

Eliot Newsletter – Fall 2024

Reflections from our Eliot board president

As I sit at my computer to write this report for the Eliot fall newsletter, I'm still trying to come to terms with the outcome of the U.S. election. To say that I'm shocked and saddened doesn't begin to describe how I feel and how I know many of you feel right now. I'm particularly worried about the marginalized among us, knowing that we need to be vigilant, knowing we need to stand up for the rights and inclusion of all. The Eliot community at



our August camp was made all too aware of how vigilant we need to be. You were all informed about the incident by email. I remain full of gratitude for the leadership at that camp; the decisions that were made and the actions taken were made with justice and love at the centre. Thanks to the seven Board members, our speaker Alex Kapitan, our Chaplain Rev. Beth Chronister, and our wonderful Deans Karen Wong Duncan (KWD) and Amy Hance-Brancati, whose courage and conviction shone through. Chuck Kraining, Seabeck's Executive Director, was very supportive of our efforts. Thanks again to all of the many Elioteers who took the time to respond to our email about that incident. Many of you articulated your support and a small number had some suggestions which the Board and the Right Relations Team will seriously consider.

I know that he was recognized at July camp, but I want to express my appreciation to Spencer Ehrman, whose experience and persistence served us well as he secured a new insurance company for Eliot Institute after we were dropped by our long-term insurance carrier. He spent many long hours and

sleepless nights dealing with this issue and we are forever in his debt. Without Spencer we would not have had summer camps.

Congratulations to all the Golden Heart and Hand Award folx for summer 2024: Debbie Kaye for July, Lauren Mac Neill for August, and Ken Kersten for Creative Arts. Our camps depend on our volunteers and these three have been exemplary in their service to our Eliot community.

After the January 2025 Board meeting, our wonderful Executive Secretary, Nancy West, will be resigning from her position. The Executive/Personnel Committee will be in discussions with her regarding updating the job description, determining what appropriate hours and compensation will be for this role, and then advertising the position and interviewing candidates. In addition to her regular work, a lot of the tasks that Nancy has taken on are one-time jobs that brought folders, files and operations into our current systems. She has also spent much time on the phone and in emails guiding people like me who are not as techy as others. Nancy has had the patience of a saint and I want to extend a huge THANK YOU to her for her expertise and her dedication to us all.

Kudos to Calyn McLeod, Eliot Registrar, who successfully completed her first full year of camps as solo Registrar! A big thank you to Bev Hesterberg who stayed on as our Bookkeeper; I worried that when she became a Grandma, she might think differently, but we've lucked out. She's still doing our books. Whew!

Thanks to all the many volunteers working hard on committees to keep this organization functioning well. Thanks to Xander Simmons for keeping our finances on track and growing that team. The Fundraising Committee has been busy raising funds; thanks to all that have answered the call.

Seabeck is also fundraising - for a new septic upgrade, one that is so badly needed. I'm wondering if, as a Canadian, I should feel proud that the new septic tanks come from Alberta, Canada. With the idea of connection in mind, I'd feel better if we were the source of Snap Jacket technology being used to fix the bumpy bridge that connects us to the Seabeck campus and to each other.

And finally, I want to warmly welcome Jody Feldman (President-Elect), Jean deVenney (Vice-President Communications & Marketing), McKenna Niemer, and Rory McLeod (Members At-Large). Thanks to all of them for accepting the call to serve this community! They all attended the October Board meeting and fully begin their terms this January 2025.

Lynn Sabourin, Board President

Registrar's report



Hello from your Registrar!

We have space at **ALL** of our upcoming camps. This year's Winter Eliot will be great, for sure. Speaker Elin Kelsey's program is "The Practice of Evidence-Based Hope," a notion I'm looking forward to learning more about in these interesting times. And, it's going to be really lovely to welcome the new year surrounded by our wonderful community!

Next summer might be feeling far away... some of you have become complacent and are waiting to register until closer to camp, since the pandemic dampened attendance and camps haven't been filled to the brim

during the past several years, as they often were before 2020. But if you're intending on coming to camp, don't delay! I'm happy to report that all the summer 2025 camps have more folks signed up than the 2024 camps did at this time last year, and I'd like to remind you that housing is first come, first served - early birds are far more likely to have their requests for the best rooms fulfilled.

To register for camp, go to our website at www.eliotinstitute.org. Click on the Big Blue Button, follow the instructions, and you're on your way!

In other news, I'd like to make sure all of you are aware: the Eliot Board has approved **a change to Creative Arts Eliot registration deadlines**. The last day to register for CAE and to select a workshop is now 2 weeks prior to the start date of camp— for 2025, that's July 26. And, if you've got kids under age 11 who won't be in a workshop, we need them registered at least 6 weeks before camp (June 28, 2025), in order to guarantee they'll have a spot in a children's program. Young children can still be signed up for camp until the 2 week registration deadline, however, we can't guarantee that they will be placed in a children's program, so parents/sponsors will be responsible for looking after them during workshop time. Previously, all of these deadlines were 1 week before CAE.

Why the change? August Eliot is the week preceding Creative Arts Eliot... so, the old deadline meant that your dear registrar was left scrambling to do CAE prep during August camp, when she'd rather be present with the August community instead of spending extra time battling with the Seabeck wifi. And it's not just for me - most of our workshop presenters need to prepare supplies for the folks in their workshop. Being able to give them a final count two weeks in advance instead of one is something they are going to really appreciate. As for the children's program - CAE typically attracts an older crowd, so this camp doesn't always need a children's program. Most kids who come to CAE are 11 years or older—old enough to participate in the workshops. If there won't be any

kids too young to participate in a workshop, it doesn't make sense for the deans to recruit children's staff. If there are young kids, we need to allow time to recruit staff and for those staff to prepare for camp. All that said - please do email me if the 6 week deadline has passed and you'd like to bring little kids; it's possible that some of their peers may have already signed up and thus we may have a children's program in the works that they can join.

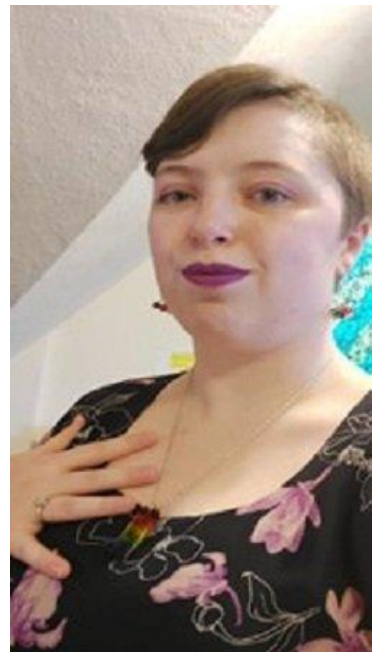
Hope to see you at camp!

Calyn McLeod, Registrar

registrar@eliotinstitute.org; 206-395-8111

Wondering about Eliot's finances??

As your Treasurer, I am proud to report that Eliot's financial's are doing better than initially expected. We are still \$4,000 in the red, which means we're currently at a loss in budget. This is mostly due to unexpected insurance premiums based on our previous provider dropping Eliot as a client, fueled by heightened wildfire risk. Thanks to our wonderful Board President Lynn Sabourin and Spencer Ehrman, Eliot was able to regain insurance in time for our summer camps to occur. Of course, it came at a higher cost than we were previously paying, hence our current financial situation.



One thing I'm focusing on at the moment is working with the Fundraising Committee on where to target Eliot's donations. First and foremost, Eliot's **Operations Fund** is the highest priority. This allows Eliot to operate as an

organization. Money from this Fund covers but is not limited to: paying people like Calyn, our Registrar, Nancy West, our Secretary, and Bev, our Bookkeeper; giving camp staff credit to allow them to come to camp; and ensuring that we can attract and compensate wonderful speakers for all of our camps.

Another focus of mine is refilling our **Scholarship Fund**. Those in need in our community have been using the Fund for its intended purpose: to help them financially get to camp. But that means the coffers must be replenished. Currently the fund has just under \$9,000. I'd like that number to be back up to \$20,000, if possible. It will be a steady process that won't happen overnight. But I know that our community is strong and that we can come together to be the best we can be. I believe in us and I am truly blessed to be your Treasurer.

If you're looking to help with Eliot's financial status, please donate to the Operations Fund and/or Scholarship Fund at <https://eliotinstitute.org/donate>. If you have any questions, reach out to me at ajfsimmons@gmail.com.

Xander Simmons, Treasurer

Highlights from Summer 2024 Camps

July Eliot

What a great camp! The July 2024 dynamic Deans **Spencer Ehrman** and **Terri Schmiesing** collected a superb staff that kept camp running smoothly and joyously all week. A special shout-out to volunteer coordinator **McKenna Niemer** for filling the week's calendar with so much fun stuff and corralling campers to make it all happen!

Speaker **Guy Nelson** offered up a light, joyful, and yet meaningful program that encouraged us to get out of our shells with storytelling, improvisation and creativity. Guy inspired me to tell a very personal story to my small discussion group that I never thought I was going to tell, until I heard it coming out of my own mouth! We look forward to welcoming Guy back as theme speaker for a future Eliot camp.

This was the first July Eliot with our new Registrar, **Calyn McLeod**, who did enormous amounts of work behind the scenes to make sure all the critically important things were in place to make camp run smoothly and seamlessly. Hats off to you, Calyn!

July Eliot was blessed with many young adults in attendance this year. Young adult leads **Ben Weber** and **Reese Schmiesing** ran an engaging program. I had the pleasure to meet with them one evening to answer any questions they had about Eliot and tell them how they can get more involved in their Eliot camp community year-round.



July Eliot's Heart and Hand award this year deservedly went to **Debbie Kaye**, a long-time July Elioteer, who is always smiling, welcoming, and willing to lend a hand: I have always considered Debbie to be a sort of "Camp Mom", which is how I honoured her when I presented the award.

July Eliot continued the COVID-19 safety measures that were put in place after August 2023, with indoor masking required for the first 48 hours. One case of COVID was detected during that time, which resulted in an indoor masking extension of another 48 hours. After that, masks came off. One more case was

detected close to the end of camp. Both campers who tested positive left camp promptly, and we're grateful no larger outbreak occurred. Hooray!

One thing that could be improved on for next year is more heads in beds! If you haven't been to July Eliot, consider coming! If you have been away from July Eliot, please return! Filling up camp—we were 60 below capacity this year—not only makes July Eliot the most fun, but it helps to ensure the financial health of the Eliot Institute itself. This will help to make sure that we can keep coming back to Seabeck year after year. Tell all your friends and help to make July 2025 a year for the ages!

My sincere thank you to all for making July Eliot joyous, fun, and trouble-free!

Gavin Grandish, July Eliot 2024 Board Representative

August Eliot

With its theme of “**Draw the Circle Wider**,” August Eliot delivered to campers an outstanding week of connection, inclusion, music, and sunshine—all the fun we look forward to each year. It also delivered an unprecedented opportunity for us to live our covenant through our response to an anti-transgender protestor seeking to disrupt our community. During the incident on the second day, we saw the attending Board members and camp leadership uphold our pledge with one another to bring our best selves to camp, to honor every person and the identity they present, and to reject the tolerance of intolerance.

Deep gratitude goes to the incredible deans **KWD** (Karen Wong Duncan) and **Amy Hance-Brancati**, Board members **Camille Killorin**, **Carla Mandy**, **Lauren Mac Neill**, **Linda Hardison**, **Lynn Sabourin**, **Rick Duncan**, and **Xander Simmons**, along with speaker **Alex Kapitan**, chaplain **Beth Chronister**, and Seabeck

director **Chuck Kraining** for being the people needed in the moment and for being fully present in their response.

Because of this experience, our speaker **Alex Kapitan's** (ze/per) message resonated deeply, helping us focus our hearts and minds even more on the joy and the authenticity that comes when we practice care and loving kindness.



Alex's program "Exploring Sexuality, Gender, and Faith" challenged us to 'Bust Binaries', practice pronouns, center our connections. Ze showed us how radical welcome—drawing the circle wider—is the practice of Unitarian Universalism no matter our gender identity or expression.

The week sparkled with joy and music, glitter and aha! moments. There were Pride flags on the Inn porch railing, tie dye galore, dances on the tennis courts and the Pavillion, and a Pride parade. One night of the Moonstruck coffeehouse was held in the amphitheater to positive reviews, and youth hosted their annual coffeehouse in new Pines. Polar bears and afternoon swimmers delighted in the warm weather and the new splinter-free swim dock. An evening Peace concert and worship service followed by singing on the bridge and the MAGs launching of peace boats honored the memory of Hiroshima Day.

The one thing that August Eliot didn't have??? Covid!! Kudos to our Health & Safety Team for clear guidelines to keep all campers healthy, and a big huzzah for everyone's concern for one another's wellbeing. When we take care of one another, we all thrive!

Linda Hardison, August Eliot 2024 Board Representative

Creative Arts Eliot

I was lucky enough to serve as Board Rep to TWO Eliot summer camps: July, and Creative Arts (my first!) It was wonderful to see so many familiar faces from other Eliots I attend, and of course to meet and make many new friends.

Deans **McKenna Niemer** and **Paul David** expertly assembled a keen and hard-working staff who kept camp activities running smoothly. A particular thank you goes to volunteer coordinator Marilyn Mays for bringing so many people together to round out the camp's activities.

The eight workshop leaders **Bryan Willis, Corey Pressman, Drew Betz, Elizabeth Higgins, Francisco Ruiz, Lynn Ungar, Margo Benedetto, and Shannon Wells-Moran** nurtured our creative spirits from the literary to the visual to the performative. How joyous and enriching it all was! And a special thank you to Extravaganza coordinator **Barbara ten Hove** for bringing everyone's creations together.



At the All-Camp Info Meeting, Seabeck Conference Center executive director **Chuck Kraining** spoke of the double financial whammy to hit SCC this year: 1) an imminent need of an overhaul to the septic system, and 2) having Seabeck's tax-free status revoked and a bill received from the state for several years of back taxes owed. Ouch! Always the eternal optimist, Chuck just keeps plowing ahead, facing any challenge that comes his way, and always seeming to pull through at the end. Go get 'em Chuck!

Shout-out to Eliot Secretary **Nancy West** for taking on the role of in-camp registrar, allowing registrar **Calyn McLeod** to enjoy camp as a camper and focus her energy on her creative outputs.

If you have not yet experienced Creative Arts Eliot, you really should! It combines the smaller, more intimate and chill atmosphere of Winter Eliot with the outdoor fun of a summer Eliot camp. Give it a try for 2025 and let your creative juices flow!

Gavin Grandish, Creative Arts Eliot 2024 Board Representative



Winter Eliot 2024: Rooted in Connection, Joy, and Hope!

Get ready for an unforgettable Winter Eliot this year! Our theme speaker **Elin Kelsey** will lead an inspiring program focused on fostering hope and resilience to co-create a culture of climate justice.

Our dedicated deans, **Janelle Durham & May Killorin**, along with their amazing staff and volunteers, have been working tirelessly to ensure that all the Winter Eliot traditions you love are better than ever. Expect a week filled with laughter, learning, and community. Don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity to connect, reflect, and grow. [Register](#) NOW and be part of the magic!

Rick Duncan, Winter Eliot 2024-25 Board Representative

Fundraising Committee connects us to our future

At this year's August Eliot camp, 20 or so young adults invited two members of the Fundraising committee to their meeting. Their questions came fast. How does Eliot finance itself? Where do registration fees go? Do we have any reserves? Here are some of our future leaders, we realized. Socially they are tightly connected, the young adults explained, smiles going around the circle. When asked to write down their thoughts, many did so. Here are their words:

"Every year, Eliot is a reset for me. A reset of my spirituality, peace of mind, willingness, happiness, and morals. All of these are subject to change and evolution, and being able to return here and share what I've learned and learn from others is grounding. Especially in a community of friends, family, and newcomers with open minds and a strive for joyful reconnection."



"I value Eliot because it gives me a space to say and be who I aspire to be. It allows me to return to a familiar place, where I feel safe, and share the changes in my life, and learn how I can grow. Eliot is so important for my growth and learning, and I believe it could be just as important to so many more."

"Eliot is everything to me. The love and friendships found in this space are so important to me every single year. I will bring my kids here, just as my dad did for me, and watch the generational bonds repeat

themselves with my friends' kids as well. Eliot is a one in a lifetime family that I hope to hold for the rest of my life."

Not-so-young adults: please consider these bright-eyed testimonials when you donate to Eliot. Your contributions — \$160,000 since 2010, mostly in the past five years (with \$23,232 in 2024 alone) — help ensure that one day these young people will lead camps that have generous scholarships, innovative programming, and a secure financial future. Click [here](#) to donate. Thank you!!



Gordon Campbell, Fundraising Committee Chair

Committee Updates

Leadership Development

The Leadership Development Committee (LDC) has finished up the *Sharing Your Skills with Eliot* survey. A big thanks goes out to Xander Simmons and Calyn for seeing this through; it's great to have that updated! We are continuing to work on 'Deaning-Up' camps –our 2025 lineup is all set and looking great!

While it may feel early, do mark down **Saturday, April 5, 2025** in your calendar - the LDC will host the 3rd annual (we can say that now) **Leadership Retreat** for staff for all camps. This will be a session from 9a - 12p via Zoom that will allow for an exchange of ideas and thoughts among staff across all camps.

This is not restricted to staff only, however. Leads (Deans, Children's Program Director, Youth Lead, YA Lead, First Aid Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, Small Group Coordinator, Tie Dye Coordinator) will certainly find this time useful. The past two retreats were well attended and well received as a means to really get thinking on Eliot and how your counterparts are planning.

The first half will focus on any changes/updates or items from the Board and/or specific committees. There will be breakout sessions in the latter half of the morning that will be more focused on individual roles at camp.

Keep an eye out for more details as we get closer to the date. As always, for more info, you can reach out to any of our committee members: Ken Kersten, Debbie Kaye, Lynn Sabourin, McKenna Niemeyer, Xander Simmons or myself.

Duke Sabourin, on behalf of the LDC

Health & Safety

Our committee reviewed current guidelines from the CDC and Washington Department of Health, and also reflected on past Eliot camps to determine the infection reduction policies for our summer camps. COVID testing prior to camp and masking for the first 48 hours were required. At July, we did have a couple folks who tested positive at camp, and went home. No other positive tests were reported at camp. August and CAE were COVID free.

We'll continue these requirements for Winter Eliot. We know that masking requirements are becoming less common and may feel onerous. However, we do have elders and people who are especially vulnerable to a variety of illnesses, and reducing their risk is in alignment with the Eliot covenant, which commits us to creating a safe and supportive environment for all.

Janelle Durham, Board liaison

Children's

This committee reviewed our policies for programming and staffing for children under age 3. We clarified that Eliot would provide a designated area for children under 3 with playthings, books, and activities and at least 2 staff, more if needed to keep the ratio of 1 adult to 3 little ones. If a child becomes distressed, the parent or guardian would be asked to take over care of the child. At both July and August, we had a robust program for our little ones, and both went well. Staff expressed delight at spending time with children, and parents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have some child-free time at camp, knowing their children were lovingly cared for.

Janelle Durham, Board liaison

Nominating

Your nominating committee is off to a roaring start with at least two Eliot community members who have already indicated their willingness to step forward to serve. The committee has had two meetings, and we're feeling good about the outlook. Each camp conducts a survey of interested individuals that is given to the Nominating Committee to help us find our next board members. Are you interested in contributing your time and passion for Eliot as a board member or member of one of our different committees? Please let us know!

Your Nominating Committee: **Suzanne Reynolds, Gavin Grandish, Nancy Stevens, & Josh Stull**

Registration & Evaluations

This committee has three responsibilities:

(1) Reviewing the results of camp evaluations and sending feedback to the board, committees, and camp staff in order to continuously improve the camp experience. Thank you to everyone for filling out your evaluations! Your input helps us make meaningful changes.

(2) Reviewing scholarship applications. If you, or someone you know, would benefit from a scholarship, we encourage all to [apply](#). If you are able to contribute to the Scholarship Fund, please do!

(3) Supporting the Eliot staff with registration policies and practices. This year, the board has approved changes to the registration deadlines for future Creative Arts Eliot. See Calyn's report for details.

Janelle Durham, Board liaison

Communications & Marketing

It can sometimes be difficult to put into words how awesome our camps are. That's why our committee has made a [short video](#) to help explain what Eliot Institute is about. The video, along with handouts and talking points, are materials that Eliot Ambassadors can share with their congregations and friends to invite new folks to camp.

Want to become an Ambassador? Reach out to any of our committee members—**Calyn McLeod, Janelle Durham, Jean De Venney, Xander Simmons**, or myself at bellaroost@gmail.com.

Linda Hardison, C & M Committee Chair

Creative Arts Eliot

The Creative Arts Eliot (CAE) Committee has a unique role to play in the life of our Eliot camps. Unlike the “traditional” Eliots, CAE brings in up to ten presenters who spend four days with campers teaching a variety of creative arts from memoir writing to acrylic painting, poetry to circle singing, watercolor journaling to fabric arts.

The CAE committee is responsible for recruiting artists from around the region (and occasionally from further afield) to come to our camp. We look for people who are not only talented and experienced artists and teachers but who will also fit into the Eliot culture. Teaching art at a camp is a unique experience!

We work closely with Calyn, the Eliot registrar, as it falls on us (with support from her!) to determine where the workshops will take place, how many participants can be in each, and if / when we might need to cancel a workshop.

We also choose a member of our committee to serve on the CAE staff each year. While the position has changed slightly over time, the primary responsibilities of this position are to liaise with the presenters and, once camp has started, to help make sure everything goes smoothly with the workshops and that our end of camp “Extravaganza” is planned and executed well.

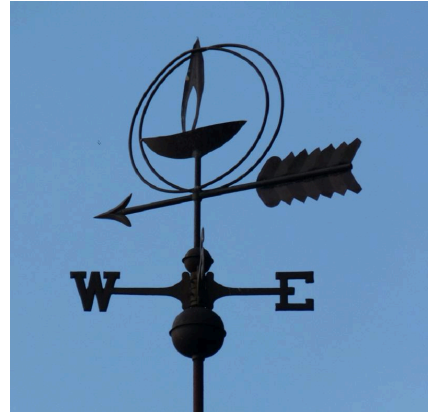
We are currently completing selection for presenters for 2025. Are you keen to do something creative next summer? The earlier you register the higher your priority and the better your chances for getting your first choice of workshop.

Our committee members include Rosemary Dougall, Drew Betz, Liz Goodger, Marilyn Mays, Carla Mandy (board rep) and Barbara ten Hove (Chair). We are deeply grateful to Joan Sandberg who is leaving our committee after many years of service. If you are interested in serving on the CAE committee, please email me at revbabs10@gmail.com.

Barbara Wells ten Hove, CAE Committee Chair

Governance

This committee is reviewing job descriptions for all Eliot staff. This helps to ensure the expectations for each role are clearly communicated, reflect current practices and resources, and offer consistent protocols across camps while also allowing for the diverse traditions of each of our camps.



Janelle Durham, Board liaison

Finance

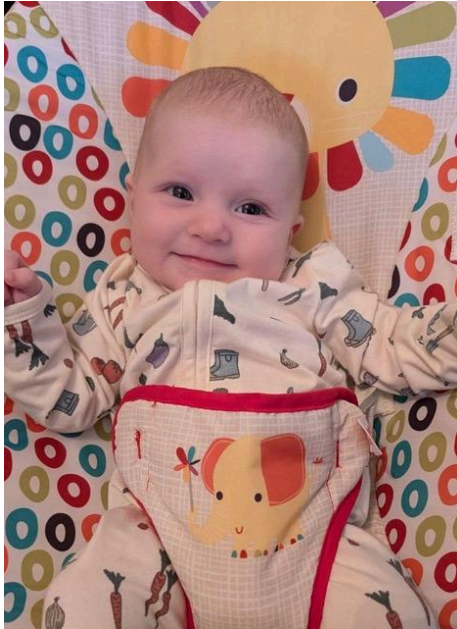
As Treasurer, I am pleased to announce that the Finance Committee has met for the first time in a long while and that we have new members to bolster our work. Currently, we are handling decisions regarding Eliot Institute's financial matters like taking a critical look at the current benefit of the UUCEF fund. We are always looking for new members! As it stands now, the Committee meets once monthly. Contact me at ajfsimmons@gmail.com if you're interested in joining Eliot's Finance Committee.

Xander Simmons, Finance Committee Chair

Eliot's Eagle Eye

Your community news update!

Meet the newest hatchlings of the Eliot community!



Alex & Rex Cassidy welcomed their first child, **Soleil**, on **August 7, 2024**. All are doing well in Chicago! **Kay Crider** and **Patrick Phillips** are proud grandparents.

Babiha was born **March 27th** to July Elioteers **Rob Kaye** and **Divneet Kaur**. Babiha won the “Most Chill Baby” award for the costume contest at Eliot.



Earlier this year, **Karla and Nathan Hesterberg** welcomed the incredible **Ingrid** to their Newburyport, MA nest. **Bev and Tim Hesterberg** are delighted to be the grandparents of this delightful little girl.



More good news: a wedding!



July 6, Adam Hesterberg and Jackie Bredenberg were married in Boston. Jackie and Adam have been together a long time, and it was wonderful to celebrate their love with family and friends from all over the country.

And finally, a bittersweet message

I only attended one camp - after my brother Jim Bushnell had his fatal crash while racing. He certainly loved Eliot and felt very welcomed. A few weeks ago, his husband, Ray Gruenewald, was no longer able to live in their home and he was moved into a memory care facility. If anyone from Eliot would like to contact him, he would appreciate it - he is feeling very isolated and unsettled. His Alzheimer's disease is progressing and his memories are a bit faulty. Ray is at the Empress Senior Living at 4020 NE 55th St., Seattle, WA 98105 with phone number 206-644-1013. He still has his own personal phone number: 206-605-1148.

Much Love, **Jeanette Bushnell**