

PORT WASHINGTON

# Program aids autistic adults

Nonprofit offers vocational help, community work

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Nicholas Pusateri is a published author, a skilled voice impersonator and an artist who has invented his own superhero universe.

The 27-year-old from Williston Park — whose love for comics and science fiction was inspired by his grandfather — featured some of those heroes in an art exhibit hosted by Port Washington-based nonprofits The Nicholas Center and The Art Guild through the end of January.

“Once he went to high school, he graduated to the couch,” said his mother, Christine Pusateri, 57. “The Nicholas Center gives him opportunities that he would never have elsewhere.”

The Nicholas Center is a person-centered program for autistic individuals who age out of the school system. The center partners with more than 35 other nonprofits to help offer services, including community projects and the art program and supporting individuals at internships and paid jobs.



Nicholas Pusateri is one of the artists whose works will be on exhibit through the end of January.

More than 60% of individuals with autism do not start work or pursue further education in the first two years after leaving high school, according to statistics from the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute at Drexel University.

The Nicholas Center aims to combat those statistics by including participants “in community life and work life, and support them in any way we can,” Lee Anne Vetrone, director of

development at the center, said. About 120 students participate in the art program, which teaches different art elements and famous art and artists, said MaryKate Carroll, creative arts coordinator at the center. More than 200 pieces were displayed at Sunday’s art show, she said.

It’s the second year The Nicholas Center has hosted the art show in conjunction with visual arts center The Art Guild.

“When [students] walked into the gallery last year and saw their artwork on the wall . . . they couldn’t believe it,” Vetrone said. “They’re marginalized in society, and so to be included, [even something] so simple as an art show, means the world.”

Jonathan Ottavio, 24, of Manhasset, a student at The Nicholas Center with a passion for music, illustrated a tribute to Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain.

“I love music, so a lot of artists like the Foo Fighters, Nirvana, Bob Dylan, all the greats, are just so great to me,” he said. He loves the art program at the Nicholas Center, where he has been a student for around six years.

Ottavio also works at Harbor Deli through The Nicholas Center and plays guitar in the center’s “Bach to Rock Bands” program. He also knows the bass, keyboard and drums, and is learning the harmonica.

Danielle Ottavio, 52, Jonathan’s mother, said he has learned work skills and had the opportunity to “expand his experiences, which has given him new confidence.”

Christine Pusateri said her son Nicholas wouldn’t have the confidence to show his art and publish his book, which is available on Amazon, without his participation in The Nicholas Center.

In one part of the book, the main character travels back in time to visit with her grandmother before she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.

“He has two grandparents with Alzheimer’s,” Christine said. “I don’t think he would have been able to process that experience of having grandparents with Alzheimer’s if it wasn’t for his ability to write things, to process things.”

PATCHOGUE

# Village board takes up zoning change that would allow hotel

BY CARL MACGOWAN  
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The proposal to build a 109-room luxury hotel-apartment complex in Patchogue will come up for a vote Monday night by the village board, Mayor Paul Pontieri said.

The board will vote on whether to grant a zoning change that would allow developer West Avenue Partners to build a Hilton Tempo hotel at the site of a shuttered bowling alley. It would be the South Shore village’s only hotel, officials have said.

Supporters say the hotel, at the corner of West Avenue and Division Street, would put a capstone on decadeslong efforts to revitalize the formerly

moribund village.

The \$40 million, five-story hotel would have 96 hotel rooms and 13 rental apartments, the developer’s lawyers and architects have said. West Avenue Partners is asking the village to rezone the site from industrial to a special category for hotels.

The village board was cleared to take action Wednesday when the Suffolk County Planning Commission voted 12-0, with one abstention, not to block the project. The commission ruled the hotel would not have a negative effect on nearby roads, buildings and waterways owned or managed by the county such as Main Street and the Sixth District Court building.

“Obviously, it’s in an already developed area. There’s a need

for a hotel,” Commissioner Lisa Perry, the commission’s Brookhaven Town representative, said before the vote. “I think it’s nice to have a hotel near a lot of transportation. It would be a definite positive for the downtown revitalization.”

The hotel would be across the street from Patchogue’s Long Island Rail Road station and adjacent to the Watch Hill ferry terminal.

Commissioner Michael Kaufman, who abstained, echoed concerns expressed by some Patchogue residents that the hotel site is prone to flooding and may not have enough parking. Developers have said there would be 119 parking stalls.

“My big problem with this is we’re putting residential in a

flood zone,” Kaufman said. “We don’t like to put anything in a flood zone.”

Village officials have instructed the hotel’s developers to submit a plan for drainage improvements at the site, Newsday previously reported.

Kaufman also called the five-story building “kind of dense,” adding, “this is going to stick up quite nicely from out of nowhere.”

Pontieri, who supports the project, said additional hotel parking will be available at the village-owned parking lot at the train station, which he said will be a short walk from the hotel.

“The railroad [has] a municipal lot owned by us across the street,” the mayor said in an interview. “That only fills up a third

or two-thirds even on the busiest day. There’s plenty of parking.”

He added that Patchogue officials are holding discussions with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority about obscuring views of an LIRR rail yard adjacent to the parking lot by installing plantings between the yard and the hotel site.

Pontieri said the hotel will be no taller than other buildings in the village, noting New Village mixed-use complex on West Main Street also is five stories.

“We have four buildings in the village that are five stories,” Pontieri said. “It’s not out of character in the village.”

He said if the village board approves the rezoning, the project will need approval before construction can begin.