



IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Student with Autism Wins N.J. Governor's Award for Entertaining Seniors at Assisted Living Facilities

HO-HO-KUS – Eric Perkins, who has autism, is usually a young man of few words, but when he picks up a guitar or sits down at the piano, he finds his voice.

Perkins, 19, possesses a gift for singing and playing music that has been delighting senior citizens at two Bergen County assisted living facilities this year and has won him a N.J. Governor's Jefferson Award.

The award is part of the youth program of the NJ Governor's Jefferson Awards for Public Service, recognizing the achievement of goals supporting outstanding service by students of all ages. Perkins won in the Health & Wellness category among 27 projects selected from all over the state.

On Saturday, May 12, Perkins accepted the award at a ceremony for all winners held at the Newark Museum. Reading from a brief prepared speech, he told the hushed audience, "I enjoy bringing smiles to their faces as they sing-a-long with me."

Perkins attends the ECLC of New Jersey school in Ho-Ho-Kus for children with special needs, and the visits are coordinated by his teacher, Russ Bargiel, as part of the school's work-readiness program called SKIL (Seeking Knowledge for Independent Living). In SKIL, students receive vocational training and job "sample" within the community to explore future employment options.

Perkins is considering a career in the performing arts, and these opportunities to entertain at Van Dyke Park Place in Hawthorne and Van Dyk Manor in Ridgewood are helping him gain the self-confidence and stage presence required.

About ECLC

Founded in 1970, ECLC has grown from a small, early-intervention program into a comprehensive network of non-profit agencies serving more than 700 children and adults with special needs, including autism, Down syndrome, severe learning and/or language disabilities or multiple disabilities.

ECLC runs schools, for students ages 5-21, in Ho-Ho-Kus and Chatham and has P.R.I.D.E. Centers in Bergen County and Chatham, offering day and evening programs for adults with special needs. ECLC also offers adults with special needs opportunities for meaningful work through its supported-employment agency, Community Personnel Services. Learn more about ECLC at www.eclcofnj.org.