



AT PLAY. Students at AbilityFirst's Lawrence L. Frank Center in a creative movement class.

JAMES ERIN DETAURECU

# A World of Poss-Ability

The history of AbilityFirst is full of good cheer, good food and great successes.

➤ **MOST PASADENA RESIDENTS LEARN ABOUT ABILITYFIRST** FROM ATTENDING ITS GOURMET FESTIVAL OF FALL, ONE OF THE SAN GABRIEL VALLEY'S MOST BELOVED FOOD AND WINE EXTRAVAGANZAS. BUT WHEN THEY LEARN ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S FOCUS ON EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES TO CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH PHYSICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, THEY SEE THAT ITS ROLE GOES WAY BEYOND SERVING UP DELICIOUS DELICACIES.

AbilityFirst was established in 1926 as the Crippled Children's Society of Southern California (CCS) at the Rotary International Convention. Lawrence L. Frank—co-founder of Lawry's Restaurants—and Paul Dietrich, both Los Angeles Rotarians, were two of the original founders of the organization and continued the tradition of loyal support throughout their lives.

Frank and a member of the famous Van De Kamp family opened the very first Lawry's Prime Rib in 1938. Through these two entrepreneurial pursuits, Frank discovered his two distinct passions: charity and food service. In 1968, he created the center that is still a thriving facility in Pasadena and his namesake, the Lawrence L. Frank Center, which is just one of AbilityFirst's 24 locations Southern California.

As both of his companies grew and thrived, Frank knew that his legacy was something he wanted to pass on. "My grandfather was bigger than life," says Richard R. Frank, current CEO of Lawry's Restaurant, Inc., who took over the position from his father, Richard N. Frank. "The family is more involved in this business now than it has ever been," referring to the cousins and nephews who work along side him.

Even those who aren't related to the Franks act as if they're part of the family, their stead-

// STORY BY SARAH HAUFRECT

fast dedication to AbilityFirst's programs and services evident in all they do. At the AbilityFirst Lawrence L. Frank Center, Director Michael Barkyoub loves showing off the activities wall, which includes water rafting, horseback riding, kayak trips and an array of trophies won by the center's accomplished cheerleading squad. "AbilityFirst is about giving people real-life skills, making each person aware of what they can achieve, rather than their limitations," Barkyoub says. "Ideally, I would like to be out of a job years from now because of the work we are doing today—teaching kids and parents how to enjoy life to the fullest." From full-blown musicals to holiday pageants to participation in the Los Angeles Marathon, kids at AbilityFirst have the same opportunities—if not more so—than regular summer camps and after-school programs provide. Even the center's in-house activities are impressively varied, challenging and mentally stimulating, to children with autism and other developmental disabilities, like the facility's recycling program—where kids learn

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MICHAEL BARKYOUMB

about the environment—swimming lessons, cooking, and creative movement classes.

Most AbilityFirst programs qualify for funding through the state-supported Regional Centers. However, government support provides only about half of the dollars necessary to deliver high-quality programs and services. Lawry's still plays a very big role supporting AbilityFirst, contributing to the events that benefit the organization year in and year out. But the organization is truly indebted to the local community and its continuing support. "We are thriving in Pasadena," says Lori Gangemi, president and CEO of AbilityFirst. She might be talking about the business side, but it's plain to see that the ones who are truly thriving are the children who walk out the door changed for the better and ready to show off their abilities to the world.

The 34rd Annual AbilityFirst Gourmet Festival of Fall will be held Sunday, Oct. 5, at the Tiffany Oakes estate in South Pasadena. For additional information and tickets visit [AbilityFirst.org](http://AbilityFirst.org).

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