



Memorial: Elizabeth LeGrand wants to better educate those who have learning delays, as her late son Michael did. She founded a scholarship fund in his name.

## Scholarship remembers learning-delayed son

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

Mike LeGrand was dying of multiple sclerosis and knew he wouldn't live to realize his dream of being a special education teacher. So one day, the 23-year-old talked about it with his mom.

Stemming from that conversation, Farmington Hills resident Elizabeth LeGrand knew exactly what she had to do. Although Mike died in April from MS, he lived his entire life as a learning delayed child. And so, Elizabeth LeGrand decided to establish a scholarship and research foundation in memory of her son, intended to help children like Mike — with learning delays.

LeGrand and co-director Calvin McGinn didn't stop with the creation of the Michael Allen LeGrand Memorial Scholarship & Neuroscience Research Foundation.

They went to work on assembling the first annual "Change the World of a Child Week," taking place now through Saturday in Michigan and 37 other states. On a desktop in her condominium are proclamations from Michigan Gov. John Engler and other state leaders.

"My son was a very special kid," LeGrand said, recalling the conversation that sparked what has become her personal mission. "He loved and he cared and he was a teacher in his heart. I told him I wasn't sure how we were going to do it, but I told him 'We're not going to let them forget you.'"

"This will help him accomplish his goal on a scale he never dreamed possible."

A learning-delayed child is one who is afflicted with "any delay that makes a part of the learning process difficult — speech, fine motor, gross motor, the ability to read, write, do mathematics," LeGrand said.

Often they are labeled in preschool as slow learners. Many never fit into the mainstream; some drop out with their self-esteem hitting rock bottom, making them easy targets for recruitment into city and suburban gangs, according to a foundation fact sheet.

"Our goal is to alter the educational experience of these kids," she said. "Even learning-delayed

### Hills council hosts community talks

Farmington Hills City Council will host the first in its second series of community meetings 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 22, at the Fire Station No. 4, 28711 Drake Road, north of 12 Mile.

The agenda includes: A review of the Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council endeavors; An update on the Public Safety Millage and plans for police and fire service improvements; and information on the Parks and Recreation Millage and Woodland Hills Nature Park ballot question.

"The first round of meetings was so well received, we're doing it again," Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said. "This second round of meetings will help us be more specific in responding to issues of special interest to people in particular geographic areas with the city."

The open meeting includes question and answer time. If residents have an item or call for the agenda, they can call 473-9502.

kids have dreams.

The foundation's three primary goals are: providing scholarships to learning delayed children and adults; promoting research that seeks effective treatments for people with learning delays; and providing training to educators about new technologies for helping learning delayed children in the classroom.

Funds will help pay for tuition and books to community colleges for those who qualify. After just five months, about \$7,500 has been raised for the Michigan scholarship fund.

"We're establishing an application process" to determine who can get the scholarships, explained LeGrand, adding she has high hopes for the foundation nationally. "It is my goal, within the next two years, to be giving scholarships to every state in the country."

Besides donations to the tax-exempt 501 (c) 3 non-profit foundation, proceeds from the sale of the Tangerine Trousers debut CD, "Talking with Ed," are being dedicated to the cause. The CD is available at Harmony House locations.

Meanwhile, local entertainer Shawna wrote and recorded a song about learning delayed children, appropriately titled "Change the World of a Child."

All of the efforts are hoped to make a difference in the way these youngsters are taught and perceived, which could only improve their chances of success after they leave school.

"You can give a kid Ritalin for four hours and he can concentrate and get his work done," LeGrand said. "But in four hours he'll need more Ritalin. We want to teach teachers how to address these students in the

classroom."

Some children might need to sit on the floor, instead of in chairs, to best learn, for example.

"They all learn differently," LeGrand said, adding that educators need to find out how each child learns and "teach them along those pathways."

According to LeGrand, the foundation refers to learning disabilities as "learning delays" because the word disability implies that a child may be unable to learn, when this is not the case.

Her son was proof of that. She took Mike out of the Rochester school district in the sixth grade because he was struggling to grasp the material and enrolled him into St. John Lutheran Church.

Mike left after the eighth grade with an award for academic excellence and went on to Groves High School, where he graduated (with a 2.9 grade-point average) in 1993.

But his success in overcoming the learning delay obstacle was followed by an insurmountable one. While in 10th grade at Groves, he found out he had MS. That didn't stop him from finishing high school and taking some classes at Oakland Community College, which he unfortunately could not complete due to his worsening illness.

Despite the prognosis that he'd never walk again, and would probably die young, Mike kept battling and kept a positive attitude, his mother said.

"His favorite holiday was April Fools Day," she said. "He was good natured. He accepted this crummy deal he got in life."

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