“TROPICAL”
2020 Featured Artist Brandon J. Drucker
“24 x 30” on acrylic wrapped canvas

Saturday
November 21st
7:00 PM

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Center for Autism & Related Disabilities

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KW PROPERTY MANAGEMENT & CONSULTING is proud to support the important work of the University of Miami-Nov Southeastern University Center for Autism & Related Disabilities.
Congratulations to our friend Mary Palacio Pike on this well-deserved honor. Your passion and advocacy for this community are an inspiration.

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Raymond James & Associates, Inc., Member New York Stock Exchange, SIPC
Raymond James is not affiliated with UM-CARD, Tropical Nights, or Mary Pike.
Patsy Schmidt is very involved in causes promoting child advocacy, particularly with children on the autism spectrum and those children who have significant medical challenges that are potentially life threatening. She previously served on the board of the Autism Society of Miami-Dade County, and is still an active volunteer and Wish Grantor at the Make A Wish Foundation in excess of 20 years. In her journey to promote inclusiveness, she has taken part in initiatives in her native town of Ponce, Puerto Rico, which includes workshops in community centers and schools to promote an increased understanding of what being on the autism spectrum actually involves.

Patsy is passionate about the mission of UM-NSU CARD and the many lives this worthwhile program has touched in our community, including her son, Ryan and two other children, Andre & Rose. She is pleased to serve as chair this year and to promote the mission of helping families with special needs gain access to services in our community.
Dear Tropical Nights Guests

On behalf of the UM-NSU CARD Constituency Board and the Tropical Nights host committee, we would like to thank you for supporting our 2020 Virtual Tropical Nights. This year has been a year we could never have imagined and one that we will not soon forget. The impact of COVID-19 on our families is like nothing we have ever seen. COVID-19 also had a significant impact on our financial viability as our annual budget was cut by 6%. This represents a significant cut for a program like ours which is already relatively underfunded given our years of constituent growth with no commensurate funding increases. Our program budget is also very lean with nearly 97% of our state budget dedicated to salaries of the clinical and administrative staff needed to fulfill the mission of UM-NSU CARD.

While we anticipated budget cuts due to COVID-19, we had hoped that our program might not suffer any during this fiscal year, especially given our team’s heroic response to serving our community during the pandemic. UM-NSU CARD, like nearly every other aspect of life, was forced to reimagine how we reach our constituents. Fortunately, our determined, creative, and brilliant staff were able to deliver, with considerable effort, nearly all our programming in a virtual format. Remarkably, this format has allowed us to serve even more families than our previous in-person service delivery model. I am very proud of our extraordinary staff who put their hearts and minds into creating this remarkable response to the challenges of COVID-19. The innovation of this programming and the impact it has had truly inspires me.

Over the years, UM-NSU CARD has endured significant financial struggles, but we have always found a way to persevere in order to continue to serve our beloved clients, families, colleagues, and community partners. In fact, through each struggle, we seem to emerge stronger than before, and we are absolutely determined to do so yet again. We are grateful for the steadfast support of our individual, corporate and foundation funders whose generosity sustained us through those previous challenges. We treat every contribution to UM-NSU CARD as an investment in our community’s future, and our careful stewardship of those funds is what allowed us to not only overcome but thrive during difficult moments.

Although we cancelled our live Tropical Nights this past April, we are grateful that all our donors have honored their pledges - and commitment - to our community, clients, and families. Our Constituency Board and event committee have worked diligently to create a unique virtual event for all to enjoy. Congratulations to our friend, Mary Palacio-Pike, Co-Founder of Crystal Academy! Tonight, we celebrate another spectacular year of achievement for UM-NSU CARD. We once again are counting on you to help us reach our goal of $375,000.

With substantial State of Florida revenue losses anticipated into 2021, additional budget cuts are a very real concern. In these uncertain times, fundraising for UM-NSU CARD has become even more critical. With the dollars we raise privately, we can serve thousands of families who need us in South Florida. In fact, it might surprise you to learn that we are serving over 3,000 more families today than we did since our last funding increase from the State of Florida. We can do this because of YOU and the funds we raise through events like Tropical Nights.

Our most sincere gratitude for continuing to walk beside us. We strive to make South Florida a place where people with autism and related disabilities and their loved ones can find the supportive care, understanding, acceptance, respect, dignity, and love they need and deserve.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Alessandri
UM-NSU CARD Executive Director
Brandon J. Drucker was born in Miami Beach, Florida in 1991. He became a professional artist at 18. His art can be described as whimsical Fauvism and is often imaginary animals and places. Brandon’s art is the product of fragmented unfiltered thoughts trapped in his mind with no linear connection. His art communicates how he sees the world around him as an individual living with autism. For Brandon, creating art means exploring the familiar and unknown as observed in his popular series, Combo Cities, Combo Animals, and Combo Languages. He interprets the similarities and differences and paints his representation on canvas for his own understanding. His first book (2014) “Diary of An Autistic Kid, typical random thoughts of a not so typical kid” was written and illustrated when he was 23 and is a collection of his personal experiences of his struggles with relationships and the behaviors that are often seen as a manifestation of autism.

Brandon was inspired by the Tropical Nights’ event name and created “Tropical”, 24" x 30" acrylic wrapped canvas.

The art is based on rainforest featuring some of the animals you would find such as a monkey, frog, iguanas, and birds.

www.BrandonDruckerArtist.com
Congratulations Mary! In 2002, Mary was blessed with the birth of a beautiful son, her angel, David Jr. By the time David Jr. reached 18 months of age, he was not meeting expected milestones and began to show signs of inappropriate behaviors. At the end of 2004, when David Jr. was 2 years old, he was diagnosed with encephalopathy consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The family’s lives changed immediately and dramatically as they focused on raising David Jr., helping to guide him out of the seclusion of autism, as well as trying to provide the most optimal upbringing to his younger brother, Joshua. There were so many challenges and no clear roadmap to success. After years of engaging in a broad spectrum of disparate and seldom cooperative therapy approaches, it became clear that the best hope for David Jr., and other neurologically challenged children, had to be a more holistic and cooperative therapy regime which spanned disciplines and was designed around the child’s needs. Based on this belief, Crystal Academy Therapy Center was founded in August of 2009 and was expanded in 2011 to include the Crystal Academy School. Today, Crystal Academy has served more than 600 families. Part of Crystal’s mission is to continue to form alliances with community agencies and businesses in order to promote community-based instruction opportunities to increase social opportunities and life skills.

Mary currently serves as President and Director of Community Relations for Crystal Academy, where she has been instrumental in helping to create and promote opportunities for special needs children and their families in the Coral Gables area. She was nominated in 2018 for the AXA Advisors Outstanding Educator Award, as well as currently serving as a member of the Coral Gables Advisory Board on Disability Affairs. Under her direction, Crystal Academy has been the recipient of various Proclamations from the City of Coral Gables and the City of Miami. Crystal Academy has also partnered with the City of Coral Gables Government in the production of the Emmy Award Winner for best Documentary, “Embracing Autism, A Coral Gables Story.” Crystal Academy created the very first Autism Awareness event in the City of Coral Gables at the Coral Gables Museum in 2018, and held the first ASD awareness resource event at the City of Miami, MRC Building and Police Headquarters in April 2019. In addition, Crystal Academy has assisted the Coral Gables Youth Center with inclusion opportunities, training and program development. Crystal Academy has been the recipient of several grants from the Coral Gables Foundation and has been featured in Gables Living, the Coral Gables Magazine, the Mayor’s Report and in many articles in the Miami Herald.

Collaboration is the defining focus of Crystal Academy. Mary is proud and blessed to count on UM-NSU CARD not only for the children and families we serve - but also as a supportive and guiding force for our staff. UM-NSU CARD has been instrumental in the success of Crystal Academy, and immeasurably helpful in the evolution of David Jr.’s life. The family has actively participated in every Tropical Nights event since Crystal Academy opened, and Mary has had the pleasure of co-chairing the event. She is humbled and delighted to be recognized with the Cruz-Whitehurst Award at Tropical Nights 2020.
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Thank you to our friends at UM-NSU-CARD for leading by example and empowering those affected by autism in South Florida with valuable programs and services.

Congratulations to tonight’s honoree Mary Palacio-Pike, recipient of the Cruz-Whitehurst Advocacy Award. We owe you a debt of gratitude for your countless contributions to our community.
CANON SOLUTIONS AMERICA IS PROUD TO SUPPORT THE UM-NSU CENTER FOR AUTISM & RELATED DISABILITIES

We are honored to contribute to Tropical Nights 2020 and recognize the support that UM-NSU CARD gives to families affected by autism living in South Florida.

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The Whitehurst Family
lovingly thanks Dr. Michael Alessandri
and the dedicated staff at UM/NSU CARD
for their tireless efforts
on behalf of all our families.

Heartfelt congratulations to

Mary Palacio Pike

for being honored with this year’s

Cruz-Whitehurst Advocacy Award
The Binhak Family proudly supports UM-NSU CARD

Congratulations to this year’s honoree Mary Palacio-Pike! Your passion and dedication has truly made our community a better place for individuals with autism.

The law firm of Cole, Scott & Kissane, P.A., is proud to be a continued sponsor of Tropical Nights, and salutes the leadership, staff and dedicated employees at UM-NSU CARD for their unwavering commitment to South Florida Families and Constituents affected by Autism during these challenging times.
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Drs. Albert & Meaghan Parlade
The Sando Family
Tikvah Center of the Gordon School
Heartfelt congratulations to Mary Palacio-Pike for this well-deserved recognition.

Your motherly love has transformed a community and has made the autism journey so much easier for those following in your guiding footsteps.

With love,
Dr. Michael Alessandri and Luis Grados

Our most heartfelt Congratulations to Mary Palacio - Pike founder and president of Crystal Academy for being the 2020 recipient of the CRUZ - WHITEHURST ADVOCACY AWARD

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Congratulate Tonight’s Honoree
Mary Palacio-Pike

Your passion, dedication, commitment to inclusion and collaborative spirit are unparalleled.

We are overjoyed to see you being recognized for your contributions to the autism community!
We are pleased to join the UM-NSU Center for Autism and Related Disabilities in honoring:

**Mary Palacio-Pike**  
President & Director Of Community Relations for Crystal Academy  
The Cruz-Whitehurst Advocacy Award

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Congratulations to  
Tropical Nights Honoree  
Mary Palacio-Pike!

Thank you Dr. Michael Alessandri and UM-NSU CARD for all you do to support the Intellectual and Developmental Disability community. You are the strength for so many during these uncertain times.

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“Thank you for your service and commitment to empower those affected by autism and related disabilities in our community by providing valuable programs and services.”

Mary Palacio - Pike
founder and president of Crystal Academy, recipient of the

CRUZ - WHITEHURST ADVOCACY AWARD

The greatest satisfaction for parents is seeing their children grow up, knowing their values, achievements and attitudes towards society. Today we celebrate with gratitude and joy the recognition of the effort, dedication and love in all that you do. Receive our love, admiration and respect. Your life fills us with happiness.

Mom and Dad

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The Parladé Family
is proud to support UM-NSU CARD and Tropical Nights!

I am truly grateful for the opportunity to work for you, our UM-NSU CARD families. You inspire me to do better, work harder, and give more. A heartfelt congratulations to Mary Palacio-Pike, your dedication and commitment to our community is truly remarkable.
Lizzie, Blakey & Teddy Sando salute the fearless warriors at UM-NSU CARD for their dedication and commitment to all South Florida Constituents & Families affected by Autism in 2020!
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Thank you Dr. Michael Alessandri and UM-NSU CARD for all you do to support the Intellectual and Developmental Disability community.

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Congratulations to Tropical Nights Honoree Mary Palacio-Pike!
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Mary Palacio Pike

2020 Cruz-Whitehurst Advocacy Award

Congratulations Mary!

Thank you for your dedication to people with autism.

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