



The Montclair Times

Local student, organization honored for advancements in speech

Wednesday, May 02, 2007

By **LILLIAN M. ALEMAN**
of **The Montclair Times**

Marilyn Certner-Smith and Shirley Morganstein know that their lives are complete when they help individuals with aphasia, the inability to speak or understand language due to a brain injury or disease.

That's why in 2003, Certner-Smith and Morganstein formed "Speaking of Aphasia," a Montclair-based program that assists individuals who have communication impairments.

"Shirley and I had been working on aphasia for 30 years. We wanted to return to clinical life, as we had evolved into more administration type work," Certner-Smith said. "Our true love is treating people who have aphasia."

Last Friday, April 27, the New Jersey Speech-Language Hearing Association (NJSHA) honored Certner-Smith and Morganstein by presenting them with its Program of the Year Award.

"It's an enormous honor by our state organization. It's a professional acknowledgement of the work we do to advance the understanding of aphasia, which is not a well-understood problem," Certner-Smith said, adding that a million people in the nation have aphasia.

"There are 80,000 new cases each year, yet it's not a household word ... The greatest challenge is to educate the public."

Also recognized by the NJSHA was 13-year-old Renaissance Middle School student Kaan Erdi. Kaan received the Distinguished Achievement Award for his "extraordinary progress in all areas of speech and language," a release to The Times stated.

"He worked so diligently to become an effective communicator," Monique S. Kaye, president of the NJSHA, told The Times.

At one point, Kaan, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of 5, had no functional language and limited verbal behaviors, such as eye contact, facial focus and joint attention, according to the NJSHA. Now, at the age of 13, Kaan is capable of normal conversational talking.

"We are so proud of their accomplishments and it's so nice that we could have this opportunity to celebrate their successes in a formal manner like the awards reception. It had a magical aura because there was so much to celebrate," Kaye said. "It was a special evening."

Contact Lillian M. Aleman at aleman@montclairtimes.com

14712