



## Lekotek Welcomes Staff Members

Mia Vahle and  
Katelyn Brieden

As you can see, Mia and Ricky agree, you're never too old for an Easter Egg Hunt. Ricky Raschke and Mia Vahle have enjoyed and helped at Lekotek events for more than a decade. Ricky and his parents were one of the first families to participate in play sessions at the Cobb Lekotek Satellite. We're delighted to congratulate Ricky on becoming an Eagle Scout. Eagle Scout is the highest achievement for a Scout. Since its inception in 1911, only four percent of Scouts have earned this rank.



Mia (in the photo with Ricky) is not new to Lekotek either. Mia has been volunteering at Lekotek since she was 12 years old. Upon completing her studies and earning her college degree from Kennesaw State University in December, Mia's dream job of becoming a Lekotek leader became a reality. Mia is the site manager of the Alpharetta satellite and also sees families at the Atlanta and Kennesaw locations.

Lekotek is also delighted to welcome Katelyn Brieden as Associate Director. Katelyn has an undergraduate degree in Business and is also a Certified Recreation Therapist. She has more than five years of experience working with individuals with disabilities in a variety of settings including parks and recreation, camps, adaptive sports, pediatric and school settings. Katelyn is excited to utilize both her backgrounds in Business Management and Therapeutic Recreation to promote Lekotek's mission of inclusion.



## Dr. Margaret Giannini, A True Pioneer

By Katharine Q. Seelye

Dr. Margaret Giannini, a pioneer in helping children with developmental and physical disabilities, died on Nov. 22 at the age of 100 at her home in San Diego. Dr. Giannini, an internationally recognized expert in the care of people with disabilities, was the catalyst behind the Westchester Institute for Human Development in Valhalla, N.Y., one of the world's largest facilities for people with developmental disabilities.

A pediatric oncologist at New York Medical College, she was summoned one day in 1950 to the office of the chairman of her department, Dr. Lawrence B. Slobody. He introduced her to several parents whose children had a range of disabilities; they had not been able to find a doctor in New York City willing to provide them with medical care. Recognizing the need, Dr. Giannini started a clinic that would focus exclusively on children with disabilities. She founded the Mental Retardation Institute in East Harlem, the first of its kind in the country. She worked out of a basement because others in the building did not want children with disabilities coming through the lobby. By 1971, she had raised more than \$7.5 million to establish a new building in Valhalla. The institute provided diagnosis, evaluation, and therapy. It also trained professionals and students in psychology, social work, speech, audiology, sign language, nutrition and rehabilitation. (Interestingly, Lekotek's executive director, Helene Prokesch, credits her skills as a Lekotek leader because her first job as a teacher was at the Valhalla Institute.)

Margaret Joan Giannini was born on May 27, 1921, in Camden, N.J., the youngest of four girls. Her father, Francisco Giannini, a member of the prominent operatic Giannini family of Philadelphia, died of a sudden illness when she was a young girl. Her mother, Rose, struggled to raise the family through the Depression. Margaret worked after school in the nurse's office of the nearby Campbell Soup factory. It was there that she developed her interest in medicine. She started college at Boston University but left after a year because of economic hardship. Several years later she returned to college at Temple University. After her third year, she planned to go to medical school, but she never graduated from Temple and needed one more credit, in organic chemistry, to meet the pre-med requirements at Hahnemann. The only university nearby that was offering organic chemistry over the summer was Villanova, which at the time accepted only men. She enrolled anyway, but after she had attended class for a week, officials insisted she leave. Her professor offered to give her private lessons and said that if she could pass the exam, he would give her the credit she needed. She passed and began medical school in the fall of 1941. She graduated in 1945, one of three women in the class, and did her internship at New York Medical College.

Dr. Giannini's work at the Mental Retardation Institute, of which she was director from 1950 to 1978, drew the attention of President Jimmy Carter, who appointed her the first director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research. There she got to know Tommy Thompson, the Secretary of the Health and Human Services under President Jimmy Carter, who said, "She wanted to make sure that people with disabilities had the same opportunities as everyone else. She was a constant doer, always in motion, always doing something for somebody else." She received scores of honors and awards throughout her life before retiring from federal service in 2009 at age 88. But she never really stopped working. A week before she died, she was pressing Congress to establish a federal holiday for people with disabilities.

## What's So Special About A Lekotek Easter Egg Hunt?



Each year, the Peachtree City and Kennesaw Lekoteks conduct Easter Egg Hunts. Adaptations make it easy for children to collect eggs. Velcroing eggs to the wall so children using wheelchairs can grab them at eye level, is one modification. Our Egg Hunt activities also include spin art, bubble and water play, rice tables and bowling. Spin art and bubble machines have large buttons so with a push of a button (with their hand, head or foot) the child can create bubbles or a unique art masterpiece.



Eggs are filled with fun-filled surprises and some light up, making them easier for children with visual impairments to see. We'd like to thank students from

neighboring Fayette and Cobb high schools for volunteering to ensure that our families had a fun day. The photos clearly show that "a good time was had by all."

## Toy of the Month Lightbox with Bath Toys

Hugh, affectionately nicknamed, Hughby, is playing with bath toys and beads, beautifully arranged by his sister, Jemma, on a light box. Hughby was born with a limb difference and has no arms. But at just 5 months, he's incredibly adept with his feet. After our play session, Hughby was able to borrow a light box built by Georgia Tech students. Lekotek makes it possible for our kids to continue to play and learn at home with materials we are able to loan.



## Can You Pass The Lekotek Quiz?



## Lekotek of Georgia

Making a Difference for Children with Disabilities

### 1. The word Lekotek is Swedish for:

(a) play library (b) inclusion (c) technology (d) teacher

### 2. Lekotek began in:

(a) a church (b) a synagogue (c) the basement of Easter Seals (d) a school

### 3. This year Lekotek will celebrate its

(2) 28th anniversary (b) 32nd (c) 35th (d) 38th

### 4. Lekotek's current fiscal year budget for six sites, is:

(a) \$600,000 (b) 700,000 (c) \$800,000 (d) 1 million

### 5. The entire staff, full and part-time, total:

(a) 8 (b) 11 (c) 14 (d) 16

### 6. To date, Lekotek has helped:

(a) 3,500 children (b) 5,000 (c) 6,000 (d) 7,500

Answers: a, c, d, c, b, d

## Meet Gunner

"Gunny Bear" is my affectionate nickname for my sweet grandson, Gunner. Gunner was born in November 2015 and every day since, has been our little miracle. Gunner was born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy called Walker - Warburg Syndrome. His doctors didn't believe he would survive, but he proved them wrong. His

condition caused significant physical and cognitive delays and Gunner immediately began every therapy known to man and hated every one!

We became a Lekotek family after his first birthday. Initially, a good session was one in which he didn't cry or fall asleep. Gunner's Lekotek leader, Nicole, was a trooper. She persevered, always selecting fun and developmentally appropriate toys. Borrowing toys to use at home helped Gunner learn new skills and reach milestones. Though small, we were grateful for each and every one.



Lekotek provides opportunities for Gunner to just be a kid and for our family to enjoy typical activities, just like any other family. We enjoy play sessions with Nicole and participate in many other programs like fishing, rafting, Happy Tails Pet Therapy and Leko-Music. We're grateful to Nicole and all the Cobb leaders.

I never realized how many things I would need to know raising a child with special needs. Lekotek has helped me navigate it all and is a place where families can breathe and have fun. I credit Lekotek for preparing Gunner for school. He is now a full-time kindergartner, riding the bus and making friends. And, today his Lekotek sessions are filled with smiles and laughter.

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