

INSIDE

NEWS

- Education _____ 17
- Legal Notices _____ 31A, 36
- Obituaries _____ 12
- Police Report _____ 27
- Public meetings _____ 2
- Real Estate News _____ 19A

BUSINESS

- Business News _____ 15
- Business Profile _____ 15

COMMENT

- Editorials _____ 8
- Letters _____ 8
- The Observer _____ 9

COMMUNITY

- ArtBeat _____ 6A
- Calendar _____ 3A
- Classifieds _____ 39A
- Community Columns _____ 24A
- Crossword Puzzle _____ 23A
- Diane Amussen _____ A
- Focus on Nature _____ 16A
- Health _____ 18A
- Movie Guide _____ 25A
- North Fork Chef _____ 10A
- Pierre Gazarian _____ 15A
- Service Directory _____ 40A
- Weddings/Engagements _____ 8A
- Untitled _____ 11A

SPORTS

- Auto Dealer Directory _____ 39
- Sports Desk _____ 37

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Clarification

Greenport art restorer Patrice Bertin, who seeks a variance to use his studio at 633 First St. for occasional exhibitions, said that when he received the original variance to build the studio, he wasn't prohibited from using the space as a gallery. The original permit was to use it for artistic purposes, he said, although at the time, he hadn't anticipated needing gallery space. Under village code, he is allowed to use a portion of his home for showing artwork, but now needs a variance in order to use the studio for exhibitions.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Southold Town Board Meetings can now be seen 24/7 at townclerk.com

Thursday, April 3

- 5 p.m.—Greenport Planning Board, Third Street firehouse.
- 7 p.m.—Greenport Village Board of Trustees organizational meeting, Third Street firehouse.
- 7:30 p.m.—Mattituck-Cutchogue Board of Education budget hearing, high school auditorium.

Friday, April 4

- 8 a.m.—Southold Town Trustees, Bay Constables and Assistant Town Attorney work session, Town Hall Annex.



Suffolk Times photos by Barbaraellen Koch

Tara Gatz (center), 12, talks about the upcoming completion of her hearing implant with audiologist Jennifer Lohr and Dr. Kevin Braat.

Sounds like a miracle

Pioneering surgery gives local girl the gift of hearing

By Rebecca Packard

When Tara Gatz saw Dr. Kevin Braat in Aquebogue in August 2007 it was to make sure she'd still hear out of her "good" ear. She never imagined he'd tell her she'd one day hear with her right ear, which had never worked before.

Tara, a 12-year-old from Mattituck, was born without a right outer ear, due to a congenital condition called microtia. She had four reconstructive surgeries in 2001 at Schneider Children's Hospital to gain the appearance of a outer ear. But the surgeries didn't restore her ability to hear with her right ear.

Her pediatrician, Dr. Thomas Mercier, referred her to Dr. Braat last August because she had swimmer's ear in her left ear. "He really wanted to get special care for this one," said Tara of her "good" ear.

"The swimmer's ear is all gone, and we got something better out of it," said her mother, Mary Gatz.

Dr. Braat had recently been certified by the Cochlear Corporation to perform BAHA implant surgery, a procedure that provides a conducting mechanism to the inner ear. Patients may be lacking this mechanism due to congenital deformity, trauma or chronic infections, according to Dr. Braat. Audiologists working with Dr. Braat at Peconic Ear, Nose, Throat and Facial Plastic Surgery P.C. examined Tara and found that her right ear had the inner workings to qualify her for the surgery.

Tara had the implant surgery in January at Peconic Bay Medical Center and, on April 7, she'll have a sound processor installed during an in-office procedure, making her the first patient in Dr. Braat's practice to have the procedure done.

But it doesn't look like she'll be the last. Six patients between ages 12 and 70 have had the first part of the procedure done through Peconic Ear, Nose and Throat. About 30 patients are un-



A BAHA bone conductor implant was installed behind Tara's right ear in January.

dergoing the evaluation and authorization process and the practice has a list of several hundred candidates for the surgery, according to Dr. Braat.

The procedure has two parts. After evaluation, eligible patients undergo surgery to install the BAHA bone conductor implant. Then, after the body has had three months to adapt to the implant, a sound processor is put in place and adjusted for each particular patient.

Though the procedure was initially approved for conducting sound to a working inner ear, the federal Food and Drug Administration recently approved it for patients who don't have a working inner ear; the sound is picked

Wednesday, April 9

- 4 p.m.—Greenport Housing Authority work session, village hall.
- 7 p.m.—Southold Board of Education work session, high school auditorium.

Thursday, April 10

- 6 p.m.—Southold Town Zoning Board of Appeals, Town Hall Annex.
- 7 p.m.—Southold Board of Education budget hearing, high school auditorium.
- 7:30 p.m.—Mattituck-Cutchogue Board of Education budget hearing, high school auditorium.

Stakeholders...

► From page 3

dwelling units and the other to rule on specific rental permit applications.

Mr. Russell said he favors the concept of rental permits, and said he proposed rental permits himself "a few years ago." But he doesn't favor citizen review boards. "I don't want independent review boards deciding if someone gets to keep their apartment or not," he said. "Good code does that. If you follow the rules, you get a rental permit. If not, you don't. It's not for any community organization to decide who gets permits. That's problematic," Mr. Russell said. "It should be administered by the town just like every other permit."

Nevertheless, the supervisor said, "I have to give them credit" for the effort to tackle a difficult problem — illegal, often overcrowded rentals — that needs to be addressed.

Planning Board chairwoman Jeri

Woodhouse, who said yesterday she had not yet heard about the East Marion stakeholders' proposal, said, "I like that stakeholders groups are working so hard and want to make change. We really appreciate all the effort and energy they've put into this project."

Now, Ms. Woodhouse said, it's up to the implementation committee to make sure the stakeholders' suggestions are put into action in an orderly, transparent manner. "Part of our challenge is to coordinate the implementation of suggestions from such a large number of stakeholders groups," Ms. Woodhouse said. "We want to be able to track the progress of their suggestions and bring them directly to the people who can make these things happen," she said.

"We'd like it to be a dialogue," Ms. Weile said. "We're hoping we can somehow get the community together, trying to make the voice of the citizens more precise."



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Sounds...

► From page 2

up from the opposite inner ear, according to Dr. Braat.

Tara said there was pain or discomfort after the surgery, but that it was done on a Friday and she was able to go back to school the following Monday.

She's a beautiful, vibrant young girl, and doesn't look or sound as if she has any trouble hearing, but she said she looks forward to being able to hear out of her right ear. She plays the flute and lacrosse and competes in Irish dance. She said she has to be on a certain side to take her music lessons or hear the music in dance class, and it's sometimes hard to hear others on the lacrosse field.

"I just don't like saying, 'What? What?' when I can't hear something," she said.



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A 'whole new world' opens up

Girl, 12, talks about gaining gift of hearing

By Rebecca Packard

On April 7, Tara Gatz had a sound processor fitted that enables her to hear out of her right ear for the first time in her life. "It was so exciting," said the Mattituck 12-year-old. "It's like a whole new world."

She had the in-office procedure done by Dr. Barbara Prestano, director of audiology at Peconic Ear, Nose, Throat and Facial Plastic Surgery in Aquabogue. Tara was the first patient in the office to get the final part of the hearing restoration done. The first part was implant surgery performed by Kevin Braat of the same office, at Peconic Bay Medical Center in January.

Dr. Braat is certified by the Cochlear Corporation to perform BAHA implant surgery, a surgery that provides a conducting mechanism to the inner ear. Patients may be lacking this mechanism due to congenital deformity, trauma, or chronic infections, according to Dr. Braat.

"The whole experience of fitting her was just the most amazing thing," said Dr. Prestano. "Her eyes were so big, and her smile was even bigger."

Tara was already able to do a lot with just the use of her left ear — lacrosse,



Tara Gatz, left, taking her first flute lesson since having ear surgery, with Cutchogue East Elementary School band director Laura Gross.

music lessons, competitive Irish dance — but she wanted to do them better, with more ease, and she said life has been easier with the use of both ears.

"It's been a lot better," she said. She said it's nice to not need people to cater to her hearing out of one side, and hearing more makes her feel more involved in her activities.

Dr. Prestano said fitting the processor took about half an hour. She had Tara block off her left ear and try hearing out of only the right. The doctor made tone adjustments on the processor, showed

Tara how to use the switch and buttons, how to clean it and how to put it on. Tara was able to go to school the same day. She said it took some adjustment to get used to hearing out of both ears. It seemed like there was almost an echo, she said, and people's voices, even her own, sounded a bit different. But within a week it seemed perfectly normal.

There's a switch on the processor that enables her to control volume and eliminate background noise. There's also a safety loop and clip for the processor to use during sports. She uses it while play-

ing lacrosse so she can play better but doesn't have to worry about losing it. (One processor replacement is covered by the company with a \$300 deductible, but a second replacement would cost about \$3,000, according to Dr. Prestano.)

"I can hear people say 'Tara, I'm open,' all the way on the other side of the field," she said. Before, she could only hear them if they were on a certain side, she said.

'My friends even tell me secrets in this ear. I hear them perfectly.'

—Tara Gatz

"That was what we always look for, to make someone that happy," said Dr. Prestano about the experience of fitting Tara.

She said she can't wait to fit more patients with the processors. Six patients, ages 12 to 70, have had the first part of the procedure done with Peconic Ear, Nose and Throat. About 30 patients are going through the evaluation and authorization process, and the practice has a list of several hundred candidates for the surgery, according to Dr. Braat.

"The people who get this have just basically been told that there was nothing that could be done for them," said Dr. Prestano. "I can say to you now, no, I can do something."

Before getting her processor, Tara said she didn't want to say, "What? What?" Her wish was granted. "I don't have to do that at all," she said. "My friends even tell me secrets in this ear. I hear them perfectly."



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