



Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

CASA OF PEORIA COUNTY

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Peoria County Courthouse

April– July 2010

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# CASA Voice

## Words from the Director



Greetings CASA Friends,

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Peoria County has launched a significantly upgraded Web site in terms of ease of use and look-and-feel. The new Web site, [www.casapeoria.org](http://www.casapeoria.org), offers site visitors a comprehensive overview of CASA, makes donating easy and provides online resources for CASA volunteers. The site also gives visitors the opportunity to sign-up for electronic updates, view videos and learn more about the fundraising events being

hosted by CASA.

In our current economy, nonprofits, including CASA, are struggling even harder to capture the attention of volunteers and donors. Having a fresh, clean, easily navigated site is critical to engaging people with CASA. Because the site also serves as a portal for volunteers and board members, it will make our organization more effective, which means we'll have more time to focus on delivering services to the abused and neglected children of Peoria County.

We knew our old Web site was falling woefully behind and a major overhaul was required. We are so excited about the new site and its anticipated role in building awareness and support of CASA of Peoria County.

The Web site's development, hosting and ongoing site maintenance was donated entirely by Lisa Murphy Web Design, a Peoria-based Web site design and development firm. To have someone in our community step-up and take on such a large project at no charge, and complete it in such a short timeframe, is greatly appreciated by the entire CASA family! Thank you, Lisa Murphy!

Fondly,  
Pamela Perrilles

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## CASA Meets with Kappa Alpha Theta's Local Alumni Chapter

Last month Pam Perrilles along with CASA Board Member Jennifer Morris presented CASA of Peoria County to Kappa Alpha Theta's local alumni chapter. The National CASA organization has been Kappa Alpha Theta's international philanthropy since 1989. CASA of Peoria County looks forward to working with the local alumni chapter on future endeavors.

Featured in the picture on the right are members of Kappa Alpha Theta's alumni chapter along with Pam Perrilles and Jennifer Morris.



## Volunteer Spotlight: Nathan Keener



My name is Nathan Keener. I am an Intern Compliance Officer for the Drinking Water, Compliance Assurance Section of the Illinois EPA. I am currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Environmental Studies. I have been an advocate for nearly 2 ½ years. In that time I have advocated on behalf of the same child, so I have only worked 1 case.

### Volunteer Advocacy

**Why did you decide to become an advocate?** I became an advocate because I was searching for a way to give back to my community. I went to an informational meeting for CASA and liked the people I met there. The cause was a worthy one, so I joined up.

**Do you have any advice for other Volunteers?** Keep your promises and keep a level head.

**What has been one of your most memorable moments as a CASA Volunteer?** I remember being so scared the first time I met the family in the case to which I am assigned. I was afraid of the apparent enormity of the responsibility I was undertaking, and that if I made a mistake, I would ruin a child's life. However, I have learned that although it is a great responsibility to be a CASA, I am dealing with people, and they are nothing to be scared of.

**What keeps you motivated on your case?** I am constantly being shown that my input provides vital information to those who make very important decisions about the lives of children in our community. Without my extra pair of eyes, much valuable information would simply not be included in the decision making process.

**What are your challenges as a CASA?** It is a challenge to toe the line between advocate and instrument of the legal system. Very often it feels as if I am in the middle of competing interests. It is difficult to report only the facts when sometimes the facts may hurt one side or the other.

**Is there anything else you would like to share?** CASA is an amazing program which touches the lives of vulnerable children throughout our country. It provides hope and comfort to the youngest in our society whose lives have been turned upside down. CASA can never be a solution to the problems that vulnerable children face, but we can hope to be one positive influence on a child who may be adrift in a sea of negativity.



## Board Member Spotlight: Thomas Harrington



My name is Thomas Harrington. I am the regional managing partner for Coldwell Banker Commercial Devonshire Realty. Our company offers comprehensive real estate services to our clients. I have been on the CASA board for about two years now. I have participated in the CASAblanca events and built a playhouse for the most recent Casa's for CASA event.

**What led you to become involved with CASA?** I was new to the community two years ago and wanted to get involved with an organization that would allow me to meet new people and bring progress to a cause that moved me. The future of our community is affected by the work that CASA does everyday by helping the future of our community get every opportunity to become successful.

**What do you enjoy about your involvement with CASA and what are the rewards of being a board member?** The rewards of knowing that I have helped those who have been put in a position outside of their control make the most of the situation. The future of our community is represented in our youth. We have the opportunity to ensure the future success of our community through our youth and being involved with CASA is rewarding because I feel I am doing my part through CASA.

**What are your future goals for CASA of Peoria County from your view?** My goals for CASA of Peoria County are to continue to become more

sophisticated from a board level. I would like to see CASA service all of the needs within our community prior to taking on any more challenges. Most importantly I would like to see CASA of Peoria County find sustainable funding. We have such dedicated members of the board and volunteers involved with CASA who give so much of their time, effort, and heart to further the cause. A lot of this time is focused on fundraising, this is a necessary function but the time could be utilized to help those in need.

**What are your challenges as a CASA board member?** Challenges as a CASA board member are finding a way to distinguish CASA within the minds of the community that supports us. We need to become more visible and there is a lot of competition for the resources that keep us going.

**How has CASA grown since you've been apart of the board?** CASA has matured as a board over the last two years. We have branched out and added specialized committees and the advisory board. CASAblanca doubled the attendance last year and was a great success.

**What other committees have you've served on?** Chamber of Commerce Business Advocacy Committee. Chamber of Commerce Retail Strategy Group.

**Is there anything else you would like to share?** It is an exciting time for CASA these days, the momentum is building and we need to stay on top of every opportunity that crosses our path.



*Powerless Children, Need Powerful Friends!*

## Thump Lesson

By Laton "Ernie" Mahan



Two years ago, I was enjoying my life and family; totally immersed in self-servitude. I felt a tap on my shoulder. I ignored the tap and went on with my self-absorbed

life. Within days, I received another stronger tap on the shoulder. I stopped what I was doing to investigate the tap but didn't understand its meaning so I returned to my life. Soon afterward, I received a hard thump to the forehead. I heard, "Ernie, this is God. Remember me?" "Of course I do", I replied. "I'm sorry but I've been busy ...." God told me there

is a job I needed to do. He said I needed to be a CASA- Court-Appointed Special Advocate for children. I was a little reluctant to commit the time and effort. God wasn't interested in my lame excuses. He insisted. He told me to do what I could to help these children.

After undergoing intensive training and becoming a CASA, I was feeling very noble and proud of myself. God warned me not to be so full of myself. He said the real reason for this assignment was to teach me more about people, their sufferings, and triumphs. "You will learn more about yourself and your place in the human race," He claimed.

I introduced myself to the family of children that God had chosen for me to learn from. What a mixture! They were mostly a different race than me with a mixture of boys and girls and varied in age from 10 thru 16. After I read through the 977 pages of their past troubles and history, I told God, "I don't know if I can do this. This isn't a lesson. This is a crash course."

The children and dad were very wary of me at first. Dad explained that since the children had been entrusted to the state Fostering system, many different workers from many DCFS contracted agencies had passed through their lives. I explained that my purpose was to speak for each child in court to help them get back to their home

or obtain a permanent home.

As I came to the family home each week to monitor the family time and talk with the children, they all began to trust me and talk to me. I took careful notes of my observations. I wondered how my notes would have any effect on the courts or these children. As the months wore on, the children were receiving the attention they needed and one-by-one returning to their family home; in part, because of all those notes but mostly due to an unseen power.

*" I had discovered that all children; white, black, tan, purple, or green laugh and cry the same. They all need love and attention. I learned that all children are voiceless in a world of adults and that children are amazingly resilient.."*

I had discovered that all children; white, black, tan, purple, or green laugh and cry the same. They all need love and attention. I learned that all children are voiceless in a world of adults and that children are amazingly resilient. The children in my case are now blessed with a wonderful stepmother as well as their dad and siblings who love and care for

them. I have grown to love these children. I realize that at some point, I must let them go because other children are patiently waiting for a CASA. Many more children await a person who will rescue and comfort them. It is truly amazing to watch God work his miracles while he teaches lessons.



**Court Calendar  
April**

**April 26-1:15**  
Alyssa R. Veronica E.  
**April 27- 2:00**  
Carmen Hines  
**April 28- 1:15**  
Lisa B.  
**April 29-1:00**  
Shayla F.  
**April 29-1:15**  
Irene P.

**Court Calendar  
May**

**May 3- 10:00**  
Sherry D.  
**May 3- 2:00**  
Susan E.  
**May 5- 1:15**  
Nancy P.  
**May 13- 1:15**  
Irene P.  
**May 17- 2:00**  
Anthony W.

**Court Calendar  
June**

**June 2- 8:45**  
Christy C.  
**June 2- 1:15**  
Shavon J.  
**June 4- 1:15**  
Pam. P  
**June 7- 2:15**  
M. Welch  
**June 8- 1:30**  
Nicole P.  
**June 9- 9:00**  
Nate K.  
**June 22- 1:15**  
Ernie M.  
**June 22- 1:30**  
Julie E.

**Upcoming Events....**



**CASA of Peoria County's  
Hole-In-One Contest: May 13-15th from  
8am-8pm daily at:  
Weaver Ridge Golf Club  
5100 Weaver Ridge Blvd  
Peoria, IL 61615**

**Three qualification days leading up to the finalist shoot out contest on  
Sunday May 16th at 10am.** For more information, contact CASA of Peoria  
County Board Member: Greg Birkland 309-648-4838 or [gbirkland@bscmedical.com](mailto:gbirkland@bscmedical.com)

**CASA Everyday Heroes Essay Contest**

**Wednesday, May 5, 6:30 p.m.**  
**O'Brien Field**  
**730 SW Jefferson, Peoria, IL**

*Every child that enters the essay contest receives a free ticket to this Peoria Chiefs game, with the winning essays read just before the game. Come out a half hour early to the ballpark and applaud these great kids.*

**In-Service Opportunities**

**April 28, The Pediatric Resource Center, in conjunction with the National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter, is hosting a showing of the movie Precious.** The movie will be shown at 7p.m on Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup> at the **Apollo Fine Arts and Entertainment Center, 311 Main Street, Peoria.** The admission price of \$10 includes the movie, popcorn and soda. The showing of this film is part of the Child Abuse Prevention Campaign to make people aware of the problem of child abuse. **Precious** offers an education to everyone who views it.

**May 6, CASA Time:** at 5:00 location to be announced.  
**June 3, CASA Time:** at 5:00 location to be announced.



The image on the left is from the last CASA Time gathering at Panera Bread! Don't miss out on the next CASA Time event on May 6, 2010. Location to be announced! Appearing from left to right are: Becky Weber, Collen Jornlin, Kirsten Vivian, Melkecia Welch, Wendy Harmon, Nicole Painter, Irene Pritzker, and Shari Wilkerson.

## THANK YOU, You are appreciated!

by Melkecia Welch



This past quarter I attended an ACR (Administrative Case Review) with CASA Volunteer Laton "Ernie" Mahan. I had an opportunity to really see his heart for the children and family he is appointed. I admired the time he has invested in this family by visiting with them, educating himself in areas that will help him better understand and advocate for the children, as well as

going above and beyond what is required of him. I realized what great value he is to these children. I have been blown away by his time commitment, his ability to follow through with his CASA assignment, making sure his CASA children have a voice and that their concerns are being addressed. His

steadfast commitment to the children he is ap-

pointed, as well as

his overall commitment to the CASA program has impacted the lives of the family, the CASA staff, and (after reading the featured article,

*Thump Lesson*) his own

life for the better. The

children he is appointed, all dealt with emotional, mental, and behavioral challenges. These

challenges prolonged the family's

involvement with DCFS. Through his consistent advocacy for the last two years in meeting with the family weekly, attending meetings concerning the children, researching better ways to advocate, obtaining a

positive rapport with the family and service work-

ers, and writing reports has helped bring some stability

to such a complex case. His stable volunteer advocacy has helped three of the five children return home to their father and move another one step closer to permanency as well. The volunteer service he has brought to this family has given the family hope and lessened their need for DCFS services. He is a true expression of the heart of a CASA and I am grateful to have him on the team!

Ernie is one example, but all the CASA's of Peoria County have done a tremendous job advocating! I want all of the CASA's in Peoria County and abroad to know that I appreciate you! I appreciate how you have opened up portions of

your life to fulfill the needs of others. Giving of your time, utilizing your resources to get to meetings or visits, reading through multiple emails regarding in-services or CASA updates as well as reading case reports, submission of timesheets, case forms, and court reports are all the things you do that help keep the CASA program thriving!

Availing yourself to speak up for a child as well as seeking out their best interest is a lifetime investment. Making sure that the child or children you serve has all of the resources he or she needs or has a voice in the decisions that are made concerning their life is an invaluable gift to give!

At times, CASA's sometimes think and have often said that they don't feel they are making a difference. Some feel this way be-

cause of the slow progressions

in their case or the con-

tinual misbehaviors of

their CASA children.

I want all CASA's

who may have felt

this way to know

that your presence

is known! It may

not always be

openly rewarded,

celebrated, or acknowl-

edged but you are making

an impact for the better! If

you really take the time out to

look at your involvement on a case

and see all you have contributed to

since your appointment; whether it is

pointing out something the caseworker

neglected to see, offered an encouraging

word, shown up consistently to visits, or com-

municated to the judge what your children

wished, you have left your mark!

*"I appreciate how you have opened up portions of your life to fulfill the needs of others. Giving of your time, utilizing your resources to get to meetings or visits, reading through multiple emails regarding in-services or CASA updates as well as reading case reports, submission of timesheets, case forms, and court reports are all the things you do that help keep the CASA program thriving!"*



So I celebrate you and I encourage you to never give up on a child because one day hopefully they will look back over their life and remember your face, your words spoken, and your active involvement in seeking their best interest. However, if the children and families never say:

"Thank you, you have changed my life for the better. Or, I am glad you took time out to care about me, my needs, me having a safe permanent home. Or even say, although things didn't turn out how we hoped, thank you for being there to advocate for me."

I want you to know that I THANK YOU and will forever be grateful for your contribution as a CASA!

## National Volunteer Appreciation Week: April 18-24th

**CASA of Peoria County would like to recognize and thank all of our active CASA Volunteers for their length of service!**

### 4 ½ years

Mary Arnold  
Sue Kingery  
Michael Waters  
Jean Polk

### 4 years

Sue Elliott  
Linda Waters  
Stephanie McCarthy (case recently closed) Great work Stephanie!

### 3 ½ years

Lisa Beaupre

### 3 years

Kirsten Vivian  
Stacy Borho

### 2 ½ years

Susie Champion  
Carmen Hines  
Irene Pritzker  
Nathan Keener

### 2 years

Britta Jost  
Ernie Mahan

### 1 ½ years

Greg Birkland  
Nancy Pease  
Veronica Elliott  
Alyssa Rodgers  
Shari Wilkerson (case recently closed) Great Work Shari!  
Gwen Hendrix

### 1 year

Sherry Dooley  
Susan Ecroyd  
Shayla Flemming  
Sherry Gordon  
Wendy Harmon  
Shavon Johnson  
Rosalind Lowry  
Nicole Painter  
Anthony Williams

### 5½ months

Christy Collier  
Julie Eliathamby  
Robby Hinkle  
Sara Jacobs (case recently closed) Great Job Sara!  
Collen Jornlin  
Evelyn Kenyon  
Teresa Pflederer  
Brandi Stanley  
Jeff Stevens  
Becky Weber



### Leaving a Loving Legacy:

**Planned Giving through your will:** You can create a legacy of hope for vulnerable children through a planned gift to CASA of Peoria County.

Bequests Through Your Will

A bequest to the CASA of Peoria County is one of the most effective and simplest ways to make a lasting impact on the lives of vulnerable children. You may specify a specific amount or a percentage you wish to give. If you would like to make such a gift to the CASA of Peoria County, you may include language similar to the following:

"I, [name], of [city, state, ZIP], give, devise and bequeath to CASA of Peoria County a nonprofit public benefit corporation having its principal office at 324 main Street, Room 215, Peoria, IL 61602, [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] to be used for the furtherance of its charitable purposes in the discretion and at the direction of its Board of Trustees for its unrestricted use and purpose."

If you are considering making a gift by bequest, please meet with your attorney to discuss the ramifications and, if appropriate, to update your will. Please let us know if you have included CASA of Peoria County in your estate planning.

Contact CASA of Peoria County

324 Main St, Rm 215  
Peoria, IL 61602

Phone: 309-669-2939  
Fax: 309-672-6957

We're on the Web!

[www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org)  
[www.casapeoria.org](http://www.casapeoria.org)

### Bring A Voice to a Child

Yes, I would like to support a CASA Child for one year @ \$100 per month.

I would like to make a one time gift.

\$25  \$50  \$100  \$250  \$500  \$1,000  Other \$

I am interested in learning more about CASA.

I would like to give of my time. Please contact me about being involved:

- Board Member
- CASA volunteer
- Other volunteer
- Help with **Special** events
- Other:

Name:  Phone #

Address:  City: , IL Zip:

Email Address:

The best time to reach me is during  day or  evening.

Method of Payment: Visa  MasterCard  Check #

Account Number:  Expiration Date:

Name as it appears on card:  Signature:

**Make checks payable to:** CASA of Peoria County  
**Return to:** 324 Main Street, Room 215  
Peoria, Illinois 61602

**Make A Difference!**

### Our Mission

The mission of CASA of Peoria County is to advocate for abused and neglected children in Peoria County through the services of specially trained community volunteers

