

Newsday

LONG ISLAND

Newsday

A COMMUNITY FEATURE PRODUCED BY THE NEWSDAY MARKETING DEPARTMENT

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



THE MORGAN CENTER

Providing the Joys of Preschool for Kids Living with Cancer

Every week, Newsday presents another Community Champions organization.

How To Reach Us:

The Morgan Center
Located at the Plainview
Cultural Development Center
631-206-1341
www.themorgancenter.org

Nominate a Community Champion on:

Newsday.com

or call 631-843-4708

Newsday's Community Champions are selected by the following committee of distinguished Long Islanders: **Lance W. Elder**, President & Chief Executive Officer, EAC, Inc.

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When parents send their three-year-olds off to nursery school for the first time, it's a milestone event — exciting, emotional and a bit scary. But for children undergoing chemotherapy treatments, going off to preschool isn't scary at all: It's simply not an option.

That was the case with Morgan Zuch, who was diagnosed with leukemia in the fall of 2000. A year later, Morgan wasn't able to join her friends as they started school.

"Chemotherapy suppresses a child's immune system," explains Nancy Zuch, Morgan's mother. "She couldn't go to school — or birthday parties or the mall — because catching any illness could be life threatening."

As they drove to the hospital each week for treatments, the Zuchs passed the preschool that Morgan would have attended. "The parents would be turning in the parking lot," says Zuch, "and I couldn't help but wonder why we were on this path instead of that one."

Nancy and her husband, Rod, created an answer to that question. Thanks to their experiences with Morgan, who is now a happy and healthy third grader, the Zuchs created The Morgan Center, a preschool for children who are undergoing cancer treatment. Kids at the facility learn all the same skills and socialize in a setting that is clean, safe and fun, with people who understood what they're going through.



Student Ashley Lyons and Morgan Zuch listen as Nancy Zuch, founding director and teacher, reads to children at the Morgan Center.

The Morgan Center has been a blessing to Molly Guarton, who was diagnosed with leukemia in November 2003. "The center gave my daughter a sense of normalcy and stability and friendship when everything in her life was abnormal," says Donna Guarton, Molly's mother. "It not only gave her the opportunity to develop in social, emotional and cognitive ways, it also gave her a place to have birthday parties, to see Santa ... the kinds of things most parents take for granted."

The center also was a godsend to Donna, who not only had to deal with Molly's illness but the unexpected death of her husband during the same period. "The parents become so close," she

says. "We shared information and supported each other through everything." Even though Molly graduated from the center last spring, the mothers still get together once a month, she adds: "These are lifelong friendships."

Though Morgan Zuch, now eight and a half, was too old to attend the center that bears her name, she and her 11-year-old brother Trevor frequently volunteer there. "The parents always ask when my kids are coming," says Nancy Zuch. "The students love them. It's been an amazing experience to see how my children have embraced this journey."

— Jenna Kern-Ruglie