



Special  
Section  
Inside



Photo courtesy Lindsey Lansburgh

## Foothill Family Gala

Foothill Family Gala co-chair Wende Lee, Friends of Foothill President Christine Villalpando-Escobar, Foothill Family CEO Steve Allen, event co-chair Becky Chuen and Vice President Vanessa Wolf Alexander were among those who helped organize the region’s first in-person gala since the beginning of the pandemic. **See photos, page 16.**

## AbilityFirst Fundraisers Defy Pandemic to Strengthen Mission

By Camila Castellanos  
The Outlook

Taking a page from the “extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures” handbook, AbilityFirst has achieved a pandemic-era feat by so far raising 90% of the \$5.9 million sought by a capital campaign to help the nonprofit meet the changing needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Despite the many challenges presented by the coronavirus crisis, AbilityFirst galvanized to continue meaningful services for its participants — and its donor community followed suit, supporting the Building Independence Celebrating Community Capital Campaign. Funds from that effort will underpin renovations and program enhancements



Gloria Deukmejian



Richard R. Frank

**See ABILITY FIRST, page 38**

## Pasadena Heritage to Conclude Spring Home Tour

Pasadena Heritage will present a new version of its annual Spring Home Tour. Instead of a one-day event, tours of six architectural works of art will be offered as a series. Part 3, Revival-style Architecture, will premiere on the last Sunday of June and all three recordings will be available through July 4. (April and May recordings are already available.)

Premiering June 27, virtual attendees will visit the charming Lansing Beach House, a French Norman-style home built in 1927 by David Witmer and Loyall Watson. The original owners of this house, Lansing and Kath-

erine Beach, met in France during WWI.

“It is said that they had this home built in this style as a tribute to their courtship,” a Pasadena Heritage spokesperson said. “We will also virtually visit architect Everett Phipps Babcock’s own home. This home, known locally as the ‘fairy tale castle’ then, has the feeling of a medieval manor. Built in the English Tudor style in 1926 for the architect and his wife Clare, it served as Babcock’s residence and home office for a period. The home is an official city

**See HOME TOUR, page 11**



Photos by Eric Danielson / OUTLOOK

The Polytechnic varsity boys’ basketball team defeated Arcadia, 63-54, to win the Division 4AA title, the program’s first since 1995. The winning squad includes (front, from left) Nicholas Cardenas and Bobby Hall, Justin Wang (standing, from left), Breydon Beggs, Jack Williamson, Colin Mathews, Jack Adkins, Justin Odibo, Kareem Ammar, Dimitri Mendoza, Brandon Szeto and Matthias Olson.

## Poly Captures CIF Title, Enters State Regionals

By Austin Green  
The Outlook

As Polytechnic’s basketball players began to celebrate the Panthers’ 63-54 win over Arcadia in the CIF Southern Section Division 4AA championship game last Wednesday, a referee

ran to center court and waved them off. There was still half of a second left on the clock, and Poly would need to inbound the ball one more time.

So Poly’s starting five headed back out for one final play. They had already endured a global pandemic that essentially took away over a year of their high

school experience, months of uncertainty as to whether they would even play a basketball season and, finally, a furious fourth-quarter comeback from an Arcadia team that had developed a habit of thrilling finishes throughout the postseason. The

**See POLY, page 32**



**ABILITY FIRST**

**contd. from page 1**

for AbilityFirst centers in Pasadena and Long Beach that opened more than 50 years ago.

"Throughout our 95-year history, AbilityFirst has faced various challenges and has always risen to the occasion," said President/CEO Lori Gangemi. "During the past 15 months, AbilityFirst staff has worked through the pandemic creating innovative services, including remote and alternate location programs to keep our participants engaged and safe. And similarly, our community of supporters has stepped up their support."

The number of children and adults who have developmental disabilities and need services within the Pasadena and Long Beach communities increased by 1,000 people, or by about 9%, just from 2017. Of these individuals, 66% are between 6 and 51 years old and able to be served by AbilityFirst, whose mission is to “look beyond disabilities, focus on capabilities and expand possibilities.” Through building improvements, enhancements and program expansions enabled by its capital campaign, AbilityFirst will better serve more people with disabilities, Gangemi said.

Bolstered by its co-chairs, Richard R. Frank and Gloria Deukmejian, the capital campaign has been steadily reaching its goal by “scratching away at it,” despite a rocky start.

At the outset, the pandemic was in full swing and there was a lot of uncertainty among prospective campaign donors, Frank recalled.

"It was enough of a challenge to get the capital campaign com-



Photo courtesy AbilityFirst

AbilityFirst campaign co-chair Richard Frank (left) and President/CEO Lori Gangemi overcame pandemic challenges to better serve the changing needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. Frank and campaign co-chair Gloria Deukmejian (not pictured) helped to raise 90% of the \$5.9 million goal during the global coronavirus crises.

mittee even together — via Zoom,” he said. “We were like ‘What’s Zoom?’”

Then the stock market took a hit and some potential donors backed away, with others flocking to other social justice initiatives. Businesspersons, including Frank, became inundated making sure their businesses didn't fall apart. But little by little, he noted, "We had some great success stories, too. ... We found a few gems" among potential donors.

Frank has good reason to persevere on behalf of AbilityFirst — his family has deep roots in the organization, going back three generations. His grandfather, Lawrence L. Frank, along with three other Los Angeles Rotary Club members, spearheaded the charity after visiting a center to help children with polio in Chicago in 1925. Those members returned with compassion, concern and a commitment

to help other children with polio in Southern California. The following year, they founded the Crippled Children's Society, which was eventually renamed AbilityFirst and today focuses on the unique needs and desires of each individual through a person-centered approach.

"I believe passionately in the mission, and I also know that AbilityFirst is good at what they do," said Frank as he recalled his family's impact. His grandfather served as its first volunteer executive director for more than 10 years, spending much of his time performing the day-to-day operations. Lawrence Frank also was pivotal in developing AbilityFirst's Camp Paivika — a place where children, teens and adults with disabilities can have a traditional camp experience — by helping secure the land where it sits today.

Frank's father also joined the

board of directors, and worked alongside his wife and the architect, applying their vision of mid-century modern architecture to the design of Pasadena's Lawrence L. Frank Center in the 1960s.

When Gangemi became the organization's CEO in 2004, she reached out to Frank and furthered his commitment to the charity. He joined the board of directors, following in his family's footsteps.

"The Frank family legacy with AbilityFirst and Richard Frank's involvement as a community leader in Pasadena made him an ideal candidate for our board," Gangemi said. "As a savvy philanthropist, Richard asked great questions about our current and future initiatives and our financial position before deciding to join."

Although he had limited experience in fundraising and certain fears to overcome, Frank agreed to co-chair the campaign, in part because of his family's legacy.

“When I was recently cleaning out my office, I discovered some Xerox copies of old ask letters my dad had written in the 1950s to fundraise for the first [Lawrence L. Frank Center] building. Seeing those letters, I thought, ‘Well, if my father can do it, so can I.’”

Teaming with Frank, Deukmejian didn't have the family tie to AbilityFirst, but she does have the passion for helping people with disabilities. Her commitment to AbilityFirst's mission has spanned 30 years. She has provided committee support and has been an active member of the AbilityFirst Long Beach Center Guild.

"I could see the need for improved facilities for our AbilityFirst participants," said Deukmejian of the urgency of the capital campaign and the way it will ben-

efit participants. "Because of the teaching kitchen, they can prepare meals in group settings, regardless of obstacles due to height, space, etc. They will feel empowered to perform similar tasks at home or in the community."

Since opening more than a half-century ago, the community centers in Pasadena and Long Beach have not been upgraded, so the capital campaign funds are vital in modernizing the buildings and enhance the organization's programs to meet the changing needs of individuals with developmental disabilities in those communities.

"We help our participants achieve their personal best through basic life skills, communication, socialization and healthy living. After participant and family surveys, conducting our due diligence and doing the research, we recognized the changing needs of our population have to be met with improved renovations and expansion of our programs," Gangemi said. She identified the programs set for expansion that will allow them to serve more individuals: ExploreAbility, PossAbility, After-School Program, College to Career and Supported Employment.

In addition to Frank and Deukmejian at the helm of the campaign, committee members include Joan Alderson, Bob and Mary Alice Braly, Caroline Hansen, Deloris Mayuga, Linda Silver, Julie and Henry Taboada, and Harlan Thompson. Honorary committee members include Los Angeles County Supervisors Kathryn Barger and Janice Hahn, Terri Kohl and former Pasadena Mayor Terry Tornek.

To learn more about AbilityFirst,  
visit [abilityfirst.org](http://abilityfirst.org).



*Family Fun* on the 4th

5:30pm Gates Open  
6:30pm TNT Freestyle Motocross  
7:00pm Opening Ceremonies and National Anthem  
7:45pm Haylee Joe Musical Performance  
8:00pm TNT Freestyle Motocross "All American Thrill Show"  
8:15pm NBC's The Voice Musical Performance by Mendeleyev  
9:00pm Biggest Fireworks show in Southern California.  
"Celebrating America's Perseverance" produced by  
Pyro Spectaculars by Souza

Live Entertainment

TNT Freestyle Motocross • NBC's The Voice Contestant, Mendeleyev  
• An Inside Look into NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Latest Missions in Space

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