



## **AWARD: UB professor and town resident one of 67 young scientists honored.**

**By Dave Hill**  
[E-mail Dave](mailto:hilld@gnewspaper.com)

The Tonawanda News

January 04, 2009 11:40 pm

— When Gregory Fabiano was a graduate student at the University at Buffalo, he noticed that dads weren't as involved as the moms were in a program UB was doing to help students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. Fabiano felt the dads weren't coming because the setting wasn't a lucrative one. So Fabiano decided to introduce something fathers would take greater interest in. He helped create a Little League soccer club that taught the kids soccer skills while teaching the dads how to help their children in school and social settings.

Now, Fabiano and his colleagues in UB's Center for Children and Families are using a driving simulator to show ADHD teens — the most at-risk group of drivers — exactly how distractions such as cell phones and text messaging can severely impact their driving skills.

It's that kind of innovative and promising research that landed the Town of Tonawanda resident a prestigious award that included a trip to the White House and a photo-op with President Bush last month. Fabiano, 32, was one of 67 researchers from around the country to receive the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, which recognizes the most promising American researchers in their fields. Fabiano's work centers largely on children with ADHD. He began training in UB's Center for Children and Families in 1998 and graduated from UB in 2005. He was immediately offered a position in the school psychology program. Fabiano talked with News about his research and the award for this week's Q&A.

•••

**QUESTION:** What research have you done on ADHD thus far in your career?

**ANSWER:** The main lines of research that I've been working on include the best ways to work with parents dealing with a child that has difficult to manage behaviors — and in particular — one group is fathers with kids who have ADHD.

We have a program that we developed that creates a sports Little League. It's a soccer Little League where the kids learn the best way to play the sport and get along with the other kids. And the dads go to a brief parenting meeting and then they spend the rest of the time coaching the kids within the context of the sport and practicing strategies that we know are useful not only in the sports context but also in the home or neighborhood settings that the kids may have some struggles in when they leave the program.

•••

**Q:** Why a special program only for fathers? What's unique about their situation?

**A:** Here at the Center for Children and Families at UB, we offer parenting programs almost every night of the week and on Saturdays. When I was in graduate school, one of the things that I noticed was that moms were very good attendees at our programs. They would always show up and follow through and participate. And we have plenty of very dedicated dads but it wasn't necessarily as many as the moms. So we actually asked our families why we don't get as positive participation with the dads as with the moms, and based on some of the feedback they gave us we started to think, well, maybe dads needed a slightly different approach than the kind that's used not only in our place but all over the country for mothers. Through working as a team with some other folks in the center we came up with this program that uses sports as the hook to kind of get fathers and kids involved and helps them maintain participation over a long period of time.

•••

**Q:** When did that program start, and how successful has it been?

A: We started it in the summer of 2000. It's called the "COACHES" program, which stands for Coaching Overactive Children and Heightening Essential Skills. What it involves is the first hour the kids practice soccer skills. The dads at the same time are at a meeting with other fathers where we introduce a parenting strategy, like how to catch their kid being good, how to use time-out. For the second hour we put the dads and kids together for a soccer game and it's like a regular Little League.

But the dad's job is not only to coach and manage the game but to also practice those parenting skills. We've done a whole series of studies, and the results are promising. One thing we found out was that this COACHES program engaged fathers more than a typical classroom based approach that doesn't have parent-child interaction, so the dads showed up more often to the sessions, they did their homework for the parenting class more frequently, and they showed up on time and didn't leave early. We have some recent research that also shows that it improves a child's behavior and a parent's parenting skills, so it does seem to be beneficial for the dads that sign up and participate.

•••

Q: Talk about your most recent project, which involves using a driving simulator.

A: This is a project we're pretty excited about that we're working on with some of our colleagues in the Department of Engineering and Applied Sciences. A teenage driver is by far the most at risk out of anybody in the whole pool of drivers on the road. What we also know is that if you're a teenager with ADHD, you're even more at risk than that already at-risk group. A teenage driver with ADHD is at the top of the heap for all kinds of negative outcomes. What we've developed is a program that involves the parent and teen together that uses innovative technologies to promote safe driving.

We'll have a teen go through a course on the simulator and we'll give them some feedback about how they did. We'll have them go through the same course while trying to send a text message and then we show them a comparison of what they're like as a driver just paying attention to driving and what they're like as a driver with a divided attention task.

•••

Q: What was your reaction to receiving the Early Career award?

A: It was a real humbling experience. I view it as a shared award with all of my collaborators at the center and all the folks that worked on that study because it took a lot of team effort to make that study work.

•••

Q: When did you receive the good news, and how exciting was it for you to be able to share that with your colleagues?

A: It was a real thrill. I was invited to visit the White House to receive the award on Dec. 19. It was a really nice experience. They had people from all over the country who were also receiving the award, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy put on a nice ceremony and presented us with our awards, and then we got a tour of the White House and a chance to meet the president and have a photograph with him at the end of the afternoon. It was the sort of experience you never forget.

•••

Q: How far has ADHD research come and where does it go from here?

A: There's a lot of research that shows that there's basically two treatments that work for ADHD. One is behavior modification, and then you can also use stimulant medication. Over decades, those are the two treatments that consistently show positive effects. I think what the next step is to figure out, can we get those treatments implemented consistently and effectively across home, school and peer group settings in a way that can be maintained? Because now we know that ADHD isn't a disorder that children grow out of. It's a chronic lifelong condition, and if these treatments get put in place only for a couple of months or even a couple of years, that's not going to be good enough. So I think as researchers our next step is to try to figure out how can we maintain these results and positive effects over the long run.

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.