

People First



Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

Summer 2015 News and Information for the OPWDD Community

IN THIS ISSUE



ADA•25

Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

Celebrate equality and inclusion for people with disabilities at West Capital Park in Albany, NY on Friday, 7/24/15, at 12 Noon as New York marks the 25th Anniversary of the ADA.

A Message from the Acting Commissioner

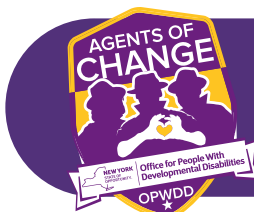
The passage of the ADA changed the way the world viewed people with disabilities and forever changed the lives of people with disabilities, providing them equal access to all areas of life, from employment to enjoyment. As the ADA celebrates 25 years of equality and inclusion for people with disabilities, we must reflect on how we can continue to make strides in this important endeavor.

As you know, the OPWDD is committed to our system transformation to provide better services, more efficiently to people with disabilities based on their specific choices and needs and integrated in their community. We

are committed to an open dialogue with you and part of that includes sharing the information contained in this newsletter so you can follow the system transformation. We hope that you will share this newsletter with others who are interested in reading about OPWDD services and the abilities of people with developmental disabilities, and encourage them to visit www.opwdd.ny.gov to sign up to receive updates. ■

Kerry A. Delaney
Acting Commissioner

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Don't forget to plan your trip to the Great NYS Fair from August 27-September 7 and stop by the OPWDD booth to become an "agent of change" and accept your "mission"...



A not-so-puzzling business venture....

When dawn broke on World Autism Day this year, so did a new opportunity for people with developmental disabilities in the workplace. That opportunity is called Puzzles, a bakery/cafe in downtown Schenectady that serves-up soups, sandwiches, baked goods and an integrated workforce. The business is the brain child of Sara Mae Hickey, a bright, entrepreneurial 25-year-old who has a younger sister on the autism spectrum whom she credits with being her inspiration.

More than half of Hickey's 20-person workforce has a diagnosis of a developmental disability, primarily Autism, and she hopes to expand that number after the incredible interest she received from applicants, some with college degrees, some in the culinary program at Schenectady County Community College and others who had never held a job before. Some say it was the first time they admitted to having Autism in a job interview having previously feared it would count against them.

"More than half of our employees do have special needs," Hickey said,

"We try not to draw distinctions between who does and who doesn't."

Olivia Elmore, a recent Guilderland High School graduate and shift leader at Puzzles, has been working there since it opened and loves her job. Elmore, who has two brothers on the autism spectrum, says the number of job applicants shows there is a real need for employment for people with special needs.

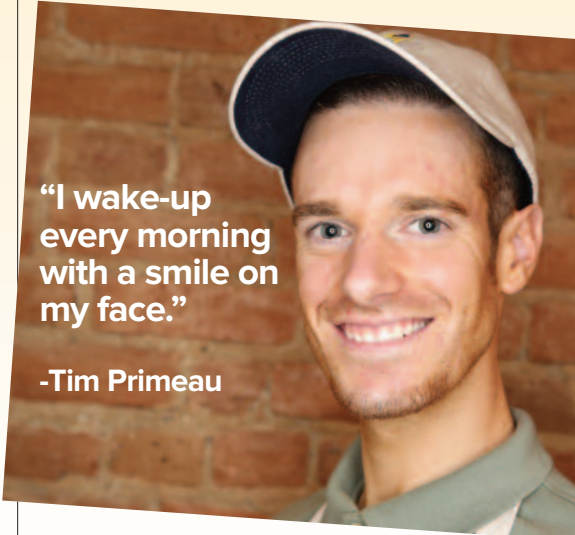
"I think about my brother, Hayden, who's 16, and he might be looking for a job soon and it's nice that this is something that's happening and growing," Elmore said. She says it's a great atmosphere to work in and says the staff has become one big family.

Hickey hopes her efforts will inspire other employers to follow her lead.

"I think there is a real need to consider employing individuals with developmental disabilities. I think that, at least from my experience, our employees are some of the best employees you could ask for," Hickey said.

It's a win-win situation for both employer and employee according to Hickey.

"I know that almost all of our staff, they come to work on time, they are thrilled to be here. They are making connections with all the employees and customers and they are just so happy to be part of what we're doing and that's all an employer can ask for. They really put their best foot forward. They're very hard working, I mean, I've been extremely happy with our employees." ■



"I wake-up every morning with a smile on my face."

-Tim Primeau

A Generation of Change...

July 26th, 2015 marks the 25th anniversary of the signing of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Since the groundbreaking legislation was enacted in 1990, we have witnessed change not only in physical environments, but in the inclusion of all Americans no matter what their ability.

Events marking the occasion are being held this summer throughout the nation. New York State will be marking the occasion as well with a celebration at the state Capitol in Albany. **We invite you to join us in West Capitol Park on July 24th at noon for music, fun and to hear the words of those whose lives were impacted by the passage of the ADA.**

About the ADA:

The ADA is the groundbreaking civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, promotes accessibility to jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The ADA was the world's first comprehensive law guaranteeing equal rights to people with disabilities. The ADA has expanded opportunities for Americans with disabilities by reducing barriers, changing perceptions and increasing full participation in community life. Soon after its passage, governments around the world began writing and enacting their own laws guaranteeing rights and access to people with disabilities. ■



ADA 25
AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT 1990-2015



Integrated Business Models for Sheltered Workshop Providers

In May, OPWDD invited sheltered workshop providers to take part in a full-day discussion about how sheltered workshops can transform into integrated business models. We heard from multiple providers, individuals and family members about their concerns and everyone provided very thoughtful and valuable feedback that will assist us as we draft solid recommendations for providers preparing to convert their workshop settings to integrated business opportunities. Draft recommendations will be completed by fall and we will be bringing these recommendations to you in multiple ways – such as regional meetings, webinars and online - so that you can provide your feedback before they are finalized. We recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to assisting individuals with meeting their employment goals. We hope that with an interactive partnership we can develop solutions to achieve our mutual goals of finding appropriate, integrated opportunities for every individual with a disability consistent with federal law and respecting each person's needs and choices. We look forward to working with you through this process and we hope that you will take part so that we can provide the most comprehensive guidance possible to providers to help them achieve an integrated business model that is compliant with federal regulations. ■



Journey Raises Money for Scholarships

John Robinson of Our Ability and his team of riders completed their trek from Buffalo to Albany along the Erie Canal to highlight the abilities of people with disabilities. The 13 day, 350+ mile Journey Along the Erie Canal has come to an end, but it's not too late to show your support by making a donation to the scholarship fund for Students with Disabilities, visit <http://www.ourability.com/journey-erie-canal/>. ■

Dave's Story



Dave at a book signing event

Dave Licht, who is 26 and lives in North Tonawanda, is able to live his dream as an author, businessman, traveler, student and creative genius thanks to his self-directed services through OPWDD. Having self-direction gives Dave the flexibility to choose the supports he wants, as well as who will provide that support. Dave owns Dave's Design Studio where he provides photography, video, graphic design, special projects and digital conversion.

"My dream started in 2006 when I took graphic design classes in high school," Dave said. It was here, he said, that his "overactive imagination blossomed." He earned good grades and he loved the work.

Dave had already been using creative writing to express himself when he first wrote Space Dogs in the late 1990s, a series about animals who live in outer space. He began a second series for tweens called 'Detective Kids', where he achieved his first real

success. Since the turn of the new millennium he has written drafts of eight books, and published the first in the series in paperback in 2013 (available from local bookstores) and an e-book version available online (Amazon, Barnes and Noble, ESTY, etc.) An audio version is scheduled to come out later this year. He is working on finalizing the second book in the series for publication. The ideas for his books come from all aspects of Dave's life – people he meets, local and national news, television, web articles, etc.

Following his graduation from high school, Dave enrolled in the Millard Fillmore College at SUNY Buffalo where he completed the Entrepreneurship Certificate Program in 2013. During that program, Dave learned entrepreneurial skills including marketing, creating a business plan and creating financial controls.

When New York State approved his business plan for Dave's Design Studio, Dave was able to combine his creative graphic arts skills with his love for writing. As a businessman he pays his own rent, taxes and business expenses. His self-direction plan provides him with people who can support him socially and professionally.

Dave is quick to say that he has been able to accomplish so much because of the great support he has received. He mentions specifically his service coordinator, friends his broker, members of his planning team, and most important, his parents. "They [my



Cover of Detective Kids

parents] have always been my greatest supporters and advocates," Dave said. "They [really the whole team] understand my needs and my goals and they are willing to fight for me, even when sometimes I don't have the fight in me."

So what advice can Dave offer for others? "Follow your heart and follow your dreams. If you do, you can accomplish anything!"

You can learn more about Dave and his accomplishments by visiting his website <http://davesdesignstudio.com/> or his Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/authoravidlicht> ■



Marketing materials Dave brings to book signings

Dolly and Charee Dunkin's dynamic duo!



Dolly Leggett, of Washington Mills, NY, began working at a Dunkin Donuts coffee shop in New Hartford in October 2009, where she does the dishes, wipes down tables, cleans the bathrooms and washes the door windows. Two months after joining the Dunkin team, she met a new employee, Charee Dunkentell, and the two became fast friends. Charee decided she would make a career at Dunkin Donuts and was named manager in February 2012.

Charee was reassigned to head a different branch, and immediately submitted a request to corporate headquarters to bring Dolly with

her to the new location. The two women worked in the new location for 10 months, when Charee was asked to transfer back to her original location. Her response: I'd be happy to, if I can bring Dolly with me.

When asked why she wanted to keep Dolly as a part of her team, Charee explained first that Dolly has the work skills she looks for in a good employee – strong work ethic, reliable, flexible, and thorough. She also felt strongly that in order to be successful, Dolly needed someone to look out for her. For example, Charee said, “Dolly is diabetic. If someone didn't

know that, Dolly could have a tendency to be tempted by the sweet treats that are detrimental to her health. Our whole team looks out for her.”

Charee said that among Dolly's greatest strengths is her flexibility and willingness to try new tasks. In addition to cleaning, she organizes supplies, assembles “Joe” bags (coffee supplies) and assembles Joe boxes. “While Dolly has special needs, she has far more capabilities than people think,” Charee said. “I can tell when Dolly isn't here because of the quality of the work. Dolly's work is impeccable.”

“I know I can always talk with Charee about anything I need,” Dolly said. “She is good to me and I like working here.” For Dolly, working at Dunkin Donuts has many benefits – steady employment, a competitive wage, and satisfaction for a job well done. Perhaps the greatest benefit of all is the support of a supervisor who values her skills and supports Dolly in reaching her goals. ■



We Want to Hear from You!

Send us your story ideas, events, pictures and artwork for the chance to be featured in the People First newsletter.

Mail to: Communications Office, NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, 44 Holland Avenue, Albany, NY 12229 or email: Communications.Office@opwdd.ny.gov. You can also follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NYSOPWDD>. ■

On the Move with Travel Training



Getting where you want to go, when you want to go, and easily, is an important part of community participation. The sense of freedom and quality of life provided by self-directed mobility; whether by public transit, carpooling or other methods, can provide an important benchmark for community inclusion.

Travel Training is a program some local agency providers offer that gives one-on-one instruction on different ways to get around town to individuals with developmental disabilities. One such provider is YAI in New York City. Stephanie Rozanski oversees all staff training for the day habilitation department at YAI. She says travel training takes about 15 weeks on average. It begins with a few basic skills like street crossing, learning routes and identifying landmarks. These tasks can develop further into use of public transportation including recognizing transit stops, understanding when to get on and off and problem solving. Rozanski says travel training opens up a world of possibilities for people with developmental disabilities.

“There are so many more opportunities if you can travel on your own...employment...just being able to do things that you want to do at your own pace,” Rozanski said.

Lisa Kornegay has been a travel trainer with YAI for the past 8 years. In that time, she has trained more than 60 individuals in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. Kornegay says the growth and benefits extend beyond just being able to get where you’re going. “The whole training is so beneficial and it’s just so needed. It opens so many doors and it builds confidence which leads to other successes,” Kornegay said.

“It’s an excellent experience,” said Tanzanika Ellerbe, who worked with Kornegay to receive training about two years ago. Ellerbe has been with YAI since 2001, but it was not until she learned to travel independently that she was eligible for the community based program at the volunteer site and her part-time job in Bayside. In addition to getting around for work and volunteering, she often makes trips to the store by herself. Travel training has been a liberating experience for Ellerbe “I feel pretty good. I’m able to do more. I do a lot more stuff than I usually do in a van.”

You can find out more about Travel Training at YAI at <http://www.yai.org/services/day-services/day-services-individual-travel-training-1.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/> or you can contact your local service provider for more information on Travel Training programs they may offer. ■

Travel Tips:

- Always stay to the right on the sidewalk and when walking up and down stairs.
- Look for the “walking person” to cross the street.
- Listen for announcements.
- If you wish to stand on an escalator, stand to the right. The left hand side is for people who wish to walk up.
- Always let people off the train or bus before trying to get on.
- Pay attention to surroundings so you don’t miss your stop.
- Ask the conductor or bus driver if you have any questions.
- Sit in front by the driver.
- The safest place to board a train is at the Conductor’s board which is a white and black striped board usually near the center of the platform. This indicates where the Conductor will stop when the train pulls into the station. They have control of the train doors and will be able to hold them open longer for those with ambulatory issues, offer assistance with directions and call for help in a medical emergency. ■



Be a Peer Mentor

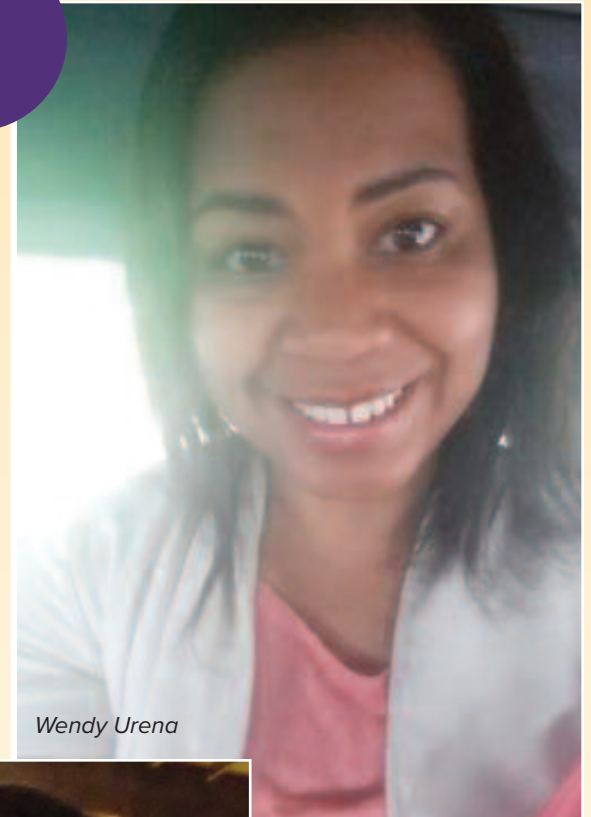
New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) is looking for individuals to serve as peers, sharing their own stories and helping others to move from an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) and Developmental Center (DC) or nursing home into a community setting.

NYAIL is working with the OPWDD on a program called Money Follows the Person (MFP). The MFP program provides peer support and transition services to help people do what they want to do and live where they want to live after they leave institutional settings.

Peers are people with developmental disabilities who have lived in places such as ICFs and DCs and are now living in the community in individual homes and small Individual Residential Alternatives (IRAs). Peers use their personal experience to show that community living is possible.

Peers, along with Transition Specialists who assist with the transition planning process, meet with people with developmental disabilities, their advocates and family members to discuss transition options and make sure that the person transitioning understands what is going on and can make informed choices about their lives. The peer meets with the person throughout the discharge planning and transition experience. Since the peer has already been through the process, they can use their own experience to help others.

In late June, two peers visited Albany from Bronx Independent Living Services (BILS) to share their personal stories. Crystal Rivera and Wendy Urena are leading by example and showing that transition and community living are possible with the right networks and supports. They spoke at the MFP Stakeholders Meeting in June about their experiences working with the program. Crystal remarked “I visit people in nursing facilities and provide hope. I do a lot of listening. I also help people feel better about transitioning by sharing my own story and showing them that having a disability does not mean you cannot live the life you want. I really enjoy doing this. It’s such a great feeling knowing that you helped make someone else’s day a bit easier. Everyone should have access to these services.” Wendy commented, “For the first time, I spoke up as a peer to help other people with disabilities and traumatic brain injuries. I’ve



Wendy Urena



Crystal Rivera

overcome a lot to finish college education and I live on my own in an apartment.”

There are opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to be hired as paid peers by their local Independent Living Center. Peers complete a paid training and learn skills such as how to share their stories to help others. If you are interested in becoming a peer, please contact

ZGarafalo@ilny.org or call 518-465-4650 ext. 106. Family members can also help if they have a loved one that has transitioned to the community and would like to help other families going through this process. ■



State Provides Budget Increase for People with Developmental Disabilities

Thanks to the leadership of Governor Cuomo, the 2015-2016 budget provided a 3.2 percent increase towards services and supports for people with developmental disabilities.

The budget provides \$124 million to develop needed supports and services ranging from employment and day services to residential opportunities for people who need 24-hour services. Four million dollars of this funding will be specifically targeted to helping individuals living at home with caregivers who can no longer support them and need residential supports. To assist in OPWDD's ongoing efforts to help individuals move from developmental centers and intermediate care facilities to homes in the community, the budget commits another \$42 million to developing needed community services.

OPWDD has also received \$177 million from the federal Balancing Incentive Program which will allow us to make system-wide improvements to enhance services and supports in the community. With this funding, OPWDD is working with providers to support innovative practices ensuring that people can live and work in the community, supporting our system's transition to managed care, and enhancing the delivery system through the use of technology and data.

Recognizing that access to and availability of transportation is a significant obstacle to community living, the budget gives OPWDD the resources to examine and recommend improvements to transportation services so that people can live in the most integrated settings possible and have access to work and other activities in their communities.

The budget also provides resources to support a salary increase for direct care, support, and clinical staff of non-profit agencies which follows on the heels of another increase provided in last year's budget that went into effect in early 2015.

As recommended in the enacted budget, OPWDD will issue reports by the close of the fiscal year to ensure that you are aware of our progress on future housing and service needs, recommendations of the Transformation Panel, Front Door process improvements, review of our residential registration list and efforts to assist individuals in their transition from sheltered workshops. ■

Transforming Together

A Transformation Panel was called together by the Acting Commissioner in early March 2015 to discuss several issues faced by New York's system of supports for people with disabilities. The group, which includes individuals, family members, advocates, provider association leaders and agency executives, has addressed the need for more modern and sustainable models of care and is exploring paths that will lead to real opportunities for people with disabilities, always mindful of those with higher levels of need. As the system evolves, the goal is to help people transition from workshops to work, from institutional settings to community settings, and from exclusion to acceptance – all the while providing them with the services and supports they want and need.

In a brief period, the panel has met nine times and engaged on a variety of issues—including self-direction, housing, employment and managed care. They are scheduled to meet a few more times to examine challenges around the issues of managed care and long-term sustainability. The panel is asked to provide clear and achievable recommendations to guide our path forward.

To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in this discussion, the panel will host forums statewide in September to encourage meaningful dialogue, discussion and input. The panel will review the public recommendations gathered at the forums, through email and other feedback, and make final recommendations by November.

This is an important step in planning for the future of supports and services and we hope that you will take part in the process. ■

Volunteers Help City of Rome Preserve History



Mayor Joseph Fusco, center, honored this year's Community Excellence Award recipients, l to r, Debbie Koenig, Jeremy Deyo'Orlowski, Phetsamone (Phet) Keoviengsamay, Deborah Leonard and Mely Nanthasene.

Phetsamone (Phet) Keoviengsamay, Jeremy Deyo'Orlowski, Mely Nanthasene and Deborah Leonard along with volunteers from OPWDD State Operations Office 2's Job Connections, gather in Rome Mayor Joseph Fusco's office once a week to review local newspapers and magazines, catalogue articles and create scrapbooks that beautifully capture the happenings of the city.

In recognition of their service, Mayor Fusco this year awarded the four with the City's Community Excellence Award for Outstanding Service to the People of the City of Rome. Deb Koenig, a retiree of Job Connections, volunteers to accompany the individuals on this and other projects, and she was recognized as well.

Each year at the State of the City address, the mayor presents awards to area citizens or businesses who have contributed to improving the quality of life for the community. Mayor Fusco singled out this group because of the important contributions they have made to retaining and preserving Rome's history and

heritage. At the completion of his term as Mayor, the scrapbooks will be presented to the Rome Historical Society and "remain forever here in Rome."

"I liked helping Mayor Fusco to make Rome alive again." Jeremy said. "I told the mayor I am going to be the next mayor!"

Deborah said. "It was a tough job to put together. We had to find and pick the right articles and then cut them out. I was surprised when I heard I was getting an award from the mayor. I was excited to show my parents. They were very proud

of me and my hard work."

Phet shared Deborah's excitement. "It was a good honor and I was surprised that I received an award," he said.

"I was surprised, excited and nervous when I found out I was getting an award," Mele said. "My mom came to watch and was so excited. She took pictures to send to my sister. I like my scrapbooking group."

The City of Rome employs individuals from Job Connections as seasonal employees, and hosts many events to recognize other volunteer work such as maintaining the grounds and flowers at the local 911 monument and fire hall, and helping local senior citizens by cutting their lawns and shoveling their walks if they cannot do so themselves. ■



Mayor Fusco visits with Mele, Jeremy, Deborah, and Phet as they work on their scrapbooks.

Accessing



Planning your summer activities and looking for accessible recreational opportunities? The New York State Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (IRRC) can help!

The IRRC was made possible through a grant by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) awarded to SUNY Cortland Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies Department to increase access to recreation programs and facilities across New York State so that people of all abilities can enjoy recreation opportunities how and where they choose. The center is headquartered at SUNY Cortland, and focuses on inclusive recreational activities. Partners in the Center are the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, I Love NY Tourism Dept., NYS Recreation and Park Society, NYS Therapeutic Recreation Association, the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation, the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Self-Advocacy Association of NYS and Parent to Parent of NYS.

The IRRC helps programs and facilities assess their physical and programmatic accessibility. The results are then listed in an online database that you can view to make your plans. Each entry provides a description of the program or

facility, location, contact information, and specific information about its physical and programmatic accessibility.

Entries are collected for the database largely by trained volunteers who attend IRRC's Inclusion U where they learn skills to become an inclusivity assessor. Facilities and programs seeking to improve their accessibility can contact the IRRC for technical assistance to increase inclusion of people with disabilities and other differences into their parks, programs, or facilities.

If you have questions or need assistance with exploring and choosing community recreation resources for inclusion, you can contact the IRRC via email or telephone. Email: InclusiveRec@cortland.edu Phone: (607) 753-4833 Web Address: www.InclusiveRec.org

IRRC doesn't only promote accessible summer activities – be sure to check out facilities and activities all year long! Enjoy!

SUMMER HAPPENINGS

The long, harsh winter is just a frigid memory and the sun, surf and sand of summer is upon us. This season opens up a host of outdoor activities and events in New York State.

Check out these sites for a look at just some of what the great Empire State has to offer for the Summer of 2015!

As always, a good starting point is loveny.com for a look at places to go, things to do, places to stay and summertime events.

Stepping out into the great outdoors for your summer vacation? Take a look at the NYS Department of Parks & Recreation and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation sites for information on state parks, historic sites, campgrounds, beaches, swimming, golf courses and a host of other outdoor activities.

Thoroughbred season will be in full swing. Check out the New York Racing Association site for the latest info on Saratoga, Belmont and Aqueduct.

Find the latest on road conditions before you head out for that summer trek at the NYS Department of Transportation and NYS Thruway Authority sites.

Surf to the NYS Department of Agriculture site for a listing of county fairs and farmer's markets.

And don't forget about the Great New York State Fair in August with concerts, events, food, competitions and so much more. ■

Get a free pass to fun and the great outdoors this summer!

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation are offering the Individual Access Pass, which permits a resident of New York State with certain disabilities, free or discounted use of parks, historic sites and recreational facilities operated by the two agencies. For more about the pass and an application go to: <http://nysparks.com/admission/documents/AccessPassApplication.pdf> ■

(from left to right: Mary Nicolls, Donna Garone, Tina Troxler, Joan Hoppe, Kathy Brady, Richard Whitbeck, Stella Korotchen, Ashley Caridi, Fran Braun, Michelle Giuliano and Bill Phillips.



Lasagna Cook Off: The Oven Mitts Are Off!

By Dave Robbins, Management Support Administrator, DDRO 5

Photos by Wil Chou

Richard Whitbeck's idea of holding a contest to establish bragging rights once and for all for the "Best Region 5 Lasagna Recipe" was wildly popular. Within hours, ten fearless kitchen warriors stepped forward eager to compete.

Long Island has a rich and diverse multi-cultural heritage that blends generations of remarkable cuisines into a Long Island gumbo all of its own. Richard, a DDPS1 with the Long Island Capital and Technical Support Unit, decided to zero in on Lasagna, the perfect one-dish meal.

A date (April 13th) was set and tickets were sold to offset expenses with profits to benefit the Long Island DDRO 5 Human Relations Committee. Ticket holders were designated as judges. All you needed to qualify as a judge was a ticket, an opinion and a mouth. The event was an immediate sell-out.

All Lasagnas were prepared by participants at their homes (during off hours) and brought in and reheated on the day of the Cook

Off. The multi-purpose room was magically transformed into a Neapolitan cafe. The judges were served ten tiny 1½ inch squares of lasagna, each identified with a different colored toothpick. Judges voted for their favorites by toothpick color, since the identities of the chefs were initially withheld.

It should be noted there were no losers. The real winners were the bloated judges and the Human Relations Committee. First Place went to Ashley Caridi (LMSW1), for her incomparable Butternut Squash Lasagna. She was awarded a trophy and a large basket of culinary cheer. Second place went to Tina Troxler (SWA 2), who prepared a most excellent traditional Lasagna. Honorable Mention went to Michelle Giuliano (DDPS 1) and Fran Braun (Calculations Clerk 2) who collaborated on another superb traditional offering.

Bravo! Magnifico! The success of the Cook Off has sparked suggestions for future competitions: perhaps a cookie contest or a pie making tournament is in the works. Stay tuned for an update. ■



The Champion Dish: Ashley's Butternut Squash Lasagna





Hudson Valley Athletes to Represent NYS in Special Olympics World Games

On July 20, it was wheels up for eleven athletes and three coaches from the Hudson Valley region as they left to represent New York State on Team USA for the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles from July 25-August 2.

And you can have a front row seat for this historic event, as the Special World Games will be broadcast daily. The opening ceremony will be broadcast live on ESPN co-hosted by Robin Roberts from ABC's "Good Morning America" and ESPN's Lindsey Czarnecki and Kevin Negandhi. ESPN, ABC or ESPN2 will air daily coverage of the weeklong event including features and key results from the competition.

Seven thousand athletes and 3,000 coaches representing 177 countries, along with 30,000 volunteers and an anticipated 500,000 spectators will be on hand for what Special Olympics New York says will be the largest sports and humanitarian event anywhere in the world in 2015, and the single biggest event in Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games.

New York State's athletes will compete in two events – tennis and unified basketball.

Be on the lookout for OPWDD's fall edition of People First to meet New York's athletes and hear first-hand about their experiences.

Poems by John Judson Roe IV

Pleasant Memories

Remembering how your story began
 On this happy day,
 So many years ago my friend
 Hoping this next year
 Brings you new adventures
 Of happiness
 And that you always know
 How good it is to see
 The individual you've become
 Can't wait to see
 Where life will take you next.

Brighter Side of Life

When a situation gets you down
 And, all you want to do is frown,
 Don't give up because if you do
 Then you have lost
 But if you carry on
 Things can get better
 Because there is always a brighter side of life
 And a way out of the situation
 All you have to do is
 Try.

A Real Gift Toward All

Your smile is so often a precious gift to all
 It can bring great joy to a person
 Winter, spring, summer or fall.
 This smile you display is so often a treat
 For each and every single person you meet.