



UPCOMING CLASSES

## Families in Conflict Situations

We always hope to see relationships last, but when ending one is best for everyone involved, it means a difficult transition is at hand. Sometimes, communication breaks down and tempers erupt.

Moms and dads must work out differences. The children need to find healthy, constructive outlets for their intense feelings.

That's why we offer **Families in Conflict Situations**, a free three-week course for divorcing families who have been experiencing high levels of ongoing conflict. Dads attend the first session with their children, moms attend the second session with their children, and the whole

family attends the third. Parents have reported what a relief it's been to find a comfortable outlet in which to share their feelings, and to meet other parents having similar experiences. (Read more at [beechacres.org/fics](http://beechacres.org/fics)) To register, call 513.233.4706, or visit our website for a downloadable form that can be mailed or faxed.

**UPCOMING CLASS DATES:**

Thursdays, March 13-27, 6:00-7:30pm

Thursdays, May 15-29, 6:00-7:30pm

**Classes are held at our 6881 Beechmont Avenue location.**



Meet Trisha and JC, who got married while taking part in our Building Strong Marriages and Relationships program. Page 4.



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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

# Strengthening Relationships



My wife, Debby, and I had our first date on Valentine's Day....44 years ago! Three kids and eight grandchildren later, we're still going strong—happily—thanks to our basic love, hard work, a supportive environment, and lots of new skills gained along the way.

I hope you had a good Valentine's Day and were able to spend it with someone you love, whether that was a romantic partner, your children, other family, or close friends. This time of year, we tend to talk a lot about love, so this issue of Connections is dedicated to the subject.

Thirty-four years ago, Beech Acres first created services to help divorcing couples reduce the negative effects of divorce on their children. Since then, more than 100,000 parents and children have come to us to learn how to cope through one of life's most stressful changes. For most of those couples, divorce was clearly in the best interest of everyone involved, including the children. For others, we wondered whether their family disruption might have been preventable with the chance to gain new knowledge and skills....like communication, conflict resolution and commitment.

In 2006 we set out to test that theory. For seven years, thanks to a grant from the Administration for Children & Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Beech Acres has offered services to reduce divorce and strengthen marriages and relationships. More than 10,000 people have participated in these services, which can be customized to meet the needs of each couple. The story on pages 4-5 is just one shining example of the program's success.

As a parenting center, we are committed to strengthening relationships between mothers and fathers (including step-parents), married or not. As I watch my children in their marriages and raising their kids, I clearly see how my relationship with Debby has affected their habits. Fortunately, most of those are positive, because we have learned so much, and adapted our own relationship, along the way.

Children learn most by watching their parents behave, not by listening to our lectures. Parent teach kids respect, honesty and communication by how we act with our significant others.

Civility with each other matters. Fortunately, it can be learned. Beech Acres is here to help.

Turn the page to learn how.

Sincerely  
  
James R. Mason

President & CEO

THE PEOPLE BEHIND BEECH ACRES

# A Heart for Parenting



## President & CEO Jim Mason Celebrates 35 Years with Beech Acres Parenting Center

Since his high school days, when classmates sought his advice about everything from grades to girls, Beech Acres' President & CEO, Jim Mason, has had a natural gift for helping people. In 1978, he accepted a job at Beech Acres, equipped with a few years of on-the-job experience and degrees in secondary education and counseling.

Since then, Jim has poured a wealth of love, learning and leadership into Beech Acres. Father of three and grandfather of eight, Jim says raising his kids has been his greatest learning experience.

Partnering with his wife, Debby, a pediatric nurse practitioner, Jim embraced the challenges eagerly. His own parents' influence was particularly strong: "I grew up with a mom who totally accepted what I wanted to do, (except the bad stuff!) She had an unbelievably huge heart of acceptance for everyone. My dad was all about responsibility and hard work."

### Leading the Parade

Beech Acres has experienced a few major changes since its founding more than 160 years ago. Jim shepherded the former orphanage through the biggest change of all.

"Someone said to me once that social services are the broom behind the parade of humanity," Jim recalls. "And I wanted us to be much more than that." Along with the Board of Directors and staff, Jim realized that society's problems seemed only to be worsening. The best course of action was to become proactive.

"The kind of parenting a child experiences greatly determines his future. Parenting lies at the core of many later adult problems, as well as at the core of great strength and resilience," Jim says.

Understanding the need for parents to embrace their own talents and, in turn, lovingly embrace their children, Jim set out to lead the parade. "We want parenting to be intentional, mindful and nurturing of a child's natural gifts. Strengths, rather than weaknesses, are our guideposts."

Beech Acres became fully focused on parenting intentionally. It was renamed Beech Acres Parenting Center in 2005. (See sidebar.) Last fiscal year, the agency served more than 22,000 families.

### Looking Back... Looking Ahead

Even with all he's achieved, Jim looks at Beech Acres in terms of what the organization has given him, rather than what he's given to it. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to work at a place where we have the freedom and expectation to create the best

Continued on page 7

Jim and Debby with Marc, Michael, and Katie in 1986



## 35 years and counting...

### Jim Mason's Journey with Beech Acres

**1978** – Appointed Assistant Director of Child Care for Beech Acres—General Protestant Orphan Home, overseeing 84 children.

**1980s** – Promoted to Director of The Aring Institute, which focused on reducing the effects of divorce on kids. Beech Acres had a new emphasis on working with families to keep children out of residential care. Residential facilities closed in 1989.

**1989** – Named Executive Director of Beech Acres, serving 3,000 children a year, largely through government contracts.

**1990s** – Named President & CEO; agency grew to more than \$30 million in annual revenue.

**1999** – 150th anniversary of Beech Acres; hosted parenting conference with more than 1,000 people attending; embraced new identity as a resource and advocate for parents.

**2005** – Transformed service and infrastructure to become a powerful parenting resource; won the Better Business Bureau's Torch Award.

**2005** – Changed name to Beech Acres Parenting Center; won the Organizations of Noteworthy Excellence (ONE) Award, sponsored by the Cincinnati Business Courier and The Greater Cincinnati Foundation.

**2013** – Served 22,000 children and parents, with a mission of "inspiring and equipping today's parents, families and communities to raise capable, caring, contributing children."





# Building a Life Together



It took Trisha and JC twelve years to make it down the aisle, but these newlyweds made sure to do it right. As they recently sat in their cozy living room, glowing with pride and happiness, Trisha cradled their three-week-old daughter, Gracious. They described the role that Building Strong Marriages and Relationships (BSMR) program at Beech Acres played, and continues to play, in their lives.

Both warm and soft-spoken individuals, these two started dating about 12 years ago after Trisha noticed JC from across a street and struck up a conversation. “I just thought he was cute,” she smiles, and you can see the spark the memory still ignites.

“We had wanted to get married for years,” Trisha recounts. “We pictured a big wedding, but we couldn’t afford it.” Other hurdles presented themselves, too. Each of them battled and overcame alcohol addiction, a struggle that inevitably challenged their relationship. They lived together, then apart for a time, then together again. Along the way, Trisha heard about Beech Acres from friends and colleagues who had taken classes there. “We heard so many good things about Beech Acres,” she says. In particular, she heard about BSMR.

Trisha, who has two other children, said, “I’d been to all kinds of parenting classes before, but this one really focused on the relationship between the parents. Your relationship is the most important thing, I think, as far as being good parents goes.”

So, she continues, “We knew this was the perfect class to take before we got married. I asked JC if he wanted to come with me. He wasn’t too excited, but I told him it would be fun.” JC recalls, “It was a little intimidating going in, but I got a lot out of it.” They say they hit it off well with the instructor, whose sense of humor soon had the class in stitches.

“We took lots of notes,” says Trisha. “They asked us questions like, ‘If you could change something that bugs you about him, or you could change something that bugs you about her, what would it be?’ And it really helped us to work on our communication.”

One of the experiences they remember most is taking a personality test, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, to better understand how they complemented one another. They learned that JC is an introvert and Trisha is an extravert, a difference that affects how they communicate with each other.

They point out, however, that they never considered their relationship to be a troubled or unhealthy one. “Anyone can benefit from these classes,” she says. “We were already getting along fine, but we still learned so much. I would recommend the class to anybody. It’s amazing.”

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In addition to dreaming of marriage, the two had long wished for a baby together, but had suspicions that pregnancy wasn’t a possibility for them. In the end, everything sort of happened all at once. They have both found strength in religious faith, are in a more financially secure situation, found out they were expecting a child... and booked the church. “Now that we took the class, it was finally time,” Trisha exclaims.

Her voice catches as she recalls their wedding. “It was beautiful. The light was coming in through the stained glass windows. I had pearls and white diamonds on my dress and on my shoes. My brother-in-law walked me down the aisle, and JC was waiting up front for me like a man.” Beside her, JC simply nods and smiles.

Beech Acres, including all of the people who teach and support the BSMR program, congratulate Trisha and JC on their marriage and the birth of their daughter, and wish them a lifetime of happiness.

## OUR PROGRAMS

# Couples: Together or Not, Beech Acres Can Help



The break-up of a family hurts. There’s no doubt about it. It’s not only hard while it’s happening, but it affects a child for life. These kids are:

- **Almost 20% less likely** to graduate from high school
- **More likely** to be involved in crime as adults
- **48% more likely** to smoke as adults
- **10% more likely** to develop a health problem
- **Twice as likely** to be prescribed ADD drugs
- **Twice as likely** to become divorced as adults

### At Beech Acres, we strive to minimize these effects.

**Building Strong Marriages and Relationships** is a set of services funded by a Community-Centered Healthy Marriage and Relationship Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to prevent divorce and encourage unmarried couples with children to get married. Beech Acres is proud to offer these services.

We’re also dedicated to helping couples who choose to separate or divorce.

**Helping Children Cope with Divorce** is a class that teaches parents how best to support their kids through the transition.

**Mediation** can help divorced or separated parents improve communication and create parenting agreements.

**Families in Conflict Situations** helps both parents and kids with the stresses of a divorce. (See more on the back page).

Learn more about all of our resources at [beechacres.org](http://beechacres.org).



We're grateful to the following foundations, which supported us during the first half of our 2013-2014 fiscal year

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**COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Meet Nancy Bolam-Jenkins, Beech Acres Donor**

Do you remember how you first heard of Beech Acres? With such a long history, the organization has meant different things to different people over the years, but the people who support us tend to stick around.

Nancy Bolam-Jenkins recalls, "I was in college, going to night school, and I was in a sorority. The sorority helped out with the big event there...the Orphan Feast." (Longtime Cincinnatians will remember the Orphan Feast, an annual fundraiser that ran for 137 years, supporting Beech Acres when it was an orphanage.) Thus began a decades-long relationship with the agency that continues today.

Nancy has worked with hundreds of children in Cincinnati during her long career as a child psychologist, in schools and in her private practice. While employed with the Sycamore School District, she also worked at Beech Acres. "It was around the time," Nancy recalls, "that Jim Mason came on board, and he's the one who brought me in. I used to speak a lot on different topics, and he heard me speak once, I believe."

She came along at a time—the early 1990s—when divorce was on the rise and families were adjusting to shifting roles. Children needed people like Nancy more than ever.

She led numerous support groups, including some for step-families, and for the children of divorcing families. "I've always loved working with kids," she says. Today, Nancy stays committed to Beech Acres as a donor. She gives generously year after year. "I support the organization because they've done a lot of good. They've done a lot in the schools, and in the community." She acknowledges how much the organization has evolved since those Orphan Feast days, always for the best and keeping up with the needs of society.

She continues, "I'm just so impressed with Beech Acres, because they address the family as a whole, and there aren't many facilities that do that."

**To join Nancy in supporting Beech Acres with a one-time or recurring gift, please call 513.233.4728.**

*Continued from page 3*

atmosphere to do the most good for the most kids," he says. "I'm lucky that I can act so clearly from my own personal beliefs and learning. I have been truly blessed to work with an extraordinary team of board, staff, donors and community partners."

He admits he's had his moments of self-doubt, saying, "I've overcome fear and insecurity about taking risks by realizing that I have to have faith, that I am not in this by myself and that together we can achieve this mission." He quips that his failures haven't gotten him fired yet.

He expresses satisfaction with coaching younger people, comfortable with the idea that one day he'll hand over the reins. "I love what I do – the people, the learning, the impact. I'm preparing to make sure Beech Acres is in good shape when I feel it's the right time to leave."

Until then, Jim will keep adapting, innovating and creating to fulfill an ongoing dream of making Beech Acres Parenting Center the place where all parents turn to bring out the best in themselves and their children.



**Here's where to find Beech Acres in your community.**

**Main Office**  
6881 Beechmont Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45230

**West Side**  
3325 Glenmore Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45211

**Warren County**  
767 Columbus Avenue  
Lebanon, OH 45036

**Butler County**  
1879 Mercedes Drive  
Suite A  
Hamilton, OH 45011

**Central Phone**  
513.231.6630

**To Make a Gift**  
Patrick Nugent  
development@beechacres.org  
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