



**Dancing  
cheek to cheek** - Page 23

# PAGE THREE



**A Mustang  
turns Panther** - Page 26

## Fighting so daughter can hear teacher

### Family urges state to pass Grace's Law

By Mollie Gray  
Staff Writer

CLIFTON - Children should be able to hear their teachers when they speak, say Claudio and Pamela D'Alessio. If they have their way more New Jersey children who are hearing impaired will be able to do just that.

They are doing their part by trying to push Grace's Law through the state legislation, which would help their family and many others confronted with the high costs of hearing aids.

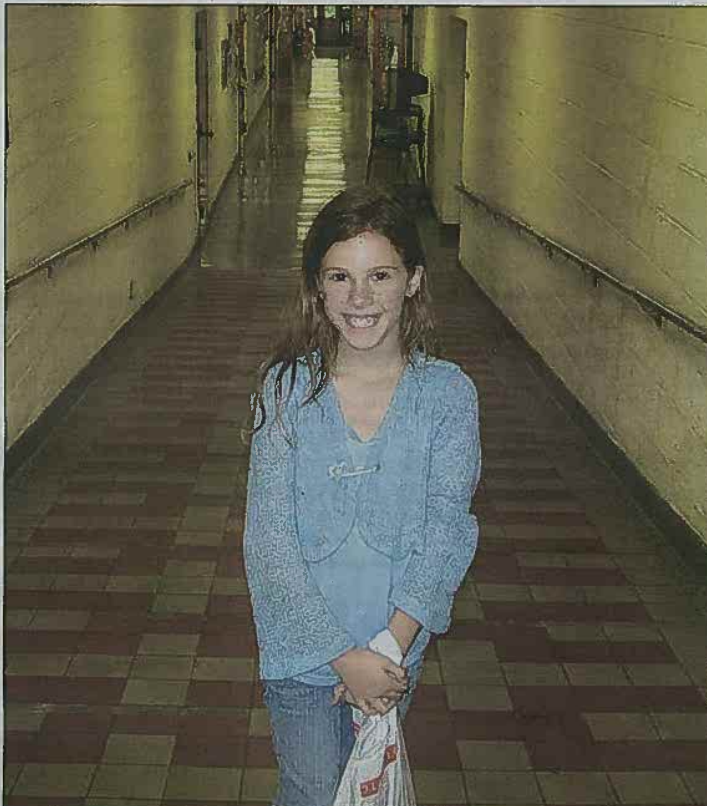
Their daughter Caitlyn, a third-grader at School 14 was diagnosed in 1996 with cholesteatoma, an abnormal skin growth in the inner ear that causes deafness. Caitlyn has since lost all of natural ability to hear in her right ear.

Legislation, if passed would require insurance companies to cover the costs of hearing aids for children age 15 and younger. Under current state law, insurance companies are not required to share these costs.

The family joins Warren County resident Jeanine Gleba who has been fighting to see Grace's Law passed for more than eight years. Gleba's daughter Grace, who inspired the bill, was born with a severe hearing impairment.

The D'Alessio family recently paid more than \$3,000 out of pocket to pay for a hearing evaluation, a hearing aid system and batteries. The system can last up to five years, Pam said, but the batteries and ear molds must be replaced much more frequently, sometimes just after a few days or just a couple of weeks. The D'Alessios insurance plan, through Pam's job as a benefits manager and Claudio's work as a production manager, doesn't cover any of these costs.

The cost isn't the only issue that concerns the D'Alessios. They said Caitlyn currently has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for her speech and works with an instructor once a week where she is learn-



#### What is Grace's Law?

- Named after Grace Gleba, born with severe hearing impairment.
- Insurance companies would be required to cover costs of hearing aids for children under age 15.
- Clifton family spent \$3,000 for daughter's hearing aid. The system can last up to five years but batteries and ear molds must be replaced more frequently, sometimes just after a few days or just a couple of weeks.
- Clifton Council approves resolution supporting Grace's Law at last meeting.

Caitlyn D'Alessio, left, pictured in School 14 where she attends as a third grader, has a condition that is causing her to lose her hearing. Caitlyn and her family are urging the state to pass legislation where insurance companies would help pay for hearing aids. The D'Alessio family is pictured below at Clifton City Hall the night the Clifton Council passed a resolution supporting the legislation.

ing to lip-read among other skills.

Last fall, the D'Alessios requested an IEP for Caitlyn in the regular classroom, but they were denied because she was doing well academically based on her previous scores on state-mandated tests.

Pam D'Alessio argues those scores should never have been used because Caitlyn achieved those scores before she lost her hearing.

She said she worries that the delay could negatively impact her daughter's experience at school.

"We just don't want her to get to the point where she starts to go downhill and then they say, 'Okay,

now we can get her an IEP.' If we give her something now, we can keep her at that level," she added.

As an alternative to the plan, the district provided Caitlyn with a FM sound system that amplifies sounds in the classroom. Her teacher speaks through a microphone and the sounds are transmitted through a speaker about 3 feet high. The D'Alessios are now requesting a more modern sound system because the one the district provided for Caitlyn isn't compatible with her new hearing aid. The new system would also be easier for

PHOTOS COURTESY OF D'ALESSIO FAMILY



SEE GRACE, PAGE 8

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## Festival of music



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOMPOHI BAYA

New Jersey Music and Arts presents the fifth One Heart International Festival of music, dance and drama that will take place on Sunday, April 6, at 5:30 p.m. in the Woodrow Wilson Middle School auditorium. Tickets are \$10 and \$8 for students and seniors. The theme of the festival is "Beauty in Diversity," a celebration of the many cultures of the world. At 4:30 p.m., a free pre-performance lecture by Stephen Sprague on Visual Arts and Modernity will be held. Among the performers are the AJU Dancers, the New Hope Players, the AKBA Caucasus Folk Music and Dance Ensemble and more. The auditorium is wheelchair accessible and large print programs are available upon request. For more information and tickets, call 973-272-3255 or log on to [www.njma.homestead.com](http://www.njma.homestead.com).

## GRACE

FROM PAGE 3

Caitlyn to transport between classes when she gets to middle school.

Caitlyn is in school with her twin sister Christina. Their mother said she wants the girls to be in the same classrooms in fourth grade so if Caitlyn misses something her teacher says she can later ask her sister.

The couple is not sure whether Caitlyn's hearing will eventually worsen. They meet with school district staff next week to find out the status of their requests. Pam said she fears their response will be, "We've accommodated her and there's nothing else we could do."

According to the Web site for Grace's Law, <http://www.graces-law.com>, approximately 10 percent of public school students in New Jersey have some form of hearing loss or a hearing problem. Proponents of the legislation say it would

benefit families and the State in the long term by reducing the costs of funding education for students with hearing impairments who fall behind in the classroom.

The City Council recently drafted a resolution supporting Grace's Law and the D'Alessio's mission to see that the law becomes a reality in the State. The bill is currently stalled in the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. Similar laws have passed in 10 other states including Connecticut, Maryland and Kentucky, California and Colorado are working to pass the legislation along with New Jersey. What's frustrating, Pam said, is that the bill stalls every year for budget reasons, yet the State continues to pass legislation in other fields like autism and mental health. She remains optimistic though.

"Hopefully we can be the next state to pass it," she said.

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## "I"

FROM PAGE 7

Dickinson University. Italiano had so much knowledge about his work that he often spoke extemporaneously as host, Vitale said.

"We did have some great times. He gave me an opportunity to be in the foreground. He liked the addition of me on his show. He wanted me to be a part of it," Vitale said.

Even after she left his program, she never stopped working with Italiano. She became an employee of his production company, Ronnie I Productions helping to showcase doo-wop and a cappella groups and DJs.

"He saw his radio program as a way to shape the public interest. I won't cater to the public mentality. I wish to reshape it. I believe in what Ronnie I's mission was," she said.

Italiano died last Tuesday. Throughout his life, he's been described as many things from music collector to music crusader. Vitale said she hopes people will remember him as altruistic and giving.

"He had a lot of knowledge and aspirations he wanted to share. He often felt frustrated when an effort of his wasn't well-received. But it didn't stop him from trying and continuing on with the same type of ideas. He didn't make his money on a lot of his projects... that's for sure. But it didn't stop him. He was doing it for the passion," she said. Born in Passaic but residing in Clifton, Italiano is survived by wife Sandra, children Ronald Jr., Doreen DeMartino and Tammi Porzl. Siblings Richard, Elaine Kling, and the late Anthony along with grandchildren Marissa, Jam, Kylie, Arianna, Aaron, Jason and Justin.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to The Cancer Center at Hackensack Medical University Hospital or Make a Wish Foundation.

(Information was used from the Herald News article "Clifton music store owner, doo-wop devotee dies" and The Record article, "For Vinyl junkies, Records Are Still King.")

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**KETEL ONE** Vodka 80° 1.75 liter... **36<sup>09</sup>**

**DEWAR'S WHITE LABEL** 1.75 liter... **29<sup>09</sup>**

**JACK DANIELS** 1.75 liter... **37<sup>09</sup>**

**SOBIESKI** Vodka 1.75 liter... **16<sup>00</sup>**

**SKYY** Vodka 80° 1.75 liter... **21<sup>00</sup>**

**HENNESSY Cognac VS** 1.75 liter... **55<sup>00</sup>**

**JIM BEAM** Bourbon 1.75 liter... **25<sup>00</sup>**

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**Wine Values**

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**Beer Values**

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## Board of Education meetings

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Law, P.L. 1975, the Clifton Board of Education will have the following regularly scheduled meetings.

All meetings are held in the Board's meeting room at the Administration building, 745 Clifton Ave. beginning at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

The regular meetings are scheduled for March 26 and April 9.

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