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August 2010

Embracing
the Future

In this Kentucky field, Jason Koger's life changed forever. When he learned he had lost his arms, he had one question: *Would he be able to hold his girls again?*



Eau de Play-Doh

BY WAYNE WOOD

You know how good Play-Doh smells? How one sniff of a freshly opened container can somehow just lift your mood and send your mind back to those carefree days of elementary school?

Well, you will be just delighted to learn that a cologne company called Demeter makes a Play-Doh Cologne Spray.

According to advertising copy at the company's website, the fragrance is "meant for highly-creative people who seek a whimsical scent reminiscent of their childhood." Which I guess is better than saying that you'll walk around all day smelling like a hygiene-challenged second-grader's hands.

Doesn't it seem obvious that there are things that most people think smell good, but would not be a good idea for a cologne? I mean, what's next after Eau de Play-Doh? Cologne that smells like a box of crayons?

Uh-oh.

Advertising copy at the same website: "Crayon cologne. Inspired by childhood...smells just like that new box of crayons you opened on your first day of school!"

I can imagine, for guys who once had a crush on a kindergarten teacher, a woman who smells like Play-Doh or crayons might be just about irresistible. Imagine the romantic talk that these scents could inspire: "My dear, when I'm with you, I want to take a pair of dull, blunt-ended scissors, cut construction paper into strips, and use Elmer's glue to create a multi-colored chain of love." Or something like that.

So maybe this crayons and Play-Doh thing isn't so bad. I mean, it's not like somebody walking around all day smelling like a giant Tootsie Roll.

Uh-oh.

From the same site: "Tootsie Roll Cologne Spray is a luscious and delectable combination of

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Farmers market

Fresh fruits and vegetables are available as well as locally farmed meats, cheeses and breads at the Thursday Farmers Market on the Medical Center Plaza.

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Aspirnauts landing on campus this fall

After getting a small taste of Vanderbilt during their summers in the Aspirnaut Initiative, three of the students have decided to take a bigger bite of the University this fall as undergraduates.



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Embracing the Future

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His father, Mike Koger, stood at his bedside and as Jason focused on his father's voice, the unbelievable reality began to settle in.

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Vanderbilt Farmers Market in full swing

For the second year, the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and Health Plus are partnering to offer a weekly Farmers Market on the Medical Center plaza every Thursday from 3-6 p.m.

The market runs through Oct. 28.

Fresh fruits and vegetables will be available as well as locally farmed meats, cheeses and breads. The market is held rain or shine, and cash, checks and debit or credit cards are accepted.

For more information and to see what is in season, visit www.vanderbiltchildrens.org/farmersmarket.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOE HOWELL



ASPIRNAUTS

LANDING ON CAMPUS THIS FALL

BY LESLIE HILL

After getting a small taste of Vanderbilt during their summers in the Aspirnaut Initiative, three students have decided to take a bigger bite of the University this fall as undergraduates.

Domonique Bragg, Richard Harris and Cody Stothers were high school students from rural Arkansas selected for a project to elevate science and math achievement among students in rural communities. Now they are rising freshman at Vanderbilt.

"I want people to know that students in rural Arkansas have full capabilities," Bragg said. "The Aspirnaut program pulls in students who probably would have been looked over but have a lot of good talent."

The Aspirnaut Initiative is directed by Julie Hudson, M.D., assistant vice chancellor for Health Affairs at Vanderbilt, and was co-founded by Billy Hud-

son, Ph.D., professor of Medicine and director of the Vanderbilt Center for Matrix Biology. The program was started in rural Arkansas where Billy Hudson was born and raised.

"Aspirnaut" is the term the Hudsons coined for students who aspire, seek and achieve.

The program focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and reaches students in underserved rural areas who often have long bus rides to school, which the program capitalizes on with laptops and online course work. It also offers videoconferencing of hands-on science labs, accelerated and AP online courses, exposure to STEM careers and professionals, college guidance counseling and mentorship by faculty and students at Vanderbilt, as well as summer research internships for high school students.

"Our vision of the Aspirnaut pro-

gram is as a K-20 STEM pipeline that affords the opportunity for rural students to enter a STEM profession," said Julie Hudson. "Intelligence is distributed randomly, but very few talented rural students enter STEM careers. At a time when it is estimated that at least 50 percent of the jobs in the next decade will be STEM-related and will require at least some education past high school, it only makes sense to enhance and accelerate the STEM education of rural students. These students also live in regions where the local economies are seeing a loss of jobs. By enhancing STEM education in these areas, we are also providing a pathway for students to not just have jobs, but to have good-paying ones for which they have passion."

Last summer, Billy Hudson invited the Aspirnauts into his lab as he researched a chemical bond throughout the animal kingdom. They returned this summer for more research and to present their results at a daylong symposium.

"What you learn in high school is just the tip of the iceberg," Stothers said. "I've learned from my research at Vanderbilt that big discoveries are not made every day. Research is so super-specific that from the outside it looks so narrow and unimportant. But each little step is important."

Stothers said he knew from the second day of 10th grade that he wanted to be a doctor, and his time as an Aspirnaut has only reinforced that decision.

"This has been the best experience of my life, and I wouldn't trade it for anything," he said. "We were well-supervised in the labs, but they made us feel like we were doing the work. And they definitely let us mess up."



High school student Cody Stothers seen here during a lab summer program, will be back this fall as a full-time student.



Billy Hudson, Ph.D., and Julie Hudson, M.A., M.D., flank incoming freshmen Domonique Bragg, Richard Harris and Cody Stothers

Harris learned an important lesson in patience.

"Results may take hours or days, and those results may be right only 5 percent of the time," he said.

Because he wants results now, not years from now, Harris said he won't be a researcher, but he values his time as an Aspirnaut.

"I liked the program so much, I only applied to Vanderbilt," he said.

Bragg has always had her sights on being a dentist, but her time as an Aspirnaut opened her up to new ideas in the field.

"I was able to talk to dentists about other aspects of the career, like policy or research. I knew I always wanted to be a dentist, but I didn't know there were so many options," she said.

The three incoming freshmen will have a big leg up on their peers when classes begin this fall. They have already spent weeks at Vanderbilt doing hands-on research, learned their way around campus, gotten to know faculty and student researchers, and even met potential mentors.

"The Hudsons have invested more in me than I ever would have invested in myself," Stothers said. "They put a lot of faith in high school kids."

"Our hope is that the Aspirnaut program functions to shine a light on career

and educational pathways that few rural students know about," Billy Hudson said.

When they begin their undergraduate classes this fall, these three students will be well on their way.

Cody Stothers and Richard Harris



ANNE RAYNER

An accident took his arms, but Jason Koger is determined that it won't take his joy of living





EMBRACING the Future

BY WAYNE WOOD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE HOWELL

Jason Koger awoke in the Burn Center at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in early March 2008, and through the unfamiliar surroundings and the anesthetic haze he understood what he was being told: below the elbow, his arms were gone.

His father, Mike Koger, stood at his bedside and as Jason focused on his father's voice, the unbelievable reality began to settle in.

He had no hands. And it hit him: *Would he ever be able to hold his girls again?*



Jason Koger with daughters Cambell and Billie Grace.

The thought would not let go. His daughter Billie Grace was 21 months old, and the baby, Cambell, was just 3 months old. One of the joys of Jason's life was wrapping his arms around them, and around his wife Jenny, too.

As soon as Jason could ask for anything, he had asked to see his father, and Mike was the first family member to talk to Jason at his Vanderbilt bedside. Mike is a big man with the confident air of a former drill sergeant who has owned and operated a construction business and knows a little about setbacks and moving around the obstacles that life and fate can bring.

And there's no denying that on a scale

of setbacks and obstacles, losing both arms below the elbow is pretty high on the scale. But on that day, Mike leaned over his son, and promised: "We'll get through this."

Not "you"—"we."

Later, Jason said that this was how he understood his dad's words: "If you put yourself in God's hands, anything is possible."

And so did Jenny: "We knew we would get through this."

Three days earlier, Jason had gone for a ride on his all-terrain vehicle. It was a late winter day, but the air had a hint of the spring to come, and he was looking

forward to enjoying the outdoors on a Saturday afternoon while Jenny and his young daughters took a nap.

He left the house and steered the ATV around the back to the dirt road that runs between farm fields behind the family home in Utica, Ky., near Owensboro. He picked up speed and the wind blew in his face as he rode along the rough road.

Ahead, a row of single power poles carry an electric line across the field. On this day, probably due to some combination of wind and the softening of the ground after a wet spring, one of the poles had tilted to about a 45-degree angle. This caused the high-voltage power line to sag close to the ground.

About four feet high.

Stretched across the dirt road.

And almost invisible against the backdrop of fields.

When Jason came in contact with the wire, high voltage current surged through his body. The shock threw him from the four-wheeler. A cousin of Jason's, who was also riding a four-wheeler, witnessed the accident and put in the call for help.

Jenny went to the site of the accident, and rode in the ambulance to the hospital while relatives took over caring for Billie Grace and Cambell. At the local hospital, doctors realized that Jason would need care at the Vanderbilt Burn Center and began arranging for LifeFlight to transport him.

In a story she has told many times, Jenny says she realized that Jason's situation was grave when in Owensboro she overheard something she was never meant to hear: one medical person saying to another, "This kid could lose his hands."

Now, two years later, Jason, who is 31, and Jenny, 29, sit on a plush chocolate brown couch in their den and talk about that day when everything changed. The den is at the rear of the house and is dominated by an entertainment center and large television on one wall, and is watched over by two mounted deer heads, which Jason, an avid hunter both before and since his accident, proudly points out.

The bright room has a large window facing the back yard. The yard rises uphill from the rear of the house before coming

When Jason came in contact with the wire, high voltage current surged through his body. The shock threw him from the four-wheeler.

to a crest and falling away on the other side, where the dirt road runs. Jason, who has a broad, guileless face and a sometimes disconcertingly straightforward way of talking, matter-of-factly notes that it was just over that rise in the yard where he was almost killed.

Their property abuts that of two of Jason's uncles and cousins, and has been farmed by members of his family for decades. This house was Jason's boyhood home.

Jenny also grew up in the area, but the couple didn't meet until they were in college at Murray State, Jason majoring in agricultural engineering and Jenny in graphic design.

"I was really good friends with his roommate," she remembers with a smile. But the roommate lost out, and it was Jason who won her over.

On their wedding day, they made the vows that are recited at weddings all over the world, pledging to stay together for better and for worse, in sickness and in health. Those words mean a lot in retrospect.

Jason and Jenny talk a lot about the need to go forward, and keeping faith, but they know better than anybody about the pain and losses that life has brought them.

"When we got married we had our whole life planned out—'We're going to have this many kids and do this by this age,'" Jenny says. She gives a little smile and a rueful shake of her head. "I think one thing we've learned is that we're totally not in control. You just realize God is in complete control, and you're not."

"Electrical injuries can be very misleading," says Jeffrey Guy, M.D., director of the Vanderbilt Burn Center. "The magnitude of destruction is difficult to quantify."



Jason with wife Jenny Koger

High voltage electricity moves through the body like a bullet, seeking an exit point after it enters, and destroying tissue everywhere it goes. The impact of that tissue destruction can lead to potentially fatal complications, such as kidney failure.

Guy, who speaks with a rapid cadence and who is as disinclined to mince words as his patient Jason, is blunt in his description of what he found when he began surgery on Jason's arms: "The first time I saw him, his arms were mummified. Once we got underneath the burns, it was obvious that the tissue was dead."

Jenny remembers signing the consent forms for Jason's surgery, including the consent to remove his limbs and/or blood transfusion if necessary. As she put it in a video interview that has been viewed 2,000 times on YouTube: "The thought didn't cross my mind, 'Do I sign or not?' I signed. Jason alive without hands, or Jason not here? That's not an option."

(To see the video, go to YouTube and search Jason Koger.)

After the initial treatment, including the amputations, Jason was in a medically-induced coma for three days before his care team brought him back to consciousness. He was unaware, of course, of all that had been going on over those three days, but his family, the Vanderbilt Team and the Owensboro support system had already made him something of a celebrity on the unit.

"I've never quite seen an outpouring like that of friends, community and family," Guy says. "The first floor lobby was filled with people—on a Saturday night."

"For three months after we got home, somebody cooked us dinner, every night, seven days a week," Jenny says. "You can't say enough about Owensboro. [We got help from] church, friends, family, people we didn't even know."

Leslie Rochelle, R.N., an outgoing bundle of positive energy and a four-year veteran of the Burn Center, was also impressed by the strength of Jason's family.

"His family unit is so strong, and they're on the same page," she says. "I came in and said, 'I'm Leslie and, we've got to do some huggin' therapy,'" she says. "He needed to know that this wasn't the end of his life by any means."

There was the severe physical injury and the challenges it brought, of course, but the psychological toll on a young healthy person was on the minds of those caring for Jason, as well. The Burn Center



Jason with Michelle Hilton, burn care specialist.

staff, as in all cases of traumatic injury, began treating Jason for the post-traumatic stress that naturally results.

"He was kind of stoic about what had happened," Guy remembers. "But even when he was still in the hospital he was talking about helping other people."

Those "other people" would eventually be other injured patients, but even in those early days in the hospital, Jason's attitude was infectious.

"He was an encouragement to the nurses and to other patients," Rochelle says. At his discharge, 12 days after his



Jason, an avid hunter, was re-learning how to use a bow within weeks of his injury.

accident, several members of the staff were standing and applauding as he was wheeled out. "Some of them were crying," he recalls. "The Burn Unit is my family. They will always have a place in my heart."

Of course, the discharge from the hospital was just the beginning. Several additional surgeries were required over the next few months. While waiting for the stitches to heal so that he could be fitted with his first prosthetic arms (it took about six weeks), Jason threw himself with a vengeance into learning how to function.

"It's about determination," he says. "I've just never really had the opportunity to just sit on the couch and think, 'Gosh dang, this sucks.'"

Well, actually, he did have that opportunity. He just chose not to.

One of the first things he did when arriving home was change the oil in his lawn mower. It probably needed changing, but more than that, Jason wanted to know he could figure out how. It took hours, but slowly, step-by-step, laboriously manipulating tools however he could, he finished the job.

He also practiced driving his truck on farm roads before he was fitted with his prosthetic arms. He taught himself to aim and fire a gun so that he wouldn't miss any of hunting season, and proudly makes it known he was turkey hunting only a month after his injury.

"Everything's a lot harder than it was," he notes, unnecessarily.

Jenny had given birth to Cambell a few months before Jason was injured. She had returned to work from maternity leave only two days before. She was building a career in marketing and graphic design at Wax Works, a venerable Owensboro music and video company. It was rewarding work, she says, one for which her passion for art and her graphic design major in college had prepared her. But the demands of two small children and a traumatically injured husband were too great; after Jason was hurt, she never returned to her job. She had another job, taking care of Jason's wounds and caring for him much as one would a child. In Jason's words: "She had to become a nurse."

"I would have to feed the baby, feed [toddler] Billie Grace, feed Jason," she remembers. Even though with his prosthetic arms, Jason can now function well and help take care of the children, Jenny says, "I'm still learning how to juggle all three of them, learning when to put what first."

The life of any parent of two small children is one of planning and coordinating, of course, but the spontaneity factor in the Koger household dropped several notches below the average.

"The first time we tried to go anywhere it took four hours just to get everybody ready. I had to give everybody a bath, I had to get everybody dressed, I had to feed everybody," she says.

And even days when there was no excursion outside the house, Jenny was overwhelmed.



Sophisticated i-limbs allow Jason to grip and hold.

"I've never had time to sit and think, 'poor me,'" she says. But not feeling sorry for herself doesn't mean she has forgotten those days: "I wouldn't eat until 10 at night, I wouldn't take a bath for two days."

Jeff Guy seems surprised at how close he has gotten to Jason and Jenny. Doctors, especially surgeons, aren't supposed to do that. "For a physician, it's like exposing a vulnerability."

But he knows why he's allowed the friendship to develop.

"He's a guy who's tough to say no to," Guy says ruefully. "He is inspiring. Whenever I have days that are bad, I focus on Jason and it rebalances."

Guy has had several non-hospital interesting days with Jason. He remembers being invited to a benefit concert being held for Jason in Owensboro—part of that extraordinary community support that Jason and Jenny talk about. Guy took along his 6-year-old daughter Madeline, who is not likely to soon forget meeting Jason: he took one look at the girl, with a smile and held up his arms with their prosthetic hooks, and said, "Look at what your daddy did to me!"

Then there was the trip to Talladega.



Jason had gotten some tickets to the Talladega 500 stock car race, and insisted that Guy and his 10-year-old son Christian accompany him to the race—even if that meant that Jason had to leave in the middle of the night to drive to the track in Alabama, and swing by to pick up Guy and Christian at 6 a.m. on the Sunday of the race.

A long, amazing day. And if Guy says that Jason is on his mind a lot of days, Jason makes it clear that the experience is shared: “I think about Dr. Guy every day,” Jason says. “He helped give me another chance.”

Changing oil, driving, hunting, going to the races—Jason is determined not to be held back. He recently went skydiving for the first time.

“He knows his life has changed,” Guy says. “But he’s moving forward.”

Part of that moving forward is Jason’s efforts to help others who have suffered injuries similar to his. He has worked with the Trauma Survivors’ Network, an organization set up to provide support for victims of traumatic injury, which he says “is going to be a great asset to people like me.” He talks of plans to start a foundation dedicated to helping provide adaptive equipment for hunters with injuries similar to his. Jason’s father speaks optimistically of plans for Jason to return to his former job, managing projects for the family construction business.

Jason is also an avid poster on Facebook, and has pages under his own name (with more than 1,800 friends) and also under Jason Koger Foundation. “I enjoy reading comments. That keeps me going forward,” he says.

Part of going forward is also the ability to laugh. During an interview at his house, Jason jumps up with an evil grin and soon returns to the den to show off a gift he received from his brother-in-law: a T-shirt emblazoned with “Look Ma, no hands!”

Recently, Jason and Jenny, along with Cambell and Billie Grace and their year-old cousin Jozie, whom Jenny was watching this day, hopped on a golf cart to take some visitors around back of the Koger house to the site of the accident. Lucky, the elderly family dog, halfheartedly walks a little way behind the cart and decides the shady carport looks more inviting. Jason expertly guides the cart down the driveway, bumping and swaying left onto the dirt road.

Jason squints in the afternoon sun,



Billie Grace holding Daddy's hand

glancing around the fields that over the years have produced wheat, corn and beans. He looks up and down the farm road and looks at the electric line overhead, now restored to its proper height.

“When I first got home from the hospital, I’d come out here. I’d say, ‘Wow.’ Right before I got to that ditch I had my hands, and then I didn’t.

“One second. One second you’re fine, and then the next you’re not.” As Jenny holds Jozie and the other children mill around in the warm grass, Jason absently reaches down and takes Cambell’s hand with his prosthetic hook.

His wish from the moment he knew his hands were gone has come true. He has lost much, but Jason can hold his girls.

For most purposes, Jason uses prosthetic arms with hooks. When he wakes up most mornings, one of his first jobs is to put on his arms, and he has willing helpers in Billie Grace and Cambell. “I can get up in the morning, throw my arms on, and walk out,” he says.

For other occasions, he has a more complex pair of prosthetic arms, made in Scotland, called i-Limbs. They are

designed with moveable fingers and thumbs, which Jason manipulates by moving his forearm muscles nestled in the hollow of the top of the prosthetics. The hands are designed so that they cannot close too tightly, so that he can even hold hand with the girls without fear of his grip hurting them. Jason uses these less often, even though they are more sophisticated.

“You can’t get ‘em wet and you can’t get ‘em dirty,” he explains, noting that for everyday work use, the hooks do just fine and are less subject to damage.

“There’s Daddy’s hands!” Cambell exclaims when Jason opens the box where the i-Limbs are stored.

“We still have bad days,” Jenny says. “We still get frustrated. But we don’t give up.”

“This could have been worse,” Jason says. “What would the girls do without me? I could have died that day. But God wanted me to have the opportunity to live, to raise my family.”

There’s a story Jason tells (it, too, is on the YouTube video): “One day Billie Grace was going through some pictures and she found one of me with my real hands. And she went up to Jenny and said, ‘Daddy had hands!’” Holding the picture, she ran in and crawled into Jason’s lap and asked what happened to his hands. She listened as he told a child-friendly version of the story, and after all that, she had one question for her father: “Daddy, did you cry?”

Jason tells the story with a big smile. But you know the answer is yes.



fudge, caramel, chocolate and vanilla that brings back childhood memories of simple and easy pleasures.”

Yessir, what lady doesn't want the phrase "simple and easy pleasures" associated with her on a first date?

Now, it's been a while since I've been part of the dating "scene," so I may be a little "out of touch" to the point of being a "total loonball whackjob bozo," but do wearers of cologne or perfume really want to smell like "fudge, caramel, chocolate and vanilla?"

That sounds like what somebody who works the counter at Baskin-

Robbins smells like before they change out of their work uniform.

Of course smelling like a giant Tootsie Roll could not possibly be worse than the situation I find myself in every second or third trip to the grocery store, in which I'm trapped in the checkout line behind a sweet older lady who has apparently just survived a near-tragic plunge into a vat of perfume, was hoisted out by fragrance factory lifeguards, and has yet to begin decontamination procedures.

This is why most supermarkets sell little packs of Kleenex by the register, so you can grab one in a hurry when

you start to sneeze in response to the checkout line olfactory assault.

So here's where I think Play-Doh perfume could be a good thing: if the overly-fragranted supermarket ladies could be persuaded to wear it instead of the powerfully flowery kind that they typically favor, it would be a definite improvement.

Or maybe even convince them to wear a perfume that smells like Junior Mints.

I just made that up. Such a product couldn't possibly exist, could it?

Uh-oh.

Go for the Gold Program kicks off for 2010

■ Go for the Gold, the annual program designed to help faculty and staff learn their health risks and support risk reduction, has been revamped and all three steps are now ready for participation, said Lori Rolando, M.D., MPH, MD, medical director for Health Plus.

"This year we have a new, earlier deadline of Oct. 31 so we are encouraging everyone to get started by visiting the Health Plus website." That site is <http://health-plus.vanderbilt.edu>.

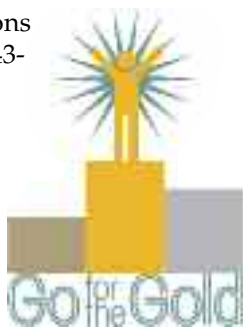
Step One: Complete your yearly Health Risk Assessment to learn your health risks.

Step Two: Complete the Wellness Actions Log that is new and more challenging. Staff and faculty who visit the Wellness Actions Log will be able to start choosing actions to improve or maintain good health.

Step Three: Watch the new Game Plan for Your Health video about maintaining a healthy weight, called "Eat. Move. Feel."

To check your current Go for the Gold status, log in to the Health & Wellness Information Portal at <http://myhealthandwellness.vanderbilt.edu>. All benefits-eligible faculty and staff can complete the Go for the Gold program. Faculty and staff who elect and pay for the Vanderbilt Health Plan benefits in 2011 are also eligible for a wellness credit of up to \$240.

Read the Frequently Asked Questions on the Health Plus website or call 343-8943 for assistance.



New Vanderbilt Clinic Provides Academic Assessments For Students With Learning Difficulties

■ The Learning Assessment Clinic, offered through the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, provides academic assessments for students age 5-25 who are experiencing academic learning difficulties.

"The Learning Assessment Clinic is here to help families find answers about why their child is not doing well in school and what can be done to help," said Sheryl Rimrodt, M.D., Clinic faculty director. "By having experts from specialties in medicine, education and psychology working together on the evaluation, this clinic gives a rich, multidimensional picture of the child's strengths and challenges in skills that affect learning and school performance."

Because every child has unique patterns of cognitive strengths and challenges that affect school performance, she said, strategies to overcome learning problems need to be modified to fit individual needs. The goal of the academic assessment is to help families understand their child's unique pattern of abilities across an array of skills including motor coordination, handwriting, reading, listening, verbal and visual learning, planning, use of strategies, and working memory.

The initial time commitment for parents and students is a full workday and a one-hour return visit for parents two weeks after the assessment.

Parents receive a multidisciplinary written report including interpretation and recommendations specific to their child. Parents may choose to share the reports with teachers, IEP committees, school districts, therapists, tutors, and/or medical professionals to assist parents in advocating for their child's educational needs.

Rimrodt, assistant professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Developmental Medicine, is clinic director. Clinic specialists also include Laurie Cutting, Ph.D., Patricia and Rodes Hart Associate Professor of Special Education; associate professor of Psychology, Radiology, and Pediatrics; and Jaime Below, Ph.D., assistant professor of Pediatrics.

For more information, contact: patty.abernathy@vanderbilt.edu, 936-5118.