Along a winding road in Caroline County dotted with farm fields not far from Tuckahoe State Park on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, a small brick entrance reads *Sisters of St. Benedict*. The burgundy buttress marks the start of a long tree-lined drive—culminating at the campus of Benedictine Programs and Services.

A weathered crest of the Order of Saint Benedict still visible on its sign serves as a relic to the school’s origins—and in a small way, unintentionally perpetuates the notion that nuns in distinctive habits and veils still roam the halls.

Founded in 1887 by the Sisters of the Order of St. Benedict with the purchase of 500 acres of farmland near the town of Ridgely, Md., a monastery was built. Through the ensuing years, the Sisters, as part of their missionary service, established St. Gertrude’s, an academy for girls, on the grounds.

Evolving from the farmland known then as simply The Plains, what began to grow here wasn’t just seeds, but the buds of potential in a few flowering students.

Seventy years after that land purchase, the Sisters found a new purpose in caring for and educating children and adults with developmental disabilities.

“The Sisters saw a need and began serving,” said Julie Hickey, Benedictine’s director of education. “This was far before it was the ‘in thing to do,’ far before any laws or regulations indicated that this was something that needed to happen.”

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS & HIGHLIGHTS

- School and Residential Programs earned accreditation from the National Commission for the Accreditation of Special Education Services (NCASES).
- Board Member Noelle Perillo was recognized by the Maryland Association of Community Services for her volunteer work with Benedictine.
- Deb Williamson, a special education teacher at Benedictine since 1985, received the Sister Jeannette Murray Award.
- Colleen Voss, a Direct Support Professional in the Employment Services Department, was awarded a Governor’s Citation during DSP Recognition week in September.
- Julie Hickey was nominated to the Board of Directors for the Maryland Association of Non-Public Special Education Facilities.
- 56 Direct Support Professionals completed phase one of the National Alliance Direct Support Professionals credentialing and launched DSP Apprenticeship Program.
- 17 staff completed a five-day Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators, or ACRE, training that focused on community employment.
- The Community Services & Training Center launched a six-week summer program, in partnership with DORS, for students from local schools focusing on job skills development.
- Entered the third year of partnership with Chesapeake College to assist and train students enrolled in the paramedic program.
- Received grants totaling $13,756 to develop sensory rooms on campus.
- Launched inaugural DC Metro Golf Tournament raising $50,000 in support of the Annual Fund.
- Attracted a record 1,500-plus participants and spectators to the 16th annual Chrome City Ride raising $121,000 in support of the Annual Fund.
- Foundation received the largest ever single gift — a bequest of $3 million from Jim Colburn and his son Joey.
- Secured support of the Eastern Shore Delegation and received $300,000 in state funds for campus improvements, one of only two nonprofits east of the Baby Bridge to receive funds.
The National Commission for the Accreditation of Special Education Services, or NCASES, recently announced that Benedictine School has earned a special education industry accreditation.

The accreditation places Benedictine among 26 programs in the nation to receive the title, including the School Program at Kennedy Krieger Institute, The Eden School in Princeton, N.J., and the New York Institute for Special Education.

As a national commission that verifies and promotes excellence in education service, NCASES evaluates private special education programs through a process that encourages diversity of educational practices and innovation. The process assures students in private special education settings are provided environments that are healthy, safe, comfortable and conducive to learning.

“We made the decision to work toward accreditation several years ago as part of our agency’s strategic planning process,” said Education Director Julie Hickey.

“We knew the process would be long and would challenge us – but we also knew that the process would be productive for our team, and that a positive end result would add to our already impressive reputation.”

The accreditation process includes a review of every aspect of the school’s program, which includes a co-ed day and residential educational program for individuals with intellectual disabilities ages 5-21, including multiple disabilities, and autism. The review requires adherence to not only state and federal laws and regulations, but industry standards as well.

Benedictine now joins four other Maryland schools that have achieved this accreditation.

The NCASES accreditation comes as an industry accolade for the Benedictine School which is certified by The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for its day program and The Department of Human Services (DHS) for its residential program, with several group homes licensed by The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

“Most importantly, it (the NCASES accreditation) brings with it validation of the work that we do, and adds a level of credibility as a non-public school providing quality services,” Hickey said.

Benedictine staff attended the National Association of Private Special Education Centers Leadership conference in San Antonio, Jan 14 to 17 where the school was recognized for its recent accreditation. Left to right are Danielle Poore, teacher; Julie Hickey, education director; Scott Evans, executive director; Stephanie Franklin, assistant principle; and Lorraine Slama, teacher.
...continued from cover page

Then named the Benedictine School for Exceptional Children, the school began with just four boys diagnosed with Down Syndrome and the mission to help students achieve their greatest potential—a mission that is still just as important today.

While the campus may best be known by the legacy of the Sisters who started their work on the rural Eastern Shore nearly 60 years ago, today Benedictine continues its transformation as a modern education center for children and adults with multiple developmental disabilities and autism.

Following the sale of the school property in 2013, a newly created independent not-for-profit organization was established. Since then, the Sisters presence here continues to be cherished. In total, 11 Sisters still call the convent on campus home, and of that group, two Sisters actively participate in the day-to-day routine, now dressed in more modern apparel.

The sale represented a milestone for what has become a legacy of care for Maryland’s, and the nation’s, differently abled.

“The Sisters made the decision to transfer the school and the property to the Board of Directors to ensure that Benedictine will, in the future, be able to continue the Sisters’ mission to provide, in the Benedictine spirit, a quality education and opportunities for children and adults with developmental disabilities and autism,” said Scott Evans, Benedictine’s executive director.

Today, Benedictine, through its 450 staff, provides school and community-based programs for 65 children and more than 100 adults. These individuals come from almost every county in Maryland as well as states throughout the Mid-Atlantic.

Now not only a school, Benedictine is a multifunctional educational center serving individuals through their lifetime with a vocational training center in Easton, Md., and 21 group homes on Maryland’s Mid-Shore and in Annapolis.
As a licensed nonprofit, Benedictine Programs and Services is a nationally recognized, accredited and cost-effective educational living and learning environment includes adult services with career exploration classes, supported employment and community services, along with home-like residential living options on campus and in the community.

Building on the Sister’s core values of compassionate caring, dignity of work and hospitality, the work remains focused on helping those served to achieve their greatest potential.

Benedictine is, in many ways, a leader in the transformation of care for individuals with multiple disabilities, diligently working toward the goal of creating a meaningful life for all.

“Everything is about choice – what is important to the person not for the person is the focus of our person-centered plan for the individuals we support,” said Robin McDuffie, adult services project manager.

Educated staff, from therapists to special educators, continue to improve and exceed the standard of care for individuals with disabilities. As one of the largest employers on the Eastern Shore, teams of special education teachers, therapists, social workers, behavioral counselors and administrative support personnel make Benedictine a leading provider in adaptive care services.

“The school and programs have a great national reputation of providing some of the best initiatives to help people with disabilities achieve their very highest potential in a wonderfully compassionate and nurturing environment, said Barry Smale, director of the Benedictine Foundation. “The Sister’s vision of what the Benedictine community could do for children, youth and adults with intellectual disabilities continues to be far-reaching, profound and inspirational.”
In the Community...

Community Services & Training Center expands services in Easton, Md.

In whimsical font just inside the doors of the Community Services and Training Center in Easton, Md., the words “In the Community...” arch across the lobby greeting all who enter.

As a hub for employment services, personal supports and advocacy for adults and transitioning youth with developmental and other disabilities, the simple message serves as the mantra that drives the staff and individuals efforts here.

“We embrace the idea that everyone is capable of achieving competitive employment,” said Candy Jordan, community services director. “We have created a support network for achieving individual goals where the only restriction is our own creativity.”

Achieving goals is exactly what takes place here for more than 30 clients being served at the Easton office, about 20 miles from Benedictine’s main campus in Ridgely, Md.

For over five years, Benedictine Programs and Services has maintained a community services and employment program location in Easton, recently opening its doors at a new location on Goldsborough Street, with an expanded training space and list of services.

“Each person’s goal is unique,” said Jordan. “We begin by matching skills and interests with community employer needs — along with expanding opportunities for job seekers to explore all types of community involvement. For some this means continuing education, learning to use public transportation and achieving independence.”

In the community, as a motto, serves as a roadmap for discovery — not a destination. One Benedictine client, Dominic, reached a milestone on that journey this past year.

“Dominic loves lights,” said Tiffany Meredith, supported employment job developer. “Interior lights, traffic lights, street posts or desk lamps — he can tell you what type of light bulb it takes.”

Through working with Dominic, Tiffany matched his very specific interest with an ideal job opportunity at Queen Anne’s County Parks and Recreation. The job was scorekeeping for elementary and high school
basketball games. Dominic jumped at the opportunity and excelled at keeping the lights on the scoreboard illuminated all season. When asked about his experience, Dominic described his season of scorekeeping as one of his favorite jobs.

“That’s what we call a dream placement,” said Jordan.

There is no one single formula or path for an individual’s job placement, but it starts with exploring interests and developing job skills. For adults that come through the Developmental Disability Administration, or DDA, the process begins with enrollment into an entirely community based career exploration adult program. Here adults ages 21 and older choose volunteer positions and learn resume building skills.

Through a referral program, Benedictine also partners with the Maryland State Department of Education Division of Rehabilitation Services, or DORS. Public school students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), who are ready for vocational learning, are placed into various classes designed by Benedictine.

“One class offered is work readiness which covers life and employment skills. Topics include: emergency readiness, personal hygiene, fitness and wellness, resolving conflict, personal finance, how to create a budget, travel planning, kitchen safety, menu planning, cleaning and household maintenance.

Another class on self-advocacy covers: personal rights and responsibilities, self-empowerment, voting, barriers, legal aid, finding a mentor and problem solving.

Courses blend classroom training time as well as community-based training that takes the class on informative trips to local businesses, banks, grocery stores and volunteer locations.

The center also provides personal support programs offered to reinforce skills and provide what Candy calls a network for success. From job coaching to home visits and many services in-between, Benedictine helps people continue their journey in the community.

Dominic began an electrician apprenticeship at Dixon Electric in December. In his role he works with professional electricians learning wiring basics and of course hanging lighting.
Fiscal Year 2017 Revenue: $28,128,389

- MD State Department of Education
- Developmental Disability Administration
- MD Department of Human Services
- Contributions and Investment Income
- Other States
- MD Autism Waiver
- Other
- Vocational Sales
- Private Tuition Fees
- State of New Jersey
- State of Virginia

Fiscal Year 2017 Expenses: $26,235,522

- Special Education
- Direct Care
- Auxiliary Services
- Management and General
- Fundraising
- Rental Expense

Any excess revenue is invested in priority projects approved by the Benedictine Board of Directors.