Independent Living, Inc.

People 1st

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A Few Words from Executive Director Doug Hovey

On this past Independence Day, I had a chance to reflect on the meaning of the word “independence.” We often define independence as self sufficiency or self reliance, but I realized that true independence is rarely achieved without the help of others at least somewhere along the way. In this issue, we recognize just how important interaction is in the quest for independence. We’ve hosted conferences that shared valuable information and fostered new ideas. And now we are taking the quest for independence in a whole new direction, together.

Ironically, the upward momentum we will soon experience will come from our lower floor. We will soon begin a project that will turn the presently vacant bottom floor into a thriving hub of activity. Since we have a knack for recognizing potential in people it seems particularly fitting that we will be developing the potential of an existing space as well. Right now it looks empty, but it will soon be filled with spirit, life and hope.

We could not accomplish our goals without the consistent support of our community. Through the help of Senator William Larkin, we are beginning the renovation with $250,000 of public funds. We also have been awarded tax credit funding from the Empire Zone up to $164,000.

CONFERENCE CONNECTIONS

Independent Living, Inc. is proud to have hosted two recent conferences that brought organizations and professionals together to meet, exchange ideas and foster even greater cooperation as we work together to achieve similar goals. Here are some highlights and photos.

Nolly Climes Honored at 8th Annual Orange County Mental Health and Wellness Conference; VESID Assistant Commissioner Spoke on Employment.

Two hundred service providers and consumers attended the 8th Annual Orange County Mental Health and Wellness Conference sponsored by Independent Living, Inc., the Orange County Wellness Task Force, the NY State Office of Mental Health and the Orange County Department of Mental Health on June 25th at Anthony’s Pier 9 in New Windsor. Orange County Wellness Task Force recognized Nolly Climes, Rehabilitation Support Services, Inc.’s Program Director for Orange County, for his leadership and unwavering dedication to wellness and recovery.

Edward Placke, Ed.D, Assistant Commissioner of the New York State Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), spoke in a keynote address about the challenges as well as initiatives underway that are designed to close the employment gap for people with disabilities, in particular those confronting mental health issues. Dr. Placke opened the floor for a lively exchange on subjects ranging from benefits and work opportunities for people with mental health disabilities to services for students transitioning from high school to adulthood.

Conference attendees also participated in workshops developed and delivered by experts in a variety of fields.

Remembering the 3rd Annual Early Childhood Development Conference

“Human service providers . . . [have] . . . not a maintenance job but an opportunity to spark growth. You can set the stage for a meaningful future for a child, or not. Every day you work with a child is an opportunity to make their life better.” said International consultant, Guy Caruso.

Read more about this conference on page 3.

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Renee Brenner (IL Staff), speaking with Natasha Tomlins of Parents Run AMOC (Autism Move-A-Thon of Orange County)

Jessica Manson, Discovery Toys

L-R with the plaque are Nolly Climes, Doug Hovey, Tara York and Chris Ashman, Orange County Commissioner of Mental Health
THE WAY SIGN LANGUAGE IS PERCEIVED SPEAKS VOLUMES

Although it has been a language within the Deaf Community for centuries, American Sign Language (ASL) only really came into the eye of mainstream America in the 1980’s. That’s when activists began to speak out about what’s really going on in the Deaf Community.

Since then, the way people view the Deaf Community has evolved.

The pathological perspective is the outsider’s view of the Deaf Community. It sees Deaf people as different from non-Deaf people and generally perceives those differences in a negative manner. When seen from this perspective, most Deaf people have something wrong with them that can and must be cured or “fixed”. Unfortunately, many non-Deaf professionals, organizations and systems that have been established to provide people who are Deaf with supportive services shared this perspective. It is easy to see how such a distorted view could lead to paternalistic and oppressive behaviors and attitudes towards Deaf people and Deaf culture.

In sharp contrast is the cultural perspective that sees the Deaf Community as a group of people whose primary means of relating to the world is visual. The cultural perspective looks at the Deaf Community as a distinct culture where people share a common language that is visually received and produced with gestures. This point-of-view recognizes that the Deaf culture has evolved right alongside the “hearing culture,” and that there are thoughts, feelings, struggles and vision that are unique to this cultural entity.

Independent Living, Inc. is committed to changing the way the Deaf Community is perceived by continuing to champion the cultural perspective and by acknowledging the accomplishments of the Deaf Community as having its own forms of artistic expression, history and folklore.

Per the 2000 Census, there are 28 million Americans who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing - 10% of the population.

VOTING MACHINE UPDATE FOR THE 2008 ELECTIONS

After years of delays and lawsuits, every county in the state must, by law, order one accessible voting machine for every polling site for the primary election on September 9, 2008. This means that voters with disabilities will finally be able to vote at their neighborhood polling site on a machine that will offer them privacy and independence.

Every county in the state has selected an accessible machine for the fall elections and is in the process of ordering them. Nearly all the counties will be using Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) that have accessible features for people with disabilities so that they can vote privately and independently by using the machine to mark their ballots. They have accessible features such as the ability to listen to a ballot with headphones, change the contrast or size of the machine’s display as well as a variety of options to mark the ballot.

These machines will be available in addition to all the lever machines until 2009.

The choice of machines strongly suggests that by 2009 most of the state will move to a paper-based system where a paper ballot is counted by a scanner. Sequoia ImageCast is the machine of choice for most counties and is a new BMD that has yet to be used in a U.S. election.

It appears that most counties will want to continue to use the Ballot Marking Devices purchased this year in 2009 and beyond. The judge has ruled that full replacement of lever machines must be made by Sept. 2009.

ANNE MILLER
NEW DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Anne Miller has been named Independent Living, Inc.’s new Director of Development. Ms. Miller was formerly Assistant to Independent Living, Inc.’s executive director as well as the director of development. “In the year that Ms. Miller has been with us, she quickly grasped the philosophy that guides us as well as the culture that surrounds us. We were happy to promote someone from within our ranks for this key position,” commented Executive Director Doug Hovey when announcing the promotion.

Among her responsibilities in this new role is encouraging support for Independent Living, Inc. through grants, community activities and a soon-to-be-launched capital campaign. Anne brings skills and abilities that she developed in the corporate world as Marketing Vice President for an educational publisher.
BUILDING ON THE PAST, RENOVATING FOR TOMORROW.

As our programs and services have grown, we have a growing need for a place to gather, exchange ideas and provide training for staff, consumers, other service providers and the community.

Welcome to the ground floor of a vision that is about to become a concrete reality. What is now 5,000 square feet of unused storage space here at our building at 5 Washington Terrace in Newburgh is about to be transformed into the new Mid Hudson Disability Training, Technology and Conference Center. The Center will accommodate a wide variety of events and activities in its large conference suite with break-out areas and classrooms, 8-10 offices, a demonstration area for durable medical equipment and assistive technology, a lounge area and fully accessible restrooms.

It won’t happen by magic. It will take hard work and dedication and we can’t wait to begin.

Our plans are to build a state-of-the-art facility where we will host a broad range of activities aimed at improving the quality of life for people with disabilities as well as those who are economically disadvantaged and/or disconnected from employment. That means senior citizens, area businesses, employers, educators, parents, advocates, therapists and other healthcare and human service professionals. In today’s economy, the number of people we reach is large. And it’s growing. Tomorrow, baby boomers will reach retirement age in numbers so vast they have been described as a “demographic tsunami”. They’re no longer leaving the community for warmer climates. Trends show that seniors will stay at home and “age in place”. We were among the first to look to the horizon, recognize this growing need and start viable programs to get ready.

In fact, our agency has consistently demonstrated leadership in engaging in progressive dialogue and in paving the way for new possibilities and unprecedented opportunities for people with disabilities. This new training facility will empower individuals with disabilities and their families and will be instrumental in changing attitudes about people with disabilities of all ages.

ONE GOOD CLICK DESERVES ANOTHER!

Goodsearch.com gives back to Independent Living, Inc.

If you make goodsearch.com your web browser, you’ll be helping Independent Living, Inc. as well. Every time someone uses the site, we receive a small donation. Just log on to www.goodsearch.com, select Independent Living, Inc. from the pulldown menu to ensure we are the non-profit recipient and follow the prompts that will make it your new web browser.

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The faith our community has in us and the funds that have been so generously assigned to this project will be used to help people develop the skills they need to continue to participate in the community. You can read about this project inside this newsletter, hear more about it during its development and hopefully see that helping individuals remain independent helps the entire community stay strong, vibrant and committed.

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On Wednesday, June 11th, the Mid-Hudson Regional Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) at Independent Living, Inc. and the Orange County Provider Coalition, a group of professional individuals and agencies that provides therapeutic and educational services to children with developmental delays/disabilities, hosted the 3rd Annual Early Childhood Conference.

The conference successfully united parents, child care providers, service providers, and early childhood professionals from Orange, Ulster, Dutchess and Sullivan counties to facilitate a continuing dialog among all the partners in a child’s education.

International consultant, Guy Caruso offered participants immeasurable insights in an inspirational address to the group. He struck a familiar and sensitive chord when he remarked that “institutionalization is not the answer either for children with disabilities or anyone else in society. When people with disabilities are isolated/excluded, both they and those without disabilities are deprived of the skills, knowledge, experience and joy that result from the inter-relationship.” A variety of workshops also provided education and an exchange of information.
Our Mission

Independent Living, Inc., a consumer-directed, cross-disability service and advocacy organization, is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for persons with disabilities. Our vision is a barrier-free society with opportunities for all persons to achieve their maximum potential. Programs and resources offered by our agency provide needed support to individuals with all disabilities at literally every stage of life and include services in the areas of: Early Childhood Direction, Personal Attendant Care, Work Incentives Counseling, School-to-Adult Life Transition, Deaf and Hard of Hearing advocacy and support, Traumatic Brain Injury and Medicaid Service Coordination, Access to Home, Long Term Care Planning and Mental Health Case Management and Peer Advocacy.

Did You Know?

- The unemployment rate for working-age adults with disabilities is 44%, yet only 6% report a condition that makes it difficult to find a job or remain unemployed. Said another way, there’s really very little reason that the unemployment rate for people with disabilities should be so high.
- Median earnings for people with no disabilities is almost double the median earnings for people with disabilities.

INDEPENDENT LIVING, INC. ON IBM APPROVED CHARITY LIST

Thanks to IBM for adding Independent Living, Inc. to the Approved Charity List. That means IBM employees and retirees can choose to donate to Independent Living, Inc. when they’re making their selections for this coming annual campaign. Our programs may not be as complex as the programs IBM develops for businesses worldwide, but to the people we help our programs mean the world as well. So thanks again IBM for making us part of the charity mainframe. And thanks in advance for helping us to continue to help our community.