



KIM COOL  
FEATURES EDITOR

The Asolo has extended that show — again!

And the beat goes on. The Asolo is extending "Menopause The Musical" through Aug. 7. I have lost track of how many extensions this makes but my Asolo friends tell me that people are driving in from Tampa, Spring Hill, St. Petersburg, Hudson and even Fort Lauderdale to see this show. They come by car, bus and van. A few have even shown up in a limo. One Clearwater lady has already seen the show five times and she is coming back again next week.

At this rate, the Asolo should consider working it into the coming season. With record-breaking crowds, the show is averaging 83 percent capacity in the 500-seat Mertz Theatre for eight performances a week.

No wonder you can almost hear the laughter down in Venice on some nights.

For tickets, call the Asolo box office at 351-8900. The Mertz Theatre is in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts at 5555 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.

To get a hint of what all the fuss is about, tune in "Talk of the Suncoast" tomorrow at 2 p.m. on 1220 AM (WIBQ). The show's host Cliff Roles will have all four stars of "Menopause The Musical" on his show, which is being extended until 3:30 p.m. that day. To learn more, visit cliffroles.50megs.com/custom3.htm.

Liza Impersonator Suzanne Goulet will perform her "Liza Las Vegas Show" at The Players Theatre, 838 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, at 8 p.m. on July 30 and at 2 p.m. on July 31. Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$15 for students. For more information, call 365-2494.

Congratulations to the Manatee Players, its wonderful production of "Metamorphoses" (seen at the Venice Little Theatre in June) swept the top national prizes at the American Association of Community Theatres this summer. The cast and crew had to beat out VLT's excellent production of "Macbeth" last fall before going on to win the regional competition in March. The winning production was directed by Rick Kirby.

Meridian Hotels & Resorts has opened its newest property, Le Meridien Sunny Isles Beach, in Miami, the 135th hotel in the world-wide chain. For \$299 per night, guests enjoy an elegantly appointed suite with a spacious private balcony overlooking the beach while experiencing a European Riviera style, luxury suite resort atmosphere.

Extend your stay by booking four nights or more and receive one night free. Book online in the European Riviera ambiance of this new beachfront hotel and spend

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# Fragile bones, firm hearts

STORY BY JENNIFER MCGLOTHLIN - STAFF WRITER

Madison Badalamenti has received a gift of freedom from the Suncoast Center for Independent Living.

Madison Badalamenti is a normal child with unusually tender bones, but that doesn't interfere with her having a normal life.

Madison Badalamenti is a talkative and playful 5-year-old girl.

Her pediatrician diagnosed her with osteogenesis imperfecta at the delicate age of 2 weeks.

According to the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation, the condition is a genetic disorder characterized by bones that break easily, often from little or no apparent cause. A person with OI may break a rib while coughing, or a leg by rolling over in their sleep. OI has been documented in all ethnic groups, and affects a person throughout their lifetime.

"She can leave the house, but we don't have a van yet, so we just carry her to the car and everything and she has a power chair," Jennifer McLeod, Madison's mother said.

Recently, the Suncoast Center for Independent Living built a ramp for little Madison with the help of donations from Home Depot.

"It's really nice to have that built so she can go out," she says about the new ramp.

What the Badalamenti really need is a van to transport little Madison from point A to point B.

"But I have a Barbie Jeep," Madison says.

Her mother smiles and continues to share about Madison.

"She's 5 now, so it's an everyday thing for me," McLeod says. "She's a regular child. It involves a lot of lifting."

Madison can pretty much get on her power chair and do everything. Her main goal with the chair is to get in and out of it herself.

"When she breaks it's really hard on her and everybody but it's just normal for us," McLeod said.

When McLeod was pregnant they said Madison had severely bowed legs, but weren't sure what it was. Then Madison was born with about 14 fractures, so her pediatrician said she probably had osteogenesis imperfecta. When she was 2 weeks old she had to go to a geneticist to make it official.

"For some reason, the strongest bones in the body the femurs, keep breaking," McLeod said. "We've had three breaks this year."

"I'm stronger," Madison says to her credit. "I can pick up things and I can move the chair and I can feed the fish all by myself."

"You're getting stronger," McLeod replies. "You're getting to be a big girl."

Madison is getting more independent as she grows. She can break anywhere, but it's just the femurs that break more so than anything.

"When she was 2 weeks old she was in a baby swing and she was just on one side sleeping and she woke up screaming — her arm broke — you know it's just that easy with pressure on it."

Then there were times Madison has bitten and McLeod thought she would break and die.

"We were actually really lucky she broke her arm before her first birthday and besides that her arms haven't been breaking since then. It's really her femurs," McLeod said.

Inclined

Peter Donald Badalamenti

II, Madison's father and actor in movies like "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Barlight," found the Suncoast Center for Independent Living online. He had originally written them a letter about getting a donation for a van for Madison. As of yet, there hasn't been any luck on finding a van, but SCIL built a ramp for the power chair so Madison would be able to get outside easier.

"It was really neat that they took that into consideration because we never mentioned it," McLeod said.

The ramp was constructed by SCIL ramp specialists Ziggy Nosal and Sandy Legrow with help from Madison's father and materials generously donated by the Sarasota Home Depot.

"We are helping people with disabilities live in this community," said Dave Caulfield, program manager for SCIL. "In a natural emergency like a hurricane you just can't beat having a ramp. It makes all the difference."

"Her dad helped us," Legrow said. "She sat in her little chair and watched us. We also made her a mini ramp for the front door. Sweet, little girl. When it was time to try out the ramp she looked like Mario Andretti up there ready to try out the ramp."

Usually the center builds ramps and things for people older than 18. Legrow has been building ramps for about three years and likes having the chance to help out a child. She also delivers medical equipment to people.

The center has to build the ramps according to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Building codes for Sarasota and Manatee county also apply. The code states that any part of an accessible route with a slope greater than 1:20 shall be considered a ramp and ramps are essential for wheelchair users if elevators or lifts are not available to connect different levels.

However, some people who use walking aids have difficulty with ramps and prefer stairs. Ramp slopes between 1:16 and 1:20 are preferred. The ability to manage an incline is related to both its slope and its length. Wheelchair users with disabilities affecting their arms or with low stamina have serious difficulty using inclines. Most ambulatory people and most people who use wheelchairs can manage a slope of 1:16. Many people cannot manage a slope of 1:12 for 30 feet.

"We do have volunteers that help," Legrow said. "Home Depot on Cattlemen Road donates enough materials for 12 ramps a year. The average cost for the wood is \$600-\$700. If you walk into the store on Cattlemen Road you'll see Madison's picture." More than 50 people need ramps. The center is funded for six-seven ramps per year per county. Depending on the conditions, some ramps can cost as much as \$3,000.

"It was an absolute joy to build this ramp for her," Legrow said.

Still, little Madison needs a van to be able to get to and from school freely.

"We might just have to buy one because she starts kindergarten Aug. 8," McLeod said.

Madison will be going to Venice Elementary this fall. The plan, as of now, is to keep the power chair at the school



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MCGLOTHLIN

Jennifer McLeod holds daughter Madison next to the new ramps that were built for her by the Suncoast Center for Independent Living.

by picking up the chair on Mondays and dropping it off on Fridays.

Madison is excited about starting kindergarten. She seems determined to make it a giggly schoolgirl occasion.

SCIL

According to SCIL, it's a member of a network of similar organizations conceived by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and funded by Congress in 1976. There are about 400 centers throughout the country, including 16 in Florida. All such organizations are managed and staffed by persons with disabilities. Each center is run by a local board of directors, and is associated with the other centers throughout the United States. All SCILs operate to promote independent living,

and assist individuals to maintain or achieve this. The program never diminishes the rights of an individual to live independently to make his or her own choices. Each individual is encouraged to contribute to society, pursue a meaningful career and enjoy full inclusion in the economic, political and social scene.

A consortium of individuals with disabilities along with representatives of several community agencies organized the Suncoast Center for Independent Living in 1990. The aim was to fill the gaps in services for persons with disabilities, and to coordinate community activities that support the ideology of independent living.

In addition to help with ramp building, SCIL wel-

comes volunteers with all sorts of skills. These include car drivers, office assistants, home health equipment installers, computer repair technicians, computer instructors and those able to teach disabled persons basic skills needed to live on their own.

A new facility has been planned for the SCIL that enhances the center's ability to help people with disabilities.

For more information about the Suncoast Center for Independent Living, its programs and sponsorship opportunities call 351-9545. If anybody in the community would like to help the Badalamenti family find a van or contribute to helping make Madison's first year of school the best they can, call 365-4025.



The SCIL also built a ramp for the front door for Madison.