

South Miami



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Mother's Day means even more to autistic children

BY NANCY EAGLETON

To celebrate Mother's Day on May 11 and Autism Awareness month, which was in April, it is an honor to profile two very special Miami mothers, Alessandra Mion and Teresa Bello. They are both the proud mothers of an autistic child, and they each have three additional children, as well.

It's challenging enough to be a mother, even more demanding when you have a large family, and to be the mother of an autistic child requires a special kind of patience.

Alessandra's son, Gianmarco, showed signs of autism at the age of one.

"He stopped saying words, he cried a lot and was very aggravated," she recalls.

Gianmarco is now 17 and is a great joy in her life.

"I used to say, 'why me?'" she said. "Now, I know he's such a blessing. We have become better people because of him. He's changed our lives for the better."

Things improved for Gianmarco and Alessandra after he started attending the Carrie Brazer Center for Autism and Alternative Approaches at the age of seven.

"My son went to seven schools before he came here," Alessandra revealed. "They focus on the positive. The teachers have such patience and they are so loving."



Above: Alessandra Mion with her son, Gianmarco.

Below: Terry Bello with her son, Anthony.



Around Town

Fighting recession in your own neighborhood

BY MICHAEL MILLER

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Want to help deal with the recession that we are in? Well, here's what you can do:



Shop at locally-owned businesses.

Spend your money there. Go to the local shopping center; go to the stores and businesses that are locally-owned in your neighborhood. For right now, shop locally! It's that simple! Support the businesses, the locally-owned businesses, in your neighborhood.

You'll feel different and you'll feel good knowing that you are making a difference. As much or as little as you spend in those stores will make an immediate direct impact on the economy in our community. It's simple. "Shop in locally owned businesses and make a difference."

Ever wonder why in the past 20 years Miami-Dade County has given birth to so many new cities, like Key Biscayne, Miami Lakes, Miami Gardens, Doral, Pinecrest, Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay? And why there are local zoning boards throughout Miami-Dade rather than the old way where zoning hearings were heard by the county commission?

It's because people want local government and local control, among other things. People are tired of big government. They want to feel lis-

Up-and-coming Hip-Hop star has his roots in South Miami

BY GARY ALAN RUSE

Troy Jeffrey, "Ghostwridah," a 24-year-old lyricist and singer has moved to New York to pursue his dream in the Hip-Hop music industry, has launched his own company – Black Lyon Music Group – and signed with NorthStar Management NYC, but his hometown, his family and the central forces that drive him are right here in the City of South Miami.

Jeffrey, or Ghostwridah as he is known to fans, was in town recently and took time to speak with Community Newspapers.

"I'm working on an independent project now that we're about to put out," said Ghostwridah two weeks ago. "We're going to record the project now and I'm going back to New York tomorrow."

The title of the new album is "The Ruler is Back." The cutting edge musical production is hosted by Green Lantern and incorporates the original soul of R&B and rap into today's real struggles of a man from the ghetto striving to succeed at the highest level. According to Ghostwridah, "The Ruler is Back" introduces a new era of Hip-Hop which focuses more on the real person behind the music as opposed to the "self-animated gangsta." It is scheduled for release later this month.

"My music is like a story, hence the name, The Ruler is Back, inspired by the



Ghostwridah

great story teller himself, Slick Rick" said Ghostwridah. "I have to show people where I'm coming from so they understand where I am going."

His wife, recording artist Summer Johnson, is also featured on the album, in a number called "Pray for Me." The conscious highlight of the album, it serves as a refreshing and uplifting duet about mama's prayers.

"God is the reason for each and every rhyme I've ever written" said Ghostwridah. "He is the reason I lived to tell my stories."

Ghostwridah also teams up with

Atlanta recording artist Shawty Lo on the hood anthem single "Born and Raised in the Ghetto" to deliver a show-stopping performance inspired by his own Miami up-bringing.

Troy Jeffrey was born and raised in "confrontational South Miami," went to South Miami Middle School and South Miami Senior High, and says that he grew up in the "real hood – not the rap hood." Ghostwridah was introduced to Hip-Hop and inspired to rap by his older brother. When his brother received a twenty-five year prison sentence for "being in the wrong place at the wrong

time," Ghostwridah experienced a life-changing moment-of-clarity and realized that he wanted more from his life.

"I realized that my drive and hard work in Hip-hop was based on much more than a Bentley and a chain," said Ghostwridah. "It's based on the amount of people I have depending on me to make something of myself. My brother is one of them."

He encourages anyone who has a dream to never give up, and to make sure they invest the time and effort in themselves to make that dream come true.

"You only live once, you get one chance, one life to do what you need to do," said Ghostwridah. "Nothing is promised to you, so you have to work every day like it's your last. I would encourage people, if they want to become a successful Hip-Hop artist, or a successful lawyer or an athlete, whatever you do, *do* it. Work at it every day until it becomes second nature to you. You can't put in 50 percent and expect to get 100 percent back."

Ghostwridah is especially pleased with "All I know," a single from the new album. Presidential candidate Barack Obama and Russell Simmons are putting out a political CD and Ghostwridah will be on that as well.

For information go online at www.myspace.com/Ghostwridah.

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The Carrie Brazer Center is a non-profit charitable school that provides cognitive training and behavior and educational therapy to children with autism and related disabilities. The center is located at 7425 S.W. 42 Street and for the last nine years, has helped change the lives of over 250 children ranging in age from two through twenty-two and their families.

Alessandra remembers the struggles in her son's early years.

"Gianmarco is non-verbal, so he would scream for everything. I couldn't take him anywhere and it wasn't fair for my three other children," she explained.

She recalls the turning point in their lives. The first successful event they went to as a family was a church service when Gianmarco was around 12 years old.

"Now we go every Sunday to St. John Neumann Catholic Church," she

said. "There's a purpose for him."

Alessandra is determined to help other parents of autistic children.

"We started a ministry at St. John Neumann for parents who have children with autism" she explained. "People weren't going to church because it was too hard, now there's a place for them. These children... they're the purest of souls."

Just months ago, Alessandra started working at her son's school, the Carrie Brazer Center. She is happy to reach out to parents who call or visit the school looking for answers.

"I have the opportunity to be with my son and help other parents, too," she explained. "I can relate to parents who are in the same situation I was in years ago."

Both Alessandra and Terry Bello assisted with Carrie Brazer's seventh annual "Comedy for Kids," a school fundraiser that was held in March. The two mothers also joined other school members to participate in the "Miami-Dade Walk Now for Autism," which was held on February 10th at Crandon Park and raised over \$460,000 for the cause.

Terry Bello remembers when her

stepson, Anthony, was diagnosed at age three and a half with autism.

"I remember thinking 'autism, what is it?'" she said. "Today, it's like an epidemic. So many people know someone who has a child with autism. So many people are touched by it."

Autism Speaks reports that every 20 minutes, another child is diagnosed with autism. The lifelong neurological disorder impairs communication, behavior, learning and social skills and affects four times as many boys as girls. Thirteen years ago, 1 in 10,000 children was diagnosed with autism. Today, 1 in 150 children are diagnosed in the U.S., making autism the nation's fastest-growing serious developmental disorder.

Terry's son, Anthony, is eleven and has been attending the Carrie Brazer Center for almost one year.

"He was thrown out of a summer camp program last year," Terry recalled. "Then, I found the summer camp at the Carrie Brazer Center. He has made such great strides here. They took a child and they have changed him."

Terry has learned everything she

can about autism and about the best treatments and therapies that will help her care for her stepson.

"I have him on a special diet," she explained. "And everything must be routine and consistent. I do everything for him, so people ask me how I do it. I tell them that I'm very patient and I pray everyday."

"We have tried everything... speech therapy, occupational, sensory and horse therapy," she continued. "Everything is so expensive for these children, but the school and the therapies are so essential to these kids."

"Before, Anthony couldn't look me in the eyes," Terry explained, describing her son's progress. "Now, he looks me in the eyes and says 'I love you.'"

In order to better serve more families, the Carrie Brazer Center is proud to announce that they will be opening a second center at the Bet Breira campus at 9400 SW 87 Avenue in the near future. To learn more about the center's school or camp programs, visit the website at www.cbc4autism.org or call 305-262-5999.