

# Access Abilities!

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's that time of year again. Even as the last leaves are falling off the trees, Thanksgiving is upon us. Sooner than expected, we are rushing around, shopping and preparing for December's holidays. And as if that weren't enough, there is hardly a busier time here at the Center, with everything from hosting the Just One Break Gala and the Henry Viscardi Legacy Luncheon to preparing for the Spring Luncheon and Sports Night.

But this is also a time for reflection, a time to remember the past year and to express gratitude for our many blessings. Collectively, we have much to remember, and many reasons to give thanks.

I personally remember with fondness each of our graduations. Whether it is the Henry Viscardi School's high school graduation or a celebration for the Abilities, Inc. graduates, it's always a great night. I appreciate our extraordinary staff every day, but at graduation, I can't help but feel a special sense of pride in their accomplishments.

There is also a special place in my heart for the Reach for a Star Committee. Every year, the Committee works tirelessly to make it possible for our students to have the resources they need. It's not just what they do to raise funds for our School, it's also the knowledge that they are always thinking of us and that they will always be here when we need them. We are truly blessed to have them.

Of course, everyone who was there will remember this year's Sports Night, when we honored our own Steve and Vicki Murphy. It was an evening that surpassed all other Sports Nights in both the funds raised and the excitement that was generated by our headline celebrities, Jack Nicklaus and Jim Brown. We could never thank Michael Pascucci enough for bringing together the many stars that made this our most memorable Sports Night ever!

I will always remember with gratitude and affection the many expressions of support from Iris Katz, Ralph Palleschi, Joseph Tranfo, and Robert Savage; but that's just the beginning of a very long list of people who are the Center's friends.

Most of all, at this time of year, I remember Hank. Every December, he would visit me and we would reminisce about the year behind us. He would always manage to find a silly gift for me that would make me laugh. And I would think with awe that we are all here because of him. How fortunate for us to have known him!

Have a wonderful holiday.

Ed

## BALBONI SETS SWING IN MOTION

New York State Senator Michael Balboni secured a \$75,000 grant through the Community Capital Assistance Program (CCAP)—and with it purchased a unique wheelchair accessible swing and created a picnic area at J.K. Kids Park on the grounds of the Henry Viscardi School (HVS). The wheelchair accessible swing is the first of its kind in New York and the second in the United States. The swing offers students who cannot transfer from a wheelchair the unique opportunity to sway on a swing. Eighty four percent of HVS students can now do what was not possible before. The renovation of the picnic area offers all of the necessary elements to provide a safe and accessible area for students to enjoy an outdoor lunch, celebrate special occasions and accommodate special weekend recreation programs.



“Outdoor recreation is extremely important to our students since more than half of them live in urban areas and have to travel one to three hours each way to attend school. As a result, time spent in the classroom and in transit takes up a great deal of time—with little remaining for outdoor recreation. The addition of the swing and picnic area will improve the quality of their recreation time—and their day,” stated President and CEO of Abilities!, Ed Cortez. In Today’s Playground, one article addresses the issue of children with disabilities and outdoor play: “Play prepares the brain for cognitive performance in areas such as language, art, math and science. Emotional stability and interpersonal skill are also considered to be benefits of play time opportunities.” ■

### SAILING FOR ABILITIES!

The Knickerbocker Yacht Club hosted its annual Knickerbocker Cup sailing races from August 30 through September 3 in Manhasset Bay, Port Washington. Twelve of the finest match race sailing teams from around the world competed on Colgate 26 sailboats. The four-day racing competition was seen from the shoreline and spectator boats provided a close-up view of the competition on Manhasset Bay. In addition to the daily regatta races, social events including seminars and a barbecue added to the excitement. The signature Knickerbocker Cup Dinner Dance and Auction raised \$8,000 which will be used to support programs at the Henry Viscardi School. ■



### DINAPOLI FACILITATES HVS CLASSROOM RENOVATION

New York State Assemblyman Thomas P. DiNapoli has provided a \$50,000 grant, which will enable students with disabilities at the Henry Viscardi School (HVS) to function more independently in their home environments. The grant provides for the renovation of the home economics classroom, providing for a

more accessible design and equipment for special needs children at HVS.

“I greatly admire the success of Abilities in working with varying segments of the community to remove institutional and attitudinal barriers so that all people can fulfill their potential,” Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli said. “I am proud to have helped secure a state grant to make the home economics classroom more user friendly for students of the Henry Viscardi School and I look forward to seeing the project completed very soon.”



*Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli reviews renovation blueprints with Abilities! and Henry Viscardi School (HVS) staff and students. (L to R) Jill Carroll, Principal, HVS; Evan Kennedy, HVS student; NYS Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli; Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!; Anthony Holmes, HVS Student; Susan Gordon Ryan, VP Development, Abilities!; Nancy Beardsley, HVS teacher; and Brianna Williams, HVS Student.*

“The renovation of the home economics classroom is essential as it better enables HVS to prepare its students to become independent and self-sufficient members of society,” stated Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!. “The home economics classroom was originally built and furnished over 20 years ago. Although we have made periodic upgrades to the facility and equipment, a complete renovation is truly required in order to better prepare our students to live independently. Much has changed with regard to building design concepts and household items, which today are more accessible for people with disabilities. Thanks to the generosity of Assemblyman DiNapoli, we will now be able to incorporate accessible design concepts at HVS and be able to use it as a demonstration site for others to see.” ■

### GAP INC. FOUNDERS’ AWARD

Gap Inc. awarded Tina Petallides-Markou, a Gap Associate Store Manager in Bayside, N.Y., with a \$50,000 grant, for the benefit of Abilities Inc., and 80 hours of paid volunteer time off. Tina was winner of the second annual Gap Founders’ Award. The award will be used to modernize the Abilities, Inc. mock

retail store where youth and adults with disabilities learn key retail skills for gainful employment.

“I grew up with many friends and family members who had disabilities, and I witnessed firsthand the struggles they faced when looking for a job,” said Tina Petallides-Markou. “The training at the mock store provides real world experience that helps people find solid, meaningful jobs and enables them to excel in these positions.” The collaborative plan is to add new merchandise, update the checkout area and create a more realistic retail atmosphere for the mock store at Abilities, Inc. Additionally, Tina is creating a job-shadowing program at the Bayside Gap location. She will also continue holding seminars for Abilities, Inc. students on interviewing, networking and resume writing—with the goal to help students enter or return to the workforce and make a good first impression.

“On behalf of Abilities, Inc., I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Tina for all the selfless hours she has volunteered to our organization and for enabling us to receive the Gap Inc.’s Founders Award. The award provides us with both the financial resources and retail expertise to renovate our retail employment training facility,” stated Edmund Cortez. “We applaud the Gap as a longtime supporter and employer of people with disabilities and for its commitment to the National Business & Disability Council.”

“In the past, persons with disabilities were at a disadvantage when it came to workplace hiring,” said President and COO, Abilities, Inc., Francine Tishman. “Thanks to Tina’s commitment, we will be able to provide our students with a state-of-the-art retail employment training facility. This is crucial to providing a competitive advantage to students with disabilities. The program will provide hands on experience using state of the art equipment providing real world experience in a simulated retail environment.”

The Founders’ Award was established in honor of the philanthropic example of Gap Inc.’s founders, Doris and Don Fisher. Tina Petallides-Markou was one of more than 100 Gap Inc. employees from nine countries in the running for the company’s annual award. “We encourage our employees to dedicate themselves to causes that are meaningful to them,” said Bobbi Silten, Chief Foundation Officer of Gap Inc. “Tina took her retail experience and found a way to improve the lives of people with disabilities in her community, so we’re proud to honor her with the 2006 Founders’ Award.” ■

## JAZZ SAMPLER

Friends of the Arts (FOTA) in collaboration with Abilities! has received a \$245,000 grant from The New York State Music Fund to provide a program entitled Jazz Sampler for Students with Physical Challenges at the Henry Viscardi School (HVS). The program will provide performances, workshops and residencies with professional artists as they work with experts in the field to adapt the Jazz Sampler model project for K-12 to students with physical challenges. Students will learn the art of improvisation and scat, compose original songs, jazz up fairy tales and stories, and learn about jazz masters and the elements and history of jazz. Jazz will be woven into math, poetry, graphic design, social studies, English language arts (ELA), and other lessons as teachers integrate jazz into curriculum. Jazz inspired artwork, career opportunities, access to the arts workshops, a Friday afternoon jazz club, one-on-one mentoring as we form the first HVS Jazz Band, as well as a project in which students from HVS and nearby Herricks School District work together to compose original songs are just some of the innovative activities planned for the two years.



*Jazz musician Louise Rogers assists HVS student Christopher Alvarez play the autoharp, as classmate Samuel Tavarez looks on.*

FOTA’s Jazz Sampler project is now in its eighth year and includes three other partner schools. Lois Kipnis, FOTA’s Director of Arts Education said, “This grant enables us to adapt and bring the project to the students at HVS, and provide them with opportunities to participate fully in the arts with professional artists. It enables FOTA to further its belief that students of all abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles should have full access to the arts.” Jill Carroll, Principal of the Henry Viscardi School echoes a similar mindset, “Programs like this help to connect our students to mainstream arts and culture and we are looking forward to an exciting two years for all of our students.”

Funding for the New York State Music Fund was created when the Office of the New York State

Attorney General resolved investigations against major record companies that had violated state and federal laws prohibiting “pay for play”, otherwise known as “payola.” The settlement agreement stipulated that funds paid by music businesses would support music education and appreciation for the benefit of New York State residents. The Attorney General’s Office enlisted the services of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, one of the nation’s largest and most experienced philanthropy services to develop and manage the grant program.

Prior to the Jazz Sampler project, FOTA and HVS had a very successful four-year collaboration with “All The World’s a Stage,” a project that brought HVS fifth and sixth graders together with sixth graders from Herricks Middle School. Together they worked with professional artists from Stages of Learning on scenes from Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” and “Romeo and Juliet.” ■

## NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

During the month of October, we celebrate the contributions and skills of American workers with disabilities. The effort to educate the public on issues related to the employment of people with disabilities began in 1945 when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October as National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week. This was an effort to promote the employment of disabled war veterans. In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the weeklong recognition to the entire month and renamed it National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) works with its member companies year round to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities into the workforce. In recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, NBDC is working with member companies across the country, planning events and programs that showcase the abilities and skills of job seekers and working Americans who have disabilities. ■

## ABILITIES, INC. EXECUTIVE RECOGNIZED

On September 19, 2006 the New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA) awarded Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities Inc. with the Adrian Levy Professional Leadership Award.

The award recognizes individuals who have made considerable contributions in the rehabilitation field.

Ms. Tishman’s commitment to people with disabilities began in 1978 when she worked for Rehabilitation International as a manager of UNICEF programs. She was responsible for technical support and consultation to UNICEF staff in developing countries for the prevention, early identification and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. In 1984, Ms. Tishman joined Abilities Inc. and through her tireless efforts the organization and its programs have grown exponentially. Under her leadership, the programs developed help people with disabilities in achieving their goals of integrated employment—and the opportunity to live with greater independence and dignity.

“Through her vision and enthusiasm, Francine has raised the standard of quality and professionalism for all of her colleagues at Abilities! and within New York State. She has positively impacted the lives of so many people with disabilities and set a high standard for all professionals in the field,” stated Ed Cortez. ■

## DISABILITY FRIENDLY VOTING MACHINES

For the first time in history, people with disabilities in New York State have been afforded the ability to cast their votes privately and independently. The September primary election rolled out the new Avante Vote-Trakker machine at select polling places throughout New York empowering people with disabilities to cast their votes unaccompanied by others. The Avante Vote-Trakker machines represent a stopgap measure in response to a lawsuit brought against New York State by the Justice Department for not complying with the 2002 federal election reform law. New York State intends to use these machines for the 2006 primary and general elections. However, these machines will not be used beyond that point since they fall short of the standards set by federal and state election reform laws. This stopgap measure prevented the state from losing \$220 million in aid for new voting machines. It is anticipated that new voting machines that meet the federal election reform law standards should be in place at all polling places in New York State in 2007. ■

## MARRIED WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

On October 4, 2006, Fran Prezant, M.Ed., CCC-SLP, Director Research and Evaluation, Abilities! presented at the International Family Therapy Association World Congress in Reykjavik, Iceland.

The presentation unveiled research related to Ms. Prezant's soon to be released book entitled, *Married with Special-Needs Children*. The book, due to be released in November by Woodbine House, is a practical guide for parents. It addresses the issue of how to work on marital issues while juggling the demands of raising a child with a developmental disability, serious medical condition, or mental illness. Co-authored with Laura Marshak, Ph.D., professor of counseling at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the authors draw on their professional experience in marital counseling and parent training, as well as on the experience of hundreds of parents of children with special needs. Throughout are quotes from husbands and wives, offering special insight into what was especially difficult for them, what solutions they discovered, and what they wished they had done differently. The presentation in Iceland, as well as the book, counters frequently faulty assumptions by sharing information about marriages that have become stronger and more resilient. ■

## HVS KIDS CORNER



Ali Clark, a 9th grade student at HVS, was one of 13 artists who won the American Kidney Fund's 11th annual calendar art contest. Her inspirational drawing will be used to illustrate their 2007 "Kid"ney Calendar, which will be distributed nationally.

HVS 5th grade student Rachel Gross had spent the past year growing her hair really long so that she could donate it to Locks of Love, an organization that creates wigs made out of real hair for people undergoing cancer treatments. Rachel stated "I feel glad that I did this because people have been helping me throughout my life and I wanted to be able to help someone. I know what it is like being unable to do something for yourself. I hope the person who gets my hair will like it. I want them to feel wonderful and beautiful." ■



## ABILITIES! PODCASTS

Since they first appeared in 2004, podcasts, digital recordings available on the Internet for download have continued to gain popularity. There is now a podcast available for nearly every subject imaginable. One reason podcasts have become so popular is easy access and the ability to listen to an episode of radio-like talk shows whenever and wherever desired.

Through collaboration between the Kornreich Technology Center and the Smeal Learning Center, podcasts are now available on several disability-related issues. Topics range from disability statistics and awareness to universal design and assistive technology. To access Abilities! Podcasts, simply download the content from our website. For Abilities! and Kornreich Technology Center content, go to [www.abilitiesonline.org/ktcpodcasts.asp](http://www.abilitiesonline.org/ktcpodcasts.asp). For National Business & Disability Council

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Additionally, if you prefer to use Apple's iTunes, simply search for "Abilities" or "National Business & Disability Council" under "Podcasts" in the iTunes Store. The podcasts are free to download to your computer.

Podcasting has been widely adopted by news organizations and higher-education institutions. There is also great potential for the medium in the business-to-business space. Abilities! views our podcasting effort as an efficient way to disseminate research and best practices to our corporate and education partners as well as to our clients. ■

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### LEGACY AWARDS LUNCHEON

The Henry Viscardi Jr. Annual Legacy Awards Luncheon will be held on December 5, 2006 at Mutual of America's New York City headquarters. The event honors corporate leaders who embrace and support the employment of people with disabilities. This year's Legacy Award recipients are Robert B. Catell, Chairman and CEO, KeySpan; Samuel J. Palmisano, Chairman and CEO, IBM Corporation; and the Corporate Legacy Award will be presented to JPMorganChase. For additional information, please contact Barbara Kilarjian at (516) 465-1520.

# Abilities!

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