

# At a Glance

■ Communicating with you, the CHOP employee.



May 18, 2009

## Amazing Art, Amazing Artists

### CAR Gallery Opening Gives Children With Autism Their Time to Shine

The initial idea was to decorate the [Center for Autism Research \(CAR\)](#) on the eighth floor of 3535 Market St. in a way that welcomed families. Debra L. Dunn, Esq., CAR's public relations director and recruitment coordinator, decided that featuring art from children on the autistic spectrum would be the perfect way to showcase their talents and give the space brightness and warmth.

A total of 40 children contributed 50 pieces of artwork that are now permanently framed and displayed on the walls of CAR. On April 22, 20 of the artists celebrated at a gallery opening where they showed off their work to their families and teachers. The nearly 100 people



Lucas Hurford, 9, with Big Heart

who attended also had the opportunity to tour the facility, check out the three different playrooms, see the mock MRI scanner (where research participants can get used to the machine before they have a real MRI), view brain images and meet the CAR staff. Music therapist Patrick Lipawen, M.A., M.T.-B.C., and art therapist Lindsay Dekich from the Child Life, Education and Creative Art Therapy Department, were on hand to help entertain the artists and their siblings during the gallery opening.

Erin Bogue, research assistant, and Ayana King-Pointer and Stephanie Ricchini-Egan, resource coordinators, also helped with planning.

The entire project had the support of Robert Schultz, Ph.D., director of CAR, and David Mandell, Sc.D., associate



Arthur LeMar, 6, poses next to his drawing, EA Sports, with his parents and teacher at Penrose Elementary, Judy R. Smith (front left).

Soliciting and collecting the art and planning the opening required the efforts of many people. Sujie Shin, M.A., project coordinator for a research study with the Philadelphia School District, contacted the district's art teachers, who passed the opportunity on to parents. Julie Mesaric, autism outreach liaison, took on the primary responsibility for

communicating with families after their children had submitted works. director of CAR, as well as local autism organizations who helped get the word out to families.

"The feedback we received from families both that night and afterward was overwhelmingly positive," Dunn says. "Every time I walk down the hall I'm inspired by the talent and effort of the children. They are truly amazing." ■