that made the real difference.

Perez says that in his home district, he felt that few cared if he did his work, or came to school. “They only saw me as a trouble maker,” he said. “At Garfield Park Academy, everyone has one goal: to help you become a slightly better person by the end of each day.”

According to Dr. Steven Morse, Executive Director, Perez is a great example of how students can turn around when given a rich student staff ratio and GPA’s unique therapeutic supports and services.

“Our job is to give students resources to make better decisions – and that is exactly what Ernie did. We are incredibly proud of him and wish him the very, very best.”

## Serving Students with Traumatic Brain Injury

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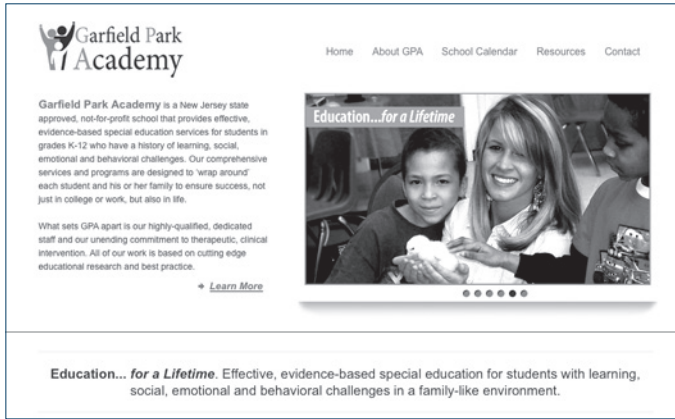
anger and rage, suicidal thoughts, and difficulties getting along with others.” When this happens, students with TBI may need more support than most public schools can offer.

“Many of the students at GPA have some form of brain injury,” said Starcher. “We are sensitive to the needs of these students and often re-structure our academics to meet their needs.” he added.

“One of GPA’s greatest strengths lies in our ability to meet the psychological and behavioral needs of these students. The unique cognitive-behavioral model we use is a great fit for these students. Here, students can not only begin to recover, they can thrive.”

## Check Out Our New Web Site!

Garfield Park Academy's website has recently undergone a makeover. The new site contains more visual material and a new navigational structure for parents, teachers and school district officials. Please take a moment to visit [www.garfieldparkacademy.org](http://www.garfieldparkacademy.org).



Garfield Park Academy is a New Jersey state approved, not-for-profit school that provides effective, evidence-based special education services for students in grades K-12 who have a history of learning, social, emotional and behavioral challenges, and is Middle States Accredited. For more information, please contact Garfield Park Academy or visit our website.

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