

# Manhattan Beach Sun

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## Coordinating Council Hears Positive News from Doctor Berenson

By Karen Kling Russo

The November meeting of the Manhattan Beach Coordinating Council began with President Stewart Fournier thanking sponsors. "We are especially grateful in this economic climate that we still try to give five scholarships a year of about \$3,000 each." Rabbi Mark Hyman accompanied his invocation with a colorful story of a young Jewish student studying in Dubai. While there, the student gradually made a friend of a young Bedouin who could not believe there could be an American or a Jew who did not hate him.

Before hearing Dr. James Berenson, as is customary at all Coordinating Council meetings, student representatives gave the latest highlights of life at their schools. Grace Campbell of American Martyrs, Gurkiran Dhaliwal of Manhattan Beach Middle School (MBMS) and Shelby Adair of Mira Costa High School each spoke. Covering triumphs in a variety of sports, music programs, and charity projects including the UCLA Blood Drive, the sparkle in their eyes seemed most dazzling when talking about all the Halloween festivities.

Another monthly event is the awards to "Students of the Month," as chosen by their schools. Aaron Henning of American Martyrs, Madison Locicero of MBMS and Darwin Zwissler of Mira Costa were presented by enthusiastic faculty members, Mrs. Kerry Climaco, Mr. David Leey and Mr. Joel Carlson respectively. Mrs. Climaco spoke of Henning's character in being a volunteer who goes the extra mile, with always a kind word for others. The same could be said for Mr. Levy's comments on Madison Locicero, an up-and-coming drama student who goes out of her way to reach out and help others

students. Mr. Carlson, who teaches music, advised his younger students to emulate Zwissler, an outstanding tuba player, whether in wind ensemble or marching band. "Soak up everything you can learn from Darwin," Carlson said.

Each student was awarded certificates from Steven Napolitano, deputy to County Supervisor Don Knabe, Manhattan Beach City Council member Wayne Powell (on behalf of Mayor Portia Cohen), and representatives from the offices of State Legislator Ted Lieu and State Senator Jenny Orupeza.

Each student presented their parents with a colorful bouquet of flowers.

The speaker of the day, Dr. Berenson, is a specialist in myeloma and bone cancer research. His talk was given special significance to Coordinating Council members because of the testimonial of Manhattan Beach Police officer Mark Vasquez. Three years ago, Vasquez, at age 30 with a wife and two young children, was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. Thirty pounds lighter, weak, anemic and unable to work, his oncolo-

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## Santa Float Spared by Donations

By Evan Ortega

When Trilogy Spa owner Chandra Shaw cancelled her fundraiser to raise money for Manhattan Beach's popular Santa float recently, it wasn't because she was having difficulty raising money. The business owner, who has volunteered on the float as an elf, had planned the "Holiday Float FUN-raiser" after finding out that the float was in bad need of costly refurbishment. "We thought we were going to get increments of 20, 50 or 100 dollars," Shaw said. "The other donations that we had coming in were all in those increments."

After learning about the needed repairs, Gordon Cherniak and other members of the Manhattan Beach Property Owners Association had decided to cut a check for \$6,000 just hours before the fundraiser

was to begin. Jim and Colleen Fersch of Manhattan Beach donated \$1,000. "We gave them a good slug; I think they were really flabbergasted," Cherniak recalled. "They were really appreciative."

Created in 1939, the organization sold some property recently and its members have been donating proceeds of the sale to local schools and charities. "We have this money and we're trying to put it back into the community in the form of legacy for us and helping the community," Cherniak said. "We're residents and we know what it means to the children and the community, and that's why we'd like to help."

Shaw was making final preparations on the day of the fundraiser when she

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gist at the time had thrown up his hands, not knowing what to do. The Manhattan Beach Police Department held a major fundraiser to help with medical costs. Then KTLA's Channel 5 prime news featured his story. That is when his fortune changed.

Seeing that show was Dr. Berenson. He knew he could help him and he called Vasquez. Dr. Berenson is Director of the Institute for Myeloma and Bone Cancer Research. Founded in 2003, it is the only independent nonprofit institute studying this disease. Its mission is to find a cure for multiple myeloma, a condition in which cancer of the plasma attacks and destroys the bone. It is the most common form of bone disease, affecting another 20,000 people each year, often metastasized from breast or prostate cancer.

Dr. Berenson's background includes a BS from Stanford, a Doctor of Medicine from UCSD, an internship in internal medicine from the University of Utah, and years of cancer study in association with Cedars-Sinai and UCLA. But it is this institute that allows him to move more rapidly, unhampered by committees and the large infrastructure that come with some other academic institutions. The institute in West Hollywood is three-pronged: A clinic where he sees patients, a lab for testing, and a CRO, Contract Research Organization, that conducts clinical trials around the country. He and his staff work with top scientists and biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies.

Without attempting to get too technical, the methodology includes taking biopsies of bone marrow samples from patients, testing on

mice with differing treatments, combination of treatments and lengths of treatments, and then going to clinical trials. Dr. Berenson has been involved in many major breakthroughs and new treatments resulting in improved and lengthened lives. Among them has been the benefit of decreasing the amount of a drug or combination of drugs, reducing toxicity but extending usage. "It's not just about complete remission," says the doctor, "but patients having a complete life."

Applications are both disease-specific and patient-specific. "We are not there yet, but with time, treatments will be more personalized or gene-specific," Dr. Berenson said. As yet, there is no total remission or cure, but life has been lengthened, he says, to 11 years. If Mark Vasquez is any example—he takes Doxil, which entails weaker but more frequent doses—he is strong and hopes to be back to work at our police department in January.

For more information on Dr. Berenson and the Institute for Myeloma and Bone Cancer Research, go to [http://www.imbcr.org/about\\_us.htm](http://www.imbcr.org/about_us.htm).

At the end of the meeting, announcements were made to remind people that the State of the City Breakfast with Mayor Portia Cohen is coming up on December 4 at Hotel Belmar; about the Mira Costa parents' campaign to improve the baseball field; and regarding an environmental tasks force of South Bay schools and supportive businesses to improve and extend bike paths.

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