

Andover Townsman



TIM JEAN/Staff photos

At right, Nicholas Nardone, 4, feeds Lemon the Duck, who is physically challenged and gets around in a modified walker. Lemon visited the Professional Center for Child Development with its owner Laura Backman, who wrote a children's book about Lemon. Backman read the book to the children later.

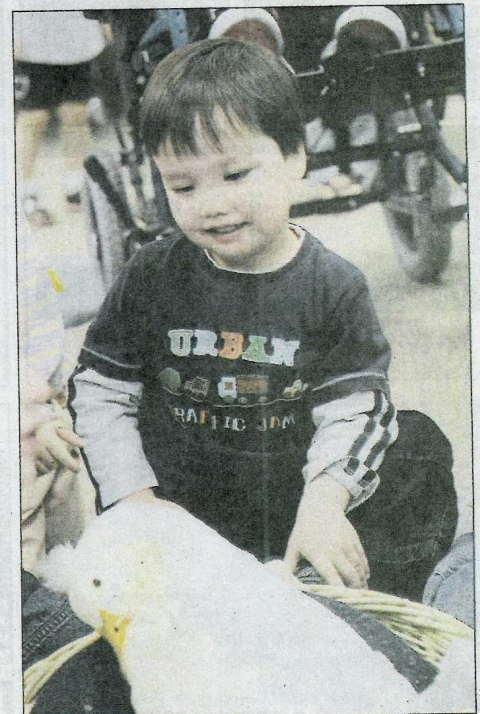
Lessons of Lemon:

Disabled duck has story to tell for kids of all abilities

By **Bethany Bray**
Staff Writer

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She has webbed feet, a bill and loves to swim. But Lemon the Duck, who visited the Professional Center for Child Development last week, has more in common with the students at the Osgood Street school than you might think. Four-year-old Lemon was born with neurological issues that affect her coordination and balance. Unable to walk or stand on her own, Lemon gets around in a specially-modified walker. Lemon was an especially poignant example to the youngsters at PCCD, many of whom are wheelchair-bound with severe physical and mental disabilities.



Kian Burt, 4, of Andover pats Lemon the Duck during Lemon's visit to the Professional Center for Child Development.

"Lemon shows that you can conquer differences in your own special

way. These kids surprise everyone with their own special talents," said Mark Simpson, whose daughter Abigail, 7, attends PCCD. "They can communicate with Lemon better than we can. They see things in a totally different light. These kids deserve to be treated like everyday kids. They have their own special place in everyone's heart. They're all significant."

PCCD, which also runs a preschool for children of all abilities, works in part with children with multiple disabilities and complex health-care needs from Andover and other local communities.

Lemon visited the school with her owner Laura Backman, who has written a children's book about Lemon's life and the challenges she's overcome with the help of friends.

"She teaches that some people need extra help and technical assistance, but can still be part of your flock," said Ellen Waddil, parent liaison.

Lemon, a crested pekin duck, was hatched from an egg, along with several of her brothers and sisters, by a kindergarten class. The class fashioned a walker for Lemon, so she could play with her siblings - and students.

Backman, who lives in Rhode Island, read her book "Lemon the Duck" to PCCD youth during her visit on Friday, April 18.

Three- and 4-year-olds from the center's preschool held rubber duckies as they listened with rapt attention to Backman. Children, ages 3 to 7, from the center's day school program sat among their preschool classmates.

One nonverbal little boy in a wheelchair formed the word "duck" in sign language upon recognizing Lemon.

Some of the children picked up feathers Lemon had shed on the floor, and used them to tickle each other.

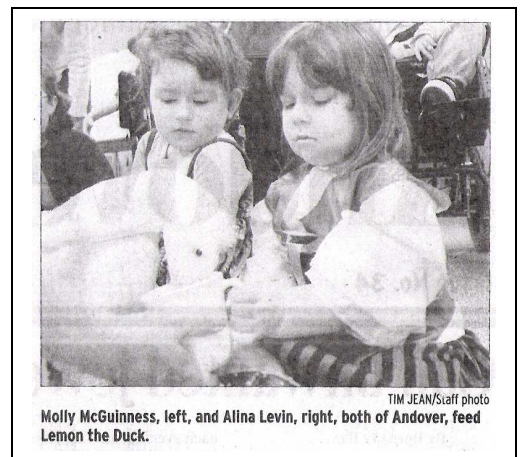
After reading her book, Backman let the students take turns petting and feeding Lemon. The youngsters giggled when Backman pulled out a snack for Lemon - a bag full of chopped kale - and Lemon recognized the food and began to quack.

"He loved the texture (of Lemon's feathers), he was smiling like crazy," said April Sansil of her son, Sammy, who used his feet to pet Lemon. "Sammy loves animals, but had never seen a duck before."

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Children's book author Laura Backman feeds Lemon the Duck, who is physically challenged and gets around in a modified walker, while he visited the Professional Center for Child Development. Backman, who wrote a children's book about Lemon, read to the children later. PCCD teaches children of all abilities through a variety of programs.



TIM JEAN/Staff photo
Molly McGuinness, left, and Alina Levin, right, both of Andover, feed Lemon the Duck.

Tim Jean Staff photographer