

# SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS



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## Solvang-based school Hidden Wings expanding

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Hidden Wings is expanding. The Solvang-based school for young adults with autism is adding new classes and exploring locations and vetting possible partners for new Hidden Wings chapters.

Founders Rev. James and Dr. Julia Billington, both Harvard University honors graduates, established the nonprofit Hidden Wings in the Santa Ynez Valley in 2008. Its mission is to help young adults on the autistic spectrum find a job and a friend. Hundreds of youth from across the country, including two of their own autistic sons, have been students.

Classes have emphasized physical activity like hiking and swimming – and intellectual activity such as digital art – in a predictable environment.

Starting this fall, “We’re combining work with fun, teaching vocational as well as social skills through woodworking, gardening, art, therapeutic drumming and other special projects,” James said. Classes will fill larger blocks of the day and will incorporate community outings like a trip to a nursery to buy succulents.

Earlier this year, Hidden Wings codified its eight years of trial and error into a how-to manual and materials for potential chapters, and hosted informational workshops for potential partners. According to James, each new chapter will be able to use the Hidden Wings 501c3 status but will coordinate its own funding, programming, board of directors, and finances.

Because of the support of Grateful Dead drummer Mickey



STAFF FILE

Rev. James Billington, co-founder of Hidden Wings, bangs on a table drum donated by Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead.

Hart, Hidden Wings was promoted during the Dead’s “Fare Thee Well” tour in 2015, resulting in more than 200 inquiries about starting local chapters.

“Things are humming along at a pace we never anticipated,” James said. For more information, email [jim@hiddenwings.org](mailto:jim@hiddenwings.org).