

# Student news from Middlesex and Union counties

Staff Report 11:06 a.m. EST November 20, 2014



(Photo: Photo courtesy Easter Seals New Jersey )

If you live in Central Jersey and you listen to radio, it's possible you've heard something **Brian Werda** helped produce.

The 20-year-old North Brunswick resident suffers from severe cerebral palsy, has difficulty walking and needs help getting in and out of cars. But that doesn't affect his ability when it comes to working as a paid summer intern at Magic 98.3 radio station. For several hours a week, Werda edited sound files for everything from promotions to music programming. He sometimes helped produced live radio, mixing in the traffic reports with playlists.

Werda graduated from North Brunswick High School in June, but obtained his internship through Middlesex County High School/High Tech (HS/HT), an enrichment program run by Easter Seals New Jersey that prepares youth with disabilities for the world of work. During the school year, the program runs workshops for high school students on topics ranging from interview skills to networking for jobs. The workshops sometimes feature guest speakers such as local employers. Students are also introduced to companies like Merck and PSE&G through High School/High Tech sponsored field trips.

For youth aged 16 and older, the program's highlight is a chance at a paid summer internship with an area employer. As of 2014, the national youth employment data obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, youth employment rates for those 16 to 19 years of age without a disability is 34.0 percent, while employment rates for those living with disabilities is 14.2 percent. Werda is just one of nine HS/HT interns that worked this summer through Easter Seals New Jersey program in fields ranging from radio to information technology to facilities management.

**Bill Heins**, a senior at Middlesex County's Vocational and Technical Schools, Piscataway campus, suffers from a specific learning disability. He studies computer systems technology and provides freelance hardware and software maintenance in his North Brunswick neighborhood.

Heins joined Easter Seals New Jersey's High School High Tech (HS/HT) to expand his career horizons. He was a summer intern at the Hyatt Regency New Brunswick's marketing/catering department. He says he chose that department to gain experience outside his field of study.

"I want to own my own business someday," he said. "I'll need to learn more about marketing and sales and the Hyatt would give me a great opportunity to do that."

With an "ability over disability" approach, Easter Seals New Jersey's HS/HT program provides students the opportunity to explore jobs or postsecondary education leading to careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)-related fields through hands-on training and internships with local businesses during the school year and through summer internships.

"Easter Seals of NJ is developing an excellent collaboration of parents, academic, business, community and agency partners that will assist students with disabilities in maximizing their potential for success through education and employment-related activities. This will assist each student in reaching the ultimate goal of HS/HT — competitive employment (based on the student's interest) in a STEM-related career," said Donna Mundy, consultant for HS/HT of Easter Seals NJ. Mundy developed the first statewide model for HS/HT in Florida, now the largest HS/HT program.

First conceived in the 1980s as a community partnership between schools, businesses, students and parents, HS/HT has been established in 10 states. Middlesex County's program is the first of its kind in New Jersey.

"Many youths today need career mentoring, and that is especially true of students living with disabilities. They've often been discouraged to explore their passions and interests. High School/High Tech provides a way forward for them" Easter Seals New Jersey High School High Tech Coordinator Jerome Montes said.

**Matt Johnson** is a senior at Middlesex County Vocational and Technical Schools, East Brunswick campus. He has a specific learning disability and is training to become a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) technician. He found his field interesting enough but didn't really see its full potential until his summer internship with the Hyatt Regency New Brunswick's engineering department.

As an intern, Johnson ranged all over the hotel. The Old Bridge resident worked there three days a week, doing everything from fixing wiring to ensuring all the appliances available to guests function properly at the 288-room property.

"Johnson did whatever we asked of him and he was eager to learn what we do here," said Pedro Carrasco, the hotel's director of engineering.

Johnson, was recently admitted to the National Honors Society, and is captain of the track team.

Johnson credits HS/HT with teaching him to think seriously about how to search for jobs and how to plan for the future.

"I really didn't know anything about resumes, about interviews or networking," he said. "High School/High Tech taught me about other important skills I need to succeed."

For more information on Easter Seals New Jersey and its statewide disability services, call 732-257-6662 or visit [www.eastersealsnj.org](http://www.eastersealsnj.org) or [www.facebook.com/eastersealsnj](http://www.facebook.com/eastersealsnj) (<http://www.facebook.com/eastersealsnj>).

### **Boston University**

**Atim E. Okengwu** of Linden received a doctor's in physical therapy and **Jenna H. Gallanter** of East Brunswick received a master's of science degree recently from Boston University.

### **East Brunswick Elks Scholarship**

The East Brunswick Elks would like to invite students to participate in the Elks Most Valuable Student Scholarship for 2014-2015. This scholarship is available to high school seniors throughout the country. Applicants must be U.S. citizens who intend to pursue a four year degree at an accredited U.S. college or university. The Elks National Foundation awards \$2.44 million through this scholarship alone every year. The 500 national awards range from \$4,000 (\$1,000 per year for four years) to \$50,000 (\$12,500 per year for four years), with additional awards bestowed at the state level. Male and female students compete separately. Judging is based on scholarship, leadership, and family need. If you, or anyone you know, would be interested in applying, you may download the application at <http://www.elks.org/ENF/scholars/mvs.cfm>

The deadline for this scholarship is Friday, Dec. 5. Applications must be delivered to the Elks lodge nearest the student's permanent residence on or prior to that date. The East Brunswick Elks Lodge #2370 is at 21B Oakmont Ave. (P.O. Box 120), East Brunswick, NJ 08816.

For questions, email Marian Walko, East Brunswick Elks #2370 scholarship chairperson, at: [scholarshipchair@yahoo.com](mailto:scholarshipchair@yahoo.com) or call the East Brunswick Elks Lodge at 732-821-9527 and leave a message.

### **Kean University**

Continuing its mission to attract faculty with international experience, the Kean University Global Business School announces the addition of Assistant Professors Dr. Eimear M. Nolan and Dr. Adrian Tan to its Global Management Studies MBA program, enhancing its international expertise in human resources and supply chain management.



**Assistant Professor Dr. Adrian Tan has joined the Global Management Studies MBA program at Kean University in Union. (Photo: PHOTO COURTESY OF KEAN UNIVERSITY)**