

TOMS RIVER

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**All American Boy In
The All American Town...**

...meet Adam Jones

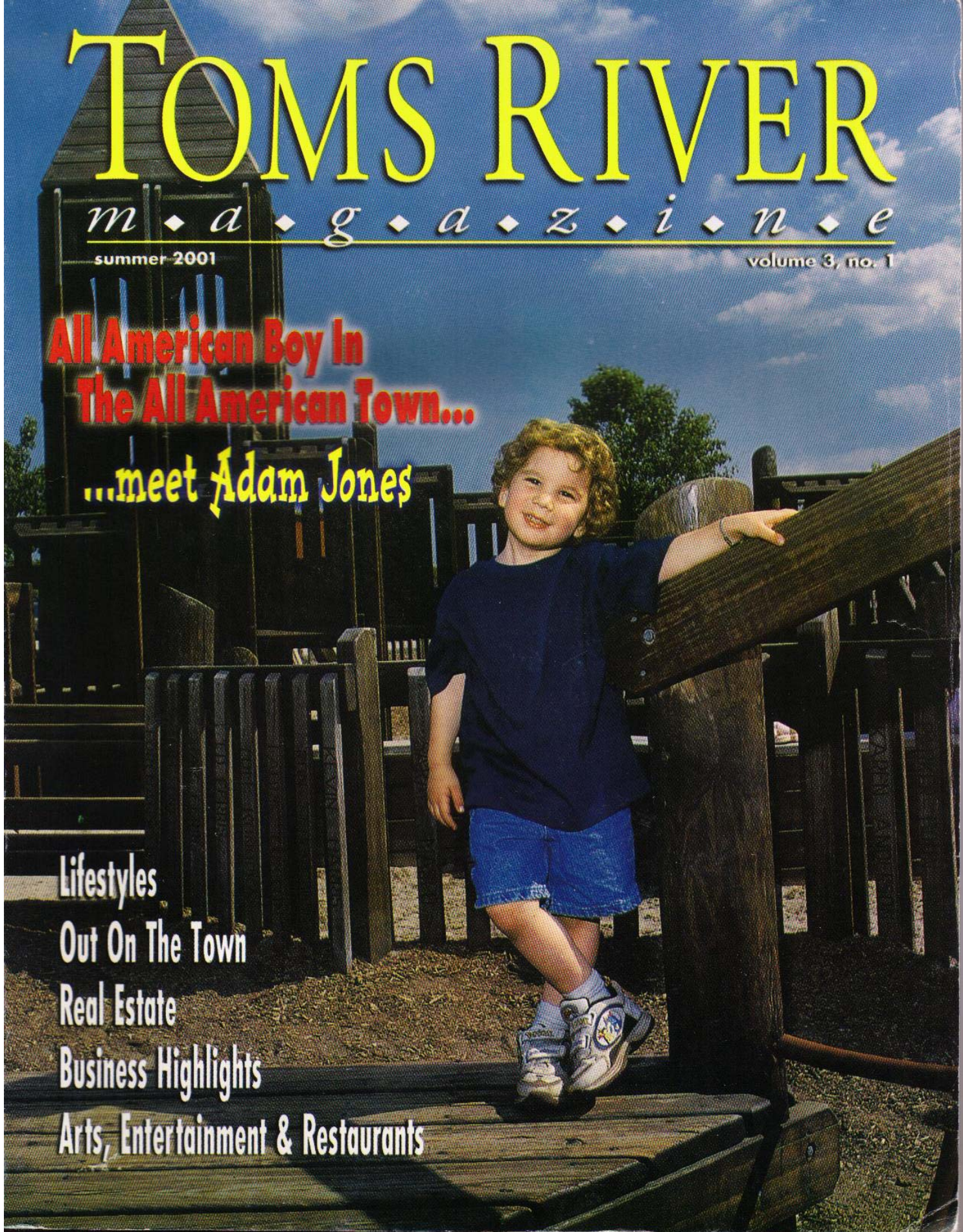
Lifestyles

Out On The Town

Real Estate

Business Highlights

Arts, Entertainment & Restaurants



People

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Miracle Journey



photos by Tracy Harman

Adam Joshua Jones

How 4-year-old Adam Joshua Jones struggled step-by-step for two years and went from a raging, self-injuring autistic child to a charming, articulate youngster. On the path with Adam, his mom, dad and 5 siblings.

by Jerry Verbel, Associate Editor

Forget what you've heard about the stereotypical autistic child. Forget the devastation and hopelessness that's implied. Forget all the negatives.

Here is the true case history of Adam Jones, age 4, that is inspirational with moments of incredible joy. His mom, Joni Jones chokes up as she recalls, "It was at age 3 that he recognized me as his mother. That is like the greatest gift a mother can receive."

If you observe Adam today at one of his therapy sessions happily playing and interacting with others his age

in the children's section of Barnes & Noble or the climb-and-crawl play section of Chuck E. Cheese's, both at the Brick Plaza, he appears and behaves as a typical youngster would.

Adam was born December 20, 1996, the sixth child of Joni and Larry Jones of Toms River. He was formally diagnosed with autism when Dr. Steven L. Kugler of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey wrote "Adam was seen for a neurological consultation. He harbors a clear diagnosis of Autism."

Autism
From Mosby's Medical Nursing and Allied Health Dictionary,
5th Edition, 1998:

Autism - A mental disorder characterized by extreme withdrawal and in abnormal absorption in fantasy accompanied by delusion, hallucination, and the inability to communicate verbally or otherwise relate to people.

Infantile Autism - A pervasive developmental disorder characterized by abnormal emotional, social and linguistic development in a child. Symptoms include abnormal ways of relating to people, objects and situations. It may result from organic brain dysfunction, in which case it occurs before three years of age.

As described by his father, "He could barely communicate, made no eye contact with other people and exploded into violent rages with head-banging and other self-injurious behavior."

Saddened and confused, the Jones' tried every available resource to learn about autism and what could be done for Adam. Everything was "negative and dark" according to Larry Jones.

From this overwhelming wall of discouraging data, Joni and Larry

determined to seek out autism success stories which they found by researching, contacting groups and educators around the country, even traveling to conferences by autism experts.

Joni, a registered nurse, was haunted by a memory from her schooling. "We were given, maybe four minutes instruction about autism," she remembers. "It was so bleak, seeing a youngster sitting and rocking that I prayed to God never to give me an autistic child."

Slowly, certain truths suggested themselves, namely very early diagnosis and intense behavioral intervention. Larry Jones, an attorney, cautions, "The risk of failing to intervene before school age is very serious. One does not wait to see if a child will "outgrow" autism."

The parents, with agreement from other children, set Adam as their top priority. Regardless of the time, efforts and monies involved, everyone would be committed to helping Adam succeed.

"This is not a 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. disability," Joni Jones said. "We need to know what to do and our children need to know what to do to complement what the professionals would be doing."

Now that they accepted that Adam was autistic, the family—and soon other professionals—focused on Adam's strengths.

"He took a golf ball and played piano because his fingers were too little," his mom explains. "He could put a puzzle together right out of the box. My instructor told me he was a genius!" (Today, Adam is both autistic and a gifted child and has named all the Presidents of the United States and all the major bones and organs in the body of every state in the country.)

The intervention to release Adam from the prison his autism had him in and to get him to the youngster he is today began with the efforts of an independent educational consultant, Dr. Jan S. Handleman of Highland Park, NJ.

Dr. Handleman reports, "In the two-year span of two years, Adam has been transformed from a boy who could not communicate or interact with people into a precociously captivating child."

Adam's Behavioral Therapists from the Children's Center Outreach in Neptune



photo by Tracy Harman



his “shadows” when he is on location and interfacing with others. They are his constant guides explaining the right things to do and praising him when he does them. Janet Hughmanic, Edith Conroy and Cyndee Smith bring along with their professional credentials, a caring that reflects in the fact that they are making a difference.

Comments from Adam’s Speech Therapist, Dana Goldberg, Occupational Therapist, Daisy Ingenito both of Children’s Center Outreach; and Hearing Therapist Dorinne Davis of the Davis Center for Hearing, Speech and Learning, Budd Lake, NJ all attest to the remarkable achievements he has made.

Rounding out the efforts being made, is the on-going care and help his sisters and brothers make at home. Although older sister Mindy is away at college, older brothers Bryan, Matthew and Jeffrey, as well as sister Rachael, have all been trained in behavioral therapy techniques so that their interfacing with Adam is to a great extent an extension of the work done by the professionals.

It all came together this past winter when Adam Jones received the Temple Grandin award “for outstanding accomplishment to your family and community”. Dr. Temple Grandin is autistic and considered among the highest functioning autistic persons in the country.

Larry Jones summed up his son’s situation saying, “You’re born autistic, you’ll always be autistic. But the real key is whether you’ll be able to function independently in this world as Dr. Grandin does. We believe, based on the progress Adam has made, that this is very do-able.” ♦

photo by Tracy Hamman

