Interim UM president reflects on busy start

By Janese Silvey

Columbia Daily Tribune Sunday, July 10, 2011

Six months after he took the reins of the University of Missouri System, Steve Owens can breathe a little easier.

When he became UM interim president Jan. 7, he had a laundry list of tasks: Balance a budget with fewer state dollars; navigate a new process to increase tuition; increase salaries this coming year; alter a decades-old pension system to make it more viable in the coming years.

Check. Check. Check. And check.

"I feel good about what the leadership team has done," Owens said Tuesday, the eve of his six-month anniversary. "We've done what we said we would do. We've been good stewards."

It has been abnormally busy around University Hall since he stepped in after Gary Forsee resigned. On Owens' watch, the Board of Curators got three new members, increased tuition and fees by an average of 5.5 percent — the first increase in three years — and agreed to change a decades-old retirement package for future employees. Owens and company also were able to cushion not only an expected 7 percent cut in state funds but also an unexpected eleventh-hour state withholding, without affecting students or employees. And he helped draft a budget that increases the merit-based salary pool by 2 percent, paving the way for pay raises this fall.

"The interim president has presided during an extremely busy time," said Warren Erdman, chairman of the Board of Curators. "He's done a wonderful job."

There have been unexpected challenges along the way, too. In April, Owens and MU leaders found themselves temporarily in the hot seat when word got out that they were planning to hire Frank Haith as head men's basketball coach. Most critics ultimately got behind the hire but not before making preliminary opposition widely known.

Then in May, a mini-drama unfolded when edited videos of a labor studies course circulated online showing two instructors from the Kansas City and St. Louis campuses apparently advocating for violence.

The campuses later determined the videos were taken out of context but not before Owens and company got an earful from those concerned about the lessons and others worried about protecting academic freedom. The frustrating part was fielding those calls before the investigation was finalized, Owens said, calling it a "weeklong emergency."
And, in the middle of that saga, a more pressing emergency unfolded on the Missouri University of Science and Technology campus when a gunman ran through an academic building. University leaders later learned Cody Willcoxon’s brief stop on campus was a coincidence, but a four-hour lockdown had administrators temporarily on edge. “We’ve faced some unique things,” Owens said, citing those three examples as abnormal situations.

An attorney by trade, Owens isn’t the type of guy to lose his head over crisis situations. If anything, he’s known as being overly cautious — not a bad trait to have, if you ask him. Communication has to be accurate, he said. And that’s accomplished “not by more words but by more precise words.”

Having the cautious attorney at the helm has improved the search for a permanent president, Erdman said. “He has taken off the pressure that would otherwise be on us to speed through the search, and that is very helpful toward having a thorough and broad search.”

While curators are looking for the right person to fill the presidential role, Owens continues to say he’s not that person.

“It’s not that this job is undesirable,” he said. “I’m loving this job. It’s interesting and stimulating and rewarding and fun. It’s a personal preference. I like practicing law. And I think I’ll be a better lawyer having been a client now.”

Owens insists he’ll be fine slipping back to the behind-the-scenes general counsel job that requires him to give advice about legal matters but not policy issues. He’ll be especially careful about not crossing that line when a new president comes on board, he said.

Owens does have a couple of suggestions in advance, though. “Keep your sense of humor,” he’ll tell the next UM president. “I think you can get distracted by the complexity of the issues or the incredible number of constituents involved.” And when making decisions, he said, “keep it simple, straightforward and merit-based.”
Mizzou New Music Summer Festival brings dynamic debuts, dialogue

By Aarik Danielsen
Columbia Daily Tribune Sunday, July 10, 2011

Patrick David Clark is back where it all began.

As a 20-year-old undergraduate at the University of Missouri, Clark heard a Bach fugue tunefully played with violin and bow. Right then and there, his trajectory was set. He heard music for all it was and could be, not merely as entertainment but a medium capable of reflecting “everything that humankind is.”

“You’re looking at human potential, human tragedy, the entire gamut of emotions, and, perhaps, all of these things translate into the divine,” Clark remembers thinking. “Why would anybody spend their time and their life with anything else — other than, potentially, working with the language of the divine?”

Now 43, he has spent his life conversing in that otherworldly vernacular, writing works of depth and beauty. This week, Clark takes another step forward as one of eight composers — selected from an international pool of more than 100 — to have works premiered by cutting-edge ensemble Alarm Will Sound at the Mizzou New Music Summer Festival.

In its second year, the festival gives eight resident composers, as they’re called, a chance to interact with two highly successful figures of the form — august Pulitzer Prize-winning legend Roger Reynolds and inventive Anna Clyne, who, barely into her 30s, has had music programmed by Martin Scorsese and Björk. The week culminates in a Saturday concert featuring the world premieres and treating audiences to a taste of the present and future of music.

Clark earned a degree in composition at MU before receiving advanced degrees at the University of Arizona and Rice University. He has worked in a variety of contexts — as a composer, teacher and writer for an online classical music digest — and had pieces programmed by symphonies and ensembles from the United States to Israel. Returning to MU to study orchestral conducting at the graduate level, he hopes to add visceral, versatile dimensions to his artistry, something of a seamlessness to his pursuits.

This concentration has not, however, equaled less attention on composing — Clark was named the 2011 Sinquefield Prize winner, a competition open to MU students. Clark casts himself as one who uses the rhetoric of musical tradition to create ironies, employing sonic elements with conventional associations in unconventional ways. As a result, “some people hear my music as very conservative; other people hear my music as experimental,” he said.
“Ptolemy’s Carousel,” to be debuted Saturday by Alarm Will Sound, is a “mystical rotation of harmonies,” a quiet but latently powerful piece, Clark said. He compared the work, in one sense, to the processes that shape a canyon. In the composition, he slowly erodes the simplest triads so intricacies are formed with each rotation, much as water weathers rock. The piece has yet to be heard, but Clark’s process is one thoughtful listeners already can recognize.

“Pat has a unique ability to present a melody or rhythmic figure in all its glory and then successfully manipulate it at his will to take the listener through a tapestry and maze of the figure in forms so different from its original — and yet so impeccably related to its original form — that when it is re-presented, there is a seamless, subconscious connection for the listener between these musical passageways that leaves them utterly satisfied and curious in the same moment,” fellow MU graduate student and composer Grant Fonda said in an email.

Clark is excited to hear elements of his work revealed in the hands of Alarm Will Sound, considered one of the great, dynamic ensembles in today’s art music world. “A lot of the piece is unfinished in a sense,” he said. “I’m going to find out things about the piece that I don’t know.” Having such a renowned ensemble play his piece is “really like access to the world through a festival in Columbia,” he said. The performance also will allow Clark’s work to be articulated by an ensemble that, in a real sense, speaks his language.

The festival will afford such dialogue on a variety of levels. Reynolds is a firm believer in composers creating within a responsive community. Composition students at the University of California-San Diego, where he teaches, participate in a rigorous and interactive jury process where performance and conversation about their works is opened not only to fellow students but members of the community as well.

“This kind of unfettered, direct, honest feedback is something that is very, very precious and frequently doesn’t happen even in an educational institutions but certainly does not happen once you leave the educational context,” he said this week in a phone interview.

In providing feedback and fostering discussion, Reynolds hopes to engage issues most germane to each composer. He has definite opinions about the contemporary music landscape and is supremely qualified to discuss how his own work has shifted over time but wants to make his remarks “malleable” and hopes these emerging composers feel liberty to speak frankly and ask questions that expose vulnerabilities.

“People, in a certain sense, shadowbox and don’t really dig in to the things that are of concern to them at the moment,” he said. “I will try to make it clear that I am willing to go anywhere and the question then is, ‘Where do they want to go?’ ”

Look for more reflections from Reynolds, Clyne and two resident composers with Missouri connections in a series of posts this week on the Art Axis blog at www.columbiatribune.com.

**MIZZOU NEW MUSIC SUMMER FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS**

“Another World’s Rapture Remix: An Electroacoustic Chamber Recital” 8 p.m. Tuesday at Whitmore Recital Hall on the MU campus. Alarm Will Sound performs works by Roger Reynolds, Anna Clyne, Mario Davidovsky, Matt Marks and more.
“Seasons” with Alarm Will Sound and Susan Narucki 7 p.m. Thursday at Missouri Theatre Center for the Arts. Narucki, a Grammy-winning soprano, joins AWS to premiere Reynolds’ “Seasons: Cycle 2” and perform Clyne’s “Blush,” John Adams’ “Chamber Symphony” and works by ensemble members Payton McDonald and Matt Marks.

“Mizzou’s Right to Bear New Music” 7 p.m. Friday at the Missouri Theatre. MU faculty and students present works by Reynolds and Clyne as well as pieces by MU faculty Stefan Freund and Thomas McKenney and MU students Patrick David Clark and Dan Cox.

“Eight World Premieres” with Alarm Will Sound 7 p.m. Saturday at the Missouri Theatre. AWS performs premiere works by this year’s resident composers: Kari Besharse, David Biedenbender, Clark, Michael-Thomas Fournai, Yotam Haber, Clint Needham, Steven Snowden and Liza White.

Tickets: Each featured concert is $10 for adults, $5 for students.

Adult passes for all four concerts are $35; $20 for students. A variety of rehearsals, presentations and performances also are free and open to the public. For a complete schedule, visit http://newmusicsummerfestival.missouri.edu/schedule.html.
A new song rising at MU

By Aarik Danielsen

Columbia Daily Tribune Sunday, July 10, 2011

A few years ago, while visiting my parents, I rifled through some early attempts at conveying meaning through the written word. I felt an odd mixture of chagrin and nostalgia as I studied short stories, essays and the like.

I cringed most frequently when reading through a collection of ham-fisted verse that a junior high version of myself hoped to shape into rock 'n' roll songs. With not-so-pleasant memories flooding back, I recalled one particular day when I felt an incredible surge of satisfaction at having composed the best melody of my young life, only to discover I had “written” Billy Joel’s “Only the Good Die Young.”

Thankfully, my songwriting improved over the years — I even played a very small southwest Missouri coffeehouse circuit during college, plying my folk-rock wares. Alas, one of the reasons you are reading this column today is that, at some point along the road to singing stardom, I realized I was much better at writing about music than writing music.

This trip through my memories explains why I have such great respect for what is vibrating and resonating from the University of Missouri School of Music. As the last strains of Hot Summer Nights fade into this hazy summer morning — the concert series concluded last night with a Missouri Symphony Orchestra showcase — the sounds of summer have not ceased to chime through Columbia but are merely beginning.

Tomorrow through Saturday night, the second annual Mizzou New Music Summer Festival will bear witness to a truth I learned the hard way: Few things are more difficult or satisfying than creating dynamic new sounds where once there was only silence.

The festival gathers a wealth of talent from around the globe for a week of concerts, clinics and premieres. Eight emerging composers — including MU graduate student Patrick David Clark, profiled on Page 3C — will subject their ambitions and approaches to established tunesmiths, receiving guidance and critique from Roger Reynolds, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and Anna Clyne, an innovator whose works have been employed by Björk and Martin Scorsese.

Each resident composer will have works debuted in a culminating Saturday concert, their relevant new expressions articulated by cutting-edge ensemble Alarm Will Sound, which features MU professor — and
renowned composer — Stefan Freund on cello. Just a cursory read of each up-and-comer’s biography promises a week filled with incredibly brilliant and thoughtful readings. Resident composers have worked in jazz, rock, electroacoustic, chamber and symphonic music and affixed their works to film, dance and theater productions. They draw inspiration from sources such as natural processes, Asian visual art, classical and contemporary literature.

The festival is one facet of a renewed emphasis on composition in Columbia. As detailed in past Tribune articles, philanthropists Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield have contributed sizable sums to bring this pursuit to the fore. Their brainchild, the New Music Initiative, encompasses this week’s festival, a composition prize for one MU student each year, scholarships for composition majors, a New Music Ensemble and the long-running Creating Original Music Project, a competition for burgeoning composers in grades K-12. In a January 2010 article, Jeanne Sinquefield cast a creative vision that would someday see Columbia rival the musical centers of Europe in centuries past.

“If you go back to when Beethoven was writing music in Austria, there was a whole community where composers got paid to write new pieces, you had orchestras play the music and had audiences,” she said. “What we’re trying to do is grow up the composers.”

While the Mizzou New Music Summer Festival is among the incredible fruit born from the Sinquefields’ labor, the continued cultivating by members of MU faculty also has led to an incredible harvest. Praising professors such as Thomas McKenney, Neil Minturn, Robert Shay and Freund, graduate student, composer and one-time Niche subject Grant Fonda called the festival “one grand seasonal extension of what happens on a daily basis on the grounds of the MU School of Music” in a recent email.

“Whether it be McKenney and Freund’s experience and national renown as composers, Minturn’s fresh approach to modern compositional and theoretical techniques, Shay’s endorsement of new composers through collaboration with the Sinquefield family, or the presence of the New Music Ensemble, there is no question in my mind that the school “is currently — and will continue to be — one of the best places in the nation to study, and emerge, as a modern composer,” he added.

For more on the Mizzou New Music Summer Festival, read Clark’s profile inside today’s section and look for a series of Art Axis blog posts on his colleagues this week at www.columbiatribune.com. For more on the fine work MU composers are doing, visit music.missouri.edu or simply place your ear to the Fine Arts Building. At the rate student composers are churning out brilliant new works, one is no doubt being birthed presently.
Court reinstates MU med school lawsuit

By Janese Silvey

Columbia Daily Tribune Friday, July 8, 2011

A lawsuit accusing the University of Missouri School of Medicine of illegally dispensing pharmaceutical drugs and firing an alleged whistleblower is moving forward in Boone County Circuit Court, albeit slowly.

Mary Joy Ellen Stafford’s case against the UM Board of Curators was dismissed in May for failure to prosecute. Court officials, however, apparently forgot to notify Stafford’s attorney, Kevin Graham, who is based in Liberty.

“The court didn’t send us notice of that,” Graham said, adding that he has been able to get the case reinstated. It’s back on the docket until Nov. 15, after which it could be dismissed again if no further action is taken.

Graham said he is waiting for records he subpoenaed that “we consider to be fairly important to the case.” He would not specify what those records are.

Stafford, of Jefferson City, worked as an office assistant in the School of Medicine’s pediatric neurology department. In May 2008, she notified the university’s human resources department that another assistant possessed a pad of blank prescription drug forms pre-signed by a physician, according to the lawsuit. The assistant, the suit claims, would then fill in a patient’s name and drug to prescribe medication without the physician’s review.

When the university failed to take action, Stafford filed a complaint with the state’s Department of Health and Human Services, which — according to the lawsuit — investigated and found the office to be in violation of prescription drug dispensing laws. Department spokesman Kit Wagar last year acknowledged the investigation but said terms of a settlement agreement prevented him from saying what those violations, if any, were.

University Hospital rules prohibit blank prescription forms to be pre-signed, spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said.

After the state investigation, Stafford was fired in July 2008, the lawsuit says. She then filed a petition to the Missouri Commission on Human Rights seeking the right to sue over an unrelated sexual discrimination charge she lodged against a male physician.

The university hired her back, this time as a temporary worker in MU’s photojournalism department.
As soon as the human rights commission finished its investigation of the discrimination charge, the suit says, that department essentially terminated her by making her position permanent and not hiring her to fill it.

Stafford, 58, is charging wrongful termination and asking a judge to require the university to rehire her or pay her salary, plus benefits, until she reaches retirement age.
Yanli Yang practices swimming under the instruction of Jing Han. She has tried to learn swimming several times before but failed. "She still needs to conquer the fear of water." said Jing.  | QIAN
BY YUE XI

COLUMBIA—On July 2 in Branson, Meng Fanjun and his wife Zhang Chunyang told friends they were going for a swim.

They never returned.

**The couple, both researchers from the MU School of Medicine, were found drowned in a hotel pool shortly after midnight.**

EMTs tried CPR to revive the couple but were unsuccessful. Police said there were no signs of foul play or intoxication.

The couple's ability to swim, however, remains a question.
The accident brings to light a potential safety issue involving international students and families who come from areas with inadequate water safety education and have few opportunities for swim lessons.

Last June, a man from the Democratic Republic of Congo drowned at Stephens Lake. The year before, Chinese doctoral student, Wei Yirui, almost died after she was found at the bottom of the swimming pool at Tara Apartments. Police said at the time that Wei had just learned to swim. Lesa Beamer, Wei’s thesis adviser in the biochemistry department, said she talked to several dozen international students while visiting Wei in the hospital and found that most did not know how to swim.

“I was really surprised,” Beamer said. “In the place I grew up, almost all kids know how to swim. You just assumed all people know that.”

Last month, a Canadian study found that newcomers to the country, especially those who had arrived within the past five years, are at higher risk for drowning when boating and swimming.

Immigrants to Canada are over four times more likely to be unable to swim than those born in Canada, according to the report released by Lifesaving Society, a nonprofit organization that trains swimmers to be lifeguards. Similarly in the U.S., a study published in American Journal of Public Health in 2006, found foreign-born males had an increased risk for drowning compared with American-born males. As of fall 2010, nearly 1,700 international students were studying at MU. The city has a foreign-born population of more than 7,000, according to 2005-2009 American Community Survey released by U.S. Census Bureau.

After Wei’s accident, Beamer said she was saddened when she read Internet comments critical of the student’s swimming skills.

“Many of them were saying how stupid you could be when you don’t know how to swim. But that is not the fact,” Beamer said. “People just don’t understand how this happened. In many other countries there are few opportunities to learn to swim.”

In China, for example, few schools can afford swimming pools. Public swimming pools are also scarce, even in big cities.
The lack of safe swimming facilities and water safety education for both parents and children has led to high rate of water-related deaths in the last decade. More than 30,000 children from age 0 to 14 drowned each year from 2000-2005, according to official Chinese statistics.

Parents are also reluctant to allow their children to learn to swim.

Research conducted in 2007 in Chengdu, a city with a population larger than Los Angeles, found only one-fifth of elementary and middle-school students could swim, while more than half had never jumped into water.

David Currey, assistant director of MU’s International Center, declined to comment about the possibility of providing water safety education during student orientation.

“All I can say is the university, in response, will do everything it can to continue trying to provide health and safety information that will meet the needs of international students,” Currey said.

Beamer said it might be helpful to make international students aware of the drowning incidents.

“Sometimes you don’t think about it when you see a nice swimming pool. You just want to have fun and jump in, and it actually can be dangerous,” she said.

On Friday afternoon, Han Jing, a former professional swimmer and a graduate student at MU, was helping two of her friends learn to swim at MizzouRec.

“I feel it is more difficult to teach adults than children,” Han said. “They are heavier, and they get too nervous.”

Han was trying to calm her friends, allowing them to hold her hands while using their legs to kick.

“Take a deep breath and relax,” she told them.

Yanli Yang, who was wearing a flotation belt, was finally able to make progress after choking some water. She did not learn to swim as a child, Yanli said, because her mother was worried about her safety.

"As I grow up, I’m getting even more scared of water," Yanli said.
Two years after her near-drowning accident, Wei is recovering quite well, Beamer said.

"She has come back here, and she seems quite determined," she said. "Wei survived, but this couple sadly did not. It is a tragedy."
Mitigating factors for domestic violence

Published: July 8, 2011 at 11:46 PM

COLUMBIA, Mo., July 8 (UPI) -- Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to become abusive adults but there are ways to foster resilience, U.S. researchers say.

Kim Anderson, associate professor at the University of Missouri School of Social Work, found women are less likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder if they are more resilient, or better able to overcome adversity.

Anderson also found mothers who were employed full time had a positive influence on their children's recovery from witnessing domestic violence.

"Mothers who work full time, even in adverse situations, create economic stability and model a strong work ethic, independence and competence," Anderson said in a statement. "This shows the importance of the bond between mothers and children and the importance of positive adult role models in the lives of children who have experienced abuse."

In addition, children of mothers who had mental health problems were more likely than others to develop PTSD later in life, as were children who witnessed the arrest of family members during violent incidents, Anderson said.

"The mental health status of mothers affects how they recover from abuse and their parenting style," Anderson says. "Children whose mothers do not experience mental health problems are less likely to have mental health problems of their own."

The finding are published in the journal Child & Family Social Work.
Restored by tai chi: Meditative martial art strengthens transplant patients' bodies, minds

By Tom Charlier Posted July 11, 2011 at midnight

The organ-transplant patients show up early for this appointment, lining up in front of Richard Link as he starts the session with a soothing, authoritative voice that makes him sound more like a doctor than a man who is on his fourth kidney himself.

"They almost never miss," Richard Link says of the transplant patients who participate in his twice-weekly tai chi class at Methodist University Hospital.

"Let's start with a deep breath," Link tells the half-dozen middle-age and elderly men and women gathered in the lobby of a building on the campus of Methodist University Hospital.

"Now, a little back stretch, like a cat when it gets up in the morning."

It's early evening, and the relaxing strains of music indicate that Link, 66, is launching into another of his twice-weekly classes in tai chi, the Chinese martial arts form employing fluid motions, gentle exercise and stretching.

If tai chi conjures up images of large group fitness sessions, in Link's class it's strictly therapeutic.

Knowing firsthand the burdens facing people who either have received or are about to get organ transplants, Link has become increasingly devoted to teaching them the meditative martial arts form.

Tai chi, he says, restores muscle strength and aerobic endurance, improves balance and flexibility, reduces stress and pain and enhances circulation and sleeping.

"It's the perfect exercise for pre- and post-transplant patients," Link says. "It's gentle, it's easy, everyone can do it."

For the past year, the retired Air Force jet aircraft mechanic has been giving free classes for transplant patients and their caregivers and speaking at support meetings for patients.
The campus of Methodist, one of the top 12 transplant centers in the nation, is an obvious location for Link's classes. In partnership with the University of Tennessee, the hospital has performed 2,000 kidney and 1,000 liver transplants, as well as 100 pancreas and 270 kidney-pancreas operations over the past three decades.

The hospital provides Link space for his classes and lets him leave brochures at the transplant clinic.

"It's not that we endorse one thing or another. We think that anything that stimulates physical activity is very important," said Dr. Luis Campos, surgical director of the kidney-transplant program at Methodist.

Link's focus is organ-transplant patients, but if recent research is any guide, the benefits of tai chi are much more broad-ranging.

_in studies published just this year, researchers from Harvard and a Boston hospital reported that tai chi workouts improved the mood and confidence of people with chronic heart failure, while another scientist at the University of Missouri found that tai chi helped cancer patients overcome the cognitive problems associated with chemotherapy._

Other studies indicate tai chi can significantly reduce falls among elderly people.

"There's a growing but imperfect amount of evidence for a number of types of rehabilitation" that can benefit from tai chi, said Dr. Peter Wayne, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and director of tai chi and mind-body research there.

The reason, Wayne said, is the relaxation and concentration involved."Tai chi is considered a mind-body exercise," he said.

That tai chi offers a variety of benefits shouldn't come as a surprise. As far back as 1947, one of the best-known grand masters of the martial art form, Cheng Man-Ching, wrote about how it "strengthens the weak, raises the sick, invigorates the debilitated and encourages the timid."

Link, a native of upstate New York who has been living in Memphis for two decades, knows all too well how weak and sick transplant patients can feel.

Possibly as a result of a childhood strep infection, he suffered from a condition called acute glomerulonephritis, in which scar tissue clogged the filtering capacity of his kidneys, shutting them down.

In 1981, both of his kidneys were removed, and he received a transplant organ donated by his brother. That kidney lasted until 2000, when he received another transplant, this time from a cadaver.

_Story continues…_
Sensory-sensitive movie series returns to wow kids

By Janese Silvey

Columbia Daily Tribune Sunday, July 10, 2011

Three-year-old Amelia Maltsbarger was noticeably eager to get inside the movie theater, where “Cars 2” would be playing shortly.

“Excited!” she proclaimed at one point after running a ways and back through the hall.

As well she should have been. It would be the first time little Amelia has been able to go to a movie. Diagnosed with special needs that make her sensitive to loud noises and flashy effects, seeing films on the big screen wasn’t an option before yesterday. “I never would have taken her to a movie,” said her mom, Becky. “This is the first time we’ve been able to go as a family.”

The special showing of a toned-down version of the “Cars” sequel was tailor-made for Amelia and other children with neurodevelopment challenges. The movie’s sounds were turned down for sensitive ears, some of the lights in the theater were left on to alleviate any fear of darkness, and the 3-D magic some moviegoers crave these days was converted back to a less-overwhelming two-dimensional format.

“Cars 2” was this summer’s Sensory-Sensitive Saturday feature, a quarterly movie program organized by occupational therapy students at the University of Missouri School of Health Professions and hosted by Hollywood Theaters. The program started in 2009 but took a temporary break when the original student organizers graduated. Emily Ford and other current occupational therapy students have since resurrected it. “We just felt like kids with autism or other processing disorders have every right to go to the movie as any normally developing child,” Ford said.

Jack and Christina Crawford have been taking their two sons, 12-year-old Gavin and 4-year-old John, to the sensory-sensitive movies since the program began.

“The lighting is not as dark, and they’re allowed to move around freely,” Christina said, noting the looser behavioral expectations make the special movies more appropriate for Gavin.

Paula Carter and her daughter, Madeleine, also have attended Sensory-Sensitive Saturday movies before, but yesterday marked another first. It was the first time Madeleine, 9, was able to invite friends to go see a movie with her, a milestone in her social development, her mom said.

A special screening of “G-Force” in 2009 was Madeleine’s first movie and is now her favorite. “It was such a positive experience for her,” Paula said. “It was the first time a movie was fun and not painful.”
Testimonies like that make Hollywood Theater Manager Joe McKie smile. The turnout at Sensory-Sensitive Saturday events isn’t always as good as it was yesterday, but “regardless, those stories of families being so appreciative” make it worth it, he said. “It’s an opportunity to bring families and children to the movies.”