

## features



### **10 Best in Real Estate: Mortgage Myths Can Cost You!**

One of the greatest myths consumers of mortgage engage in is that some lenders will loan money at seriously discounted rates. Read the 5 facts that you need to know about mortgage rates.

### **11 Best in Arts & Culture: Best in St. Pete: Public Art**

How many cities do you know that have made art an integral part of the cityscape like St. Pete has? Take a walking tour and discover some of the art this city has to offer.

### **16 Best in Science: A Scientist in Our Midst: St. Petersburg's Best Kept Secret**

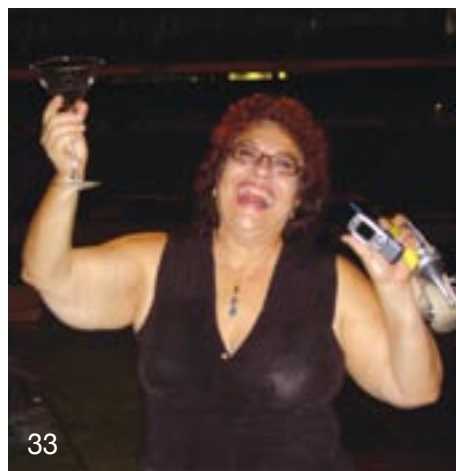
Allera, a for-profit, drug development company, has secured a licensing agreement with TBRI.

### **33 Best in Food and Dining: Local Chefs Prepare their Favorites for the Holidays**

Traditions play an important role in our lives especially during the holiday season and recipes are one way to celebrate this fantastic time of year. Check out some of St. Pete's finest restaurants favorite recipes as our special gift to you.

### **38 Best in Education: Center Academy**

High school students weren't the only ones receiving the glory at Internationally recognized Center Academy's graduation last May. After the students received their diplomas, the parent's were given one of the best awards that you get from your child-a thank you for always standing by them.



**cover** : The elegant table setting was styled by Rosemary Johnson, owner of Frannet's / Rosemary's. Photographed by Mike Ramos.

best in education

# Center Academy:

## A School that Makes a Difference

story by Center Academy Staff

There's not a dry eye in the house when Center Academy students receive their high school diplomas in the grand ballroom of the St. Petersburg Yacht Club each year. Last May 6th was no exception. Grateful students thanked the school and their own parents and reminisced about their struggles to overcome learning and motivational problems. After reading their notes of thanks, the students awarded their parents diplomas for always standing beside them. Here's one of the recent compositions:

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*There aren't enough words to thank you for all you have done for me. Thank you for helping me through 12 years of school. Thank you for removing me from schools I wasn't succeeding in. Thank you for sending me to Center Academy, where I could succeed. I would also like to thank my grandparents for helping me when I was struggling. Your help meant so much to me. Thank you, too, to all my Center Academy teachers. You have helped me so much, and I will always be grateful for your support and encouragement. This is a special day for me, and a great achievement – one I share with you all for being there with me through these 12 years.*

*David*



## A ST. PETERSBURG ORIGINAL

In 1966, Mack and Susan Hicks moved to St. Petersburg, and Dr. Mack Hicks opened the first independent private practice of psychology in Pinellas County. It was located at 105 Fifth Avenue Northeast, presently the site of the Mansion House Bed and Breakfast. He worked primarily with children and adolescents who suffered from adjustment and learning problems. While counseling helped in most cases, it became apparent that learning problems persisted, even after psychological intervention had improved the child's behavior.

Mack called on top educational experts to tutor these children for two hours per week. The leaders in this enterprise included Susan Fair, JoAnn Conser, Ceil Hedman, Joanne Cheek, Patricia Pearson, and Mary Whaley. Their work was so successful that some private schools bused their students to the practice, which had now become the not-for-profit Developmental Center.

This led to the opening of a full day school, christened Center Academy. The first class was held at St. Matthews Church, on Pinellas Point Drive South, with a grand total of seven students. Then the

school moved to Allendale Methodist Church, Lakeview Christian Church, and converted hallway space at the St. Petersburg Science Center. The student population grew, and the Air Force bused students to the school from MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. In 1974, Center Academy finally found a permanent home on ten acres of land at 6710, 86th Avenue North in Pinellas Park.

Also in 1974, a Center Academy school opened in London, England. Mack and Susan had lived in Suffolk, England for two years, where Mack was in the Air Force. Two of their children were born there. The school opened on the third floor of a synagogue with five students. The address was "St. Petersburg Muse". With the help of educational experts like Charlene Graham and medical experts like Dr. Sam Tucker, the school became an instant success.

## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Dr. Andy Hicks, who also is a neuropsychologist, is Mack and Susan's second child and presently CEO of Center Academy. His wife, Kimberly, is a St. Pete native whose family ties to St. Pete go back four generations. (Her great grandmother, Gay Blair White, is recognized at the St. Pete Museum of History for chronicling Tony Jannus' 1914 flight that made St. Pete the birthplace of scheduled air transportation.)

Andy appreciates the family connections, as well as the many staff who have been a part of Center Academy for the long haul. Center Academy has ten staff members and community leaders who have been associated with the school for at least 15 years, including Bruce McKelvey, who began his service to Center Academy as an original board member in 1968. That was about the time Andy got his first job, picking up trash around the old 5th Avenue N.E. building.

Andy attended St. Petersburg Catholic High School and returned to Center Academy full time after finishing his doctorate at Vanderbilt University in 1988. He spent many years as President of the Learning Disabilities Association of Pinellas and has been clinical director and director of assessment and

research at Center Academy.

## WHAT MAKES IT WORK?

Center Academy has been an innovator in special education since its inception. The school has always focused on meeting the needs of each individual student and continues to provide nationally normed achievement testing twice a year to measure student progress. The Center Academy prescriptive learning program was developed in part through a \$300,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. The grant enabled the school to study what types of programs work for what types of students and provided free evaluations and remediation to over 200 students.

Center Academy has developed its own testing and remedial programs and uses incentives like "Goal Days" that allow students to earn a day off. Of course, some students like it so much at Center Academy that they may show up at school even on a day off! Barbara Boucher, who has worked at the school for over 30 years, is accustomed to seeing recent and old graduates stop by for a visit to their "home away from home."

## THE FUTURE

At the present time there are 13 Center Academies, and the plan is to open a new one each year. "We're in no hurry," says Dr. Eric Larson, President of Center Academy. "Our primary goals are to continue to develop new teaching methods and to maintain the quality of service we have provided over the years."

To find out more about Center Academy, you can call Principal Pat Lambert at 541-5716 or go to [www.centeracademy.com](http://www.centeracademy.com). Or you can just come and meet the next graduating class at the St. Pete Yacht Club next May. Bring your Kleenex.

## GRADUATES TELL THEIR STORIES

*"When I first came to Center Academy, I was a mixed up fifteen-year-old girl who was ready to drop out of high school. Back then, learning disabilities were not well known and I was one of those kids who fell through the cracks. I had very little self-esteem and, as a result, had a very rocky relationship with my parents. Thank God my folks discovered Center Academy through a newspaper ad and brought me there to be tested! To this day, they still call Center Academy a Godsend.*

*Center Academy also inspired me to do more with my life beyond high school. I went on to college and graduated from USF with honors, earning a Bachelor's degree in Special Education. I then landed a position teaching learning disabled students in the public school system. I won an award for "Best New Teacher of the Year" my first year!"*

– Michaela Keats, Teacher

*"I was struggling in school and my mom sensed something was wrong. When she found Center Academy I became excited about learning again. Center Academy was the right decision for me. Thank you, Center Academy."*

– Stephen Diaco, Attorney

*"I didn't realize it at the time, but Center Academy was one of the best choices my parents made for me. Center Academy taught me the skills I needed in school, business, and life."*

– Michael Irvin, President, M. I. Productions