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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Leon and Toby Cooperman Family Foundation Jumps In to Fund Playground  
at ECLC of New Jersey's Special-Needs School**

CHATHAM – After focusing on academics, vocational skills, physical therapy and occupational therapy sessions, children at ECLC of New Jersey's school for students with special needs could use some time to relax with their classmates!

Thanks to a donation from the Leon and Toby Cooperman Family Foundation, they have a place for fun every day. The students, who are diagnosed with a range of special needs, including autism, Down syndrome and severe learning disabilities, relax, laugh and let loose outside on a beautiful playground right next to the ECLC school.

The playground was made possible through the quiet generosity of a retired staff member, Toby Cooperman of Short Hills. During her 25 years at ECLC as a learning disabilities consultant, Toby and her husband, Leon, supported the school, behind-the-scenes, as needed. They underwrote the cost of the playground, and over the years funded a school bus, bought folding chairs for the cafeteria and continuously gave to the Good and Welfare fund, which supplements costs for students with financial needs. Yet, Toby always demurred to any public recognition of her generosity.

Now, that she has retired and joined the ECLC Board of Trustees, Toby and Leon no longer shy away from publicity, with the hope that others will follow their generous lead. At the beginning of this year, they announced a \$125,000 challenge matching grant to spark excitement in a \$450,000 fund-raising campaign to expand ECLC's P.R.I.D.E. Center in Florham Park for adults with special needs.

It worked! The major gift prompted other donors to step up and write checks of all sizes. The infusion of funds allowed ECLC to expand the P.R.I.D.E. facility, transforming an empty shell of a building

into a bright and cheerful center with activity rooms, a teaching kitchen and a model apartment, plus more space for P.R.I.D.E.CO, a vocational training center. The center is open for clients, and an official grand opening is planned for the fall.

## **A Pledge to Giving**

ECLC is just one of the many nonprofits benefitting from the couple's goodwill. This wonderfully generous couple has signed the Warren Buffet Giving Pledge, a commitment in which affluent individuals have pledged to give away the majority of their wealth. Leon has often cited a quote by Andrew Carnegie, who said, "He who dies rich, dies disgraced," as inspiring their mission of giving.

The two come from modest beginnings and attribute their self-made success story to hard work, persistence and a little luck. They grew up in New York City and met at Hunter College. After graduation, they embarked on divergent career paths. Toby earned a master's degree in special education, while Leon took off to start a Wall Street career at Goldman Sachs, where he rose to become general partner and Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs Asset Management. He retired after 25 years, and in 1991 founded a private investment firm, Omega Advisors, which today has \$10.4 billion under management.

As part of their pledge, they recently committed \$25 million to Saint Barnabas Medical Center, the hospital's largest single donation ever, and gave another \$25 million to Hunter College. They also donated \$25 million to Columbia University Business School, which Leon attended, to name just a few of the nonprofits the couple assists.

Toby Cooperman reflected on the playground donation to ECLC's Chatham school. She said, "I am pleased that I was able to improve the life of the students and staff of ECLC. The school was a wonderful place to work and to experience the positive influence it had on its students."

ECLC Executive Director, Bruce Litinger, added, "Toby is an extraordinarily committed woman and has been unwavering in her support of ECLC of New Jersey. I am so grateful that in her retirement, she has committed to staying with us and helping to ensure the continued success and long-term growth of our organization."

## **About ECLC**

Established in 1970, ECLC of New Jersey offers lifelong services -- education, enrichment and employment -- to children and adults with special needs, including those diagnosed with autism, Down syndrome and severe learning and/or language disabilities. As students prepare to graduate, transition specialists from ECLC's affiliate Community Personnel Services (CPS), take over, guiding them into the next chapter of their lives. CPS specialists find meaningful jobs in the students' communities and provide ongoing support and advocacy in the workplace.

Graduates who are not ready for work are guaranteed a spot in the P.R.I.D.E. program. The P.R.I.D.E. program launched six years ago in response to requests from parents seeking a program for their adult children who weren't ready to hold down jobs. Many of them were at home and didn't have many opportunities for fulfillment.

P.R.I.D.E. has given them a purpose. It is a self-directed program for clients to continue developing their independent living skills. They stay connected to the community, whether it's for fitness at the Madison Y, book club, volunteering, paid work or another activity. Learn more about ECLC at [www.eclcofnj.org](http://www.eclcofnj.org).

ECLC is a member of the Alliance of Private Special Education Schools of North Jersey, a coalition of more than 30 state-approved private special education schools dedicated to helping parents and educators better understand and access appropriate program options. Learn more about the Alliance at <http://specialeducationalliancenj.org>.

**PHOTO CAPTION:** Toby Cooperman returns to the ECLC school in Chatham for students with special needs for a dedication ceremony with ECLC Executive Director, Bruce Litinger of Short Hills, and students (left to right) Christopher Parisaca of Berkeley Heights, Anish Arora of Short Hills and Miles Hallenborg of Summit.