Letter from the ED

It is always inspiring when people advocate for themselves and achieve the desired outcome. I recently had the opportunity to witness the power of community advocacy in action when Independent Living, Inc. appealed to the Newburgh Zoning Board for needed variances in order to develop a fully accessible, affordable housing complex on the vacant property adjacent to our Newburgh Center.

It was both humbling and gratifying that about 40 people took time out of their busy schedules at 8 p.m. on a weeknight, not only to attend, but to actively participate in the public hearing. Following a formal presentation to the Zoning Board of our concept for Independence Square, which is what we have named the apartment complex, Backyard BBQ Fun

By popular demand, our 2nd Backyard BBQ fundraiser, sponsored by Hudson Valley Federal Credit Union (HVFCU), was held on Sunday, June 2nd at Thomas Bull Memorial Park in Montgomery, NY, with nearly 200 adults and children participating.

Staff volunteers from both Independent Living and HVFCU organized games and activities that included face painting, balloon creations, kickball and a cupcake toss. The crowd lingered all afternoon to enjoy Loughran’s catering, music by DJ Eric Rassin and an exciting basket raffle.

We are deeply grateful to all who helped make our Backyard BBQ such a success, by buying tickets and attending, by donating a raffle prize, or by making a donation to sponsor the event. Photos and a listing of generous donors may be found on Facebook or at our website: www.myindependentliving.org.

NY Yankees Welcome ILI Staff Members

Frank Gaudioso, peer-mentor for people who are blind and visually impaired, and Josie Longstreet, Statewide Systems Advocate at Independent Living, Inc. attended the HOPE Week Opening Day game at Yankee Stadium on July 8th. The Yankees’ HOPE Week initiative (Helping Others Persevere & Excel) is rooted in the fundamental belief that acts of goodwill provide hope and encouragement to more than just the recipient of the gesture. HOPE Week honors individuals and groups who help those in need or to celebrate those who live a life that inspires others by overcoming hardships or disabilities.

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Reach One Partners with MHA Rockland

Independent Living, Inc. and PEOPLe, Inc. welcome the Mental Health Association of Rockland County as their new strategic partner in Reach One, the regional Recovery Center serving Rockland, Orange, Ulster and Dutchess Counties, that provides proactive outreach and engagement to people living with mental illness.

Reach One services are designed to assist individuals with psychiatric and/or substance use issues to reach their self identified goals through peer support, wellness and recovery counseling, assistance with employment, education, accessing social and recreational opportunities, housing, and access to integrated physical and mental health care through health homes. Peer Recovery Specialists based in Rockland, Orange, Ulster and Dutchess Counties conduct outreach to marginalized individuals in those communities with the goals of preventing hospitalization, encouraging people to take charge of their recovery, promoting gainful employment and social inclusion, and maximizing existing resources.

PEOPLe, Inc., our regional partner in Dutchess and Ulster Counties since 2011, advocates for and empowers individuals living with mental illness, and educates the general public about mental illness to reduce stigma and discrimination. Their mission is to instill a sense of hope, empowerment and self-determination in people with mental illness, fostering recovery and a transition to mental wellness.

As the Rockland County anchor of the Reach One regional initiative, the Mental Health Association of Rockland County provides preventative, supportive treatment and advocacy for individuals with mental illness through community outreach. Stephanie Madison, LMSW, President/CEO said: “MHA of Rockland is proud to partner with Independent Living and PEOPLe, Inc. on this exciting initiative. We are deeply committed to creating a community in which recovery is not only possible, but is expected for all. This Reach One partnership will expand the available resources to our community members, as well as strengthen the focus on wellness.”

Peer Recovery Specialists from Independent Living, PEOPLe, and MHA work collaboratively to assist the individuals they work with to achieve positive outcomes in their recovery journey.

Getting to Work in Orange & Sullivan

On June 26th, the Orange and Sullivan Counties Employment Alliance Network (OSCEAN), in collaboration with the Local Business Advisory Council (LBAC), held a Transportation Summit at the Ritz Theatre in Newburgh, NY. The goals of the Summit were to: (a) gather information about the current state of public transportation in Orange and Sullivan Counties; (b) raise awareness regarding the need for an efficient, accessible public transportation system with our elected officials locally, in Albany, and at the national level; (c) develop a working plan for the creation of an effective transportation network serving the needs of local residents.

Participants included Assembly Members Frank Skartados and James Skoufis, Newburgh Mayor Judy Kennedy, Town of Wallkill Supervisor Dan Depew, and representatives from the offices of Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney, Senator William J. Larkin, and Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther. The Orange County Planning Commission, the Orange County Office for the Aging, the Sullivan County Office for the Aging, the Greater Newburgh Partnership and more than a dozen private and public human service and health care agencies from Orange and Sullivan Counties participated, along with many members of the public.
In 2010, statistics released by the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that nearly 28 percent of Americans with disabilities aged 18 to 64 live in poverty.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Americans with disabilities earn less than minimum wage under a little-known relic of employment policy that assumed people with disabilities were not capable of meaningful, competitive employment.

**How You Can Help ILI**

We want to ensure that our programs and services are here for generations to come. When considering your last wishes and preparing your Will, we hope you will think about making a bequest to Independent Living, Inc. For more information about Independent Living’s Heritage Society, please contact our Development Office.

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**Executive Director, continued from page one**

Independent Living’s employees, board members, colleagues from other provider organizations, local residents and professionals spoke out passionately about the need for safe, decent, affordable and accessible housing. Independence Square will be a 74 unit apartment complex, which will provide workforce housing and serve the needs of people with disabilities, seniors and families.

Many people spoke about the near impossibility of finding wheelchair-accessible apartments in Newburgh, sharing personal examples of difficulties they or loved ones have encountered. Others spoke of substandard living conditions and the challenges faced by children as well as adults with developmental disabilities and their families, especially single parents. Dozens of different reasons to support the Independence Square project were presented, but the most important one, as simply stated by one community resident, is that “it will be a place where everyone can live regardless of age or disability.”

The final resolution was that the Zoning Board said “YES” to the variances. Yes, most certainly, Independence Square will be an integrated community, not a residence for a single population. The families, seniors and individuals with and without disabilities who call it “home” will revitalize this gateway to the City of Newburgh and bring new vibrancy to the neighborhood.

I look forward to telling you more about Independence Square as its story unfolds.

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**Kudos to Leadership Sullivan Graduate Nora Shepard**

It has been almost two years since we opened the doors of our service center in Monticello. Since then, Nora Shepard, Program Manager at Independent Living’s Monticello office, has recruited and led a dedicated team of knowledgeable independent living skills specialists who have assisted more than one thousand individuals with disabilities and family members throughout Sullivan County.

Nora is also a recent graduate of the Leadership Sullivan Program, comprised of individuals committed to the well-being of Sullivan County, and interested in assuming greater responsibility for the future leadership of the community. Participants from all segments of the community apply their collective experience and skills to serve, strengthen and improve the quality of life for all Sullivan County residents.

Congratulations to Nora on her accomplishments, and kudos to the Monticello staff for their proactive outreach to the Sullivan County community.
Support Groups for Individuals with Visual Impairments

2nd Tuesday of every month from 6-8 p.m. at 5 Washington Terrace, Newburgh

Monday, Aug. 19 from 12-2 p.m. at 10 Prince St., Suite 12, Monticello

There is no cost to participate. Light refreshments are provided.

Save the Dates!

• Thursday, October 10th
  5th Annual Mid-Hudson Diversity Job Fair

• Tuesday, October 15th
  White Cane Awareness Day

Follow us online

www.MyIndependentLiving.org