

# Access Abilities!

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### LOOKING FORWARD:

### THE FUTURE OF THE HENRY VISCARDI SCHOOL



During the past year, our boards of directors have been discussing where we would like Abilities!, Abilities, Inc., and the Henry Viscardi School to be five years from now, and what we need to do to make sure that we get to where we want to be. In this issue and in future issues of Access Abilities, I will share our discussions with you. Here's a summary of the discussion we have had thus far regarding the future of the Henry Viscardi School:

A few years before he passed away, Hank Viscardi implored us to make sure that the Center's programs would always remain 'relevant.' I have taken this to mean that, in order for the Henry Viscardi School to remain relevant, our School will always need to be unique in the nature of the services it provides, exceptional in quality, and worthy of replication. Today, the Henry Viscardi School fulfills these criteria in the following ways:

- HVS is unique throughout New York State in its mission of serving students with physical and medical disabilities, with a goal of obtaining a high school diploma for every child.
- HVS also is unique in supporting innovations in emerging techniques and technologies. It is through this constant innovation that we continue to be successful in meeting the changing needs of our students.

- HVS is a one-of-a-kind observation and training resource for other institutions, agencies, professionals, parents, and future teachers.

Based upon demographic trends that we have been observing during the past decade, we anticipate that five years from now many of our students will have greater physical and medical needs and will display significantly more complex academic needs than we have ever dealt with before. To ensure our future relevance, this is where we will want the Henry Viscardi School to be five years from now:

- HVS will continue to be unmatched in its success in educating children with physical and medical disabilities to obtain a high school diploma;
- The HVS staff and facility will continually adapt to the emerging needs of our new students, thus guaranteeing that every child in our School will have the greatest opportunity to succeed;
- HVS will continue to provide innovations in education techniques and technologies to address the changing needs of our students; and
- HVS will continue to be a one-of-a-kind observation and training resource for other institutions, professionals, and future teachers.

We know that we must work together to ensure this future for our School and our students. Here are just some of the things we will need to do:

- The HVS Learning Institute, a subcommittee of the Education and Innovations Committee of the Board of Trustees, is developing a description of the students we will be serving in the future. Next, the Institute must develop a new plan to meet their needs.
- HVS must find the funding to support the future needs of our students. We won't know for certain what this means until the Learning Institute finishes its review, but we must consider the possibility that we will need more money for staff, staff training, equipment, materials, building renovations, etc. While we anticipate that some support for the transition will come through our fund-raising efforts, eventually we will need to obtain higher levels of funding support from

State agencies.

- Finally, the key to our continued success in fulfilling the needs of our future students will be our continued ability to innovate, regardless of the design of our program or the nature of our funding. Likewise, if we are to benefit children with similar needs in other locations throughout the world, we must maintain our position as a resource for professional observation and training.

In our next issue of *Access Abilities!*, I will update you on our discussions regarding the future of Abilities, Inc. and its employment programs. As I share this information, I will be interested in hearing from you regarding these discussions. Please contact me at [edcortez@abilitiesonline.org](mailto:edcortez@abilitiesonline.org). ■

## PANAMANIAN RAINFOREST FIELD TRIP

Wild cats that only come out at night, poisonous snakes, howler monkeys, sloths, dung beetles, amazing ants and other fascinating animals of the rainforest up close and personal for HVS students.



From February 27 – March 2, Henry Viscardi School (HVS) students were once again able to communicate with scientists conducting research in the Panamanian Rainforest through live time interactive broadcasting. For the past three years HVS students have participated in the PRISM Rainforest Connection, which enables our students, along with other schools from across the U.S., to learn from scientists located in the tropical rainforest. Students have the opportunity to see animals and ask and answer questions about topics that include adaptations of invertebrates, decomposition, food webs and predators, monkeys, ants, the Panama Canal and culture. They also have the chance to meet and discuss topics with other viewing classes. This year HVS students participated in nine broadcasts, one of which was hosted by Abilities! own Fran Prezant, Director of Research and Evaluation, who

had been invited to join the scientific team in the rainforest.

PRISM, located at the Bristol-Myers Squibb Center for Science Teaching and Learning at Montclair State University, is a program that serves school districts to improve science and mathematics teaching. PRISM scientists, educators, and classroom teachers are content area specialists in curriculum, professional development, and pedagogy. PRISM programs emphasize inquiry-based and constructivist teaching strategies, and instructional uses of technology to improve student outcomes in science and mathematics. Dr. Jackie Willis, the scientist who directs PRISM, was one of the presenters at the Women in Science presentation for students at Henry Viscardi School last year sponsored by the Long Island Fund for Women and Girls and has been interested in assuring that HVS students have the opportunity to participate in this interactive learning alongside peers from other classes in schools across the country. ■

## VISCARDI LEGACY LUNCHEON



*Robert Catell, Chairman and CEO, KeySpan, is presented with the Viscardi Legacy Award from Abilities! President and CEO Ed Cortez*

On December 5, 2006, Abilities! hosted its Annual Henry Viscardi, Jr. Legacy Awards Luncheon at Mutual of America's New York City headquarters. This year's honorees included Robert B. Catell, Chairman and CEO, KeySpan; Samuel J. Palmisano, Chairman and CEO, IBM Corporation and the corporate legacy award was presented to JP Morgan Chase. It is with great pride that we recognized each of our honorees for their long-standing commitment to our programs and their dedication to employing people with disabilities. This year's honorees join a prestigious list of past award recipients including: Dr. Ralph W. Shrader, Chairman and CEO, Booz Allen Hamilton; Stephen Hammerman, Deputy Commissioner, New York City Police Department; Michael Pascucci, President, WLNY TV-55; and Thomas J. Moran, President and CEO, Mutual of America Life Insurance

Company; each of whom set an example for other corporate leaders to follow. ■



*John Bradley, Director of Global Diversity, JP MorganChase accepting the Corporate Legacy Award.*



*Ed Cortez presents the Legacy Award to Paula Baker, VP Global Community Initiatives, IBM who accepted the award on behalf of Samuel Palmisano, Chairman and CEO, IBM.*

## KESSLER LABORATORY PROGRAM

JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute hosted a dedication ceremony and ribbon cutting for the opening of a new training laboratory in New Jersey. The new laboratory assistant training program was a collaborative effort between Abilities, Inc., Abilities! National Business & Disability Council, Henry H. Kessler Foundation and the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute to replicate one of Abilities, Inc. model programs that trains adults with disabilities for employment in pharmaceutical, clinical, environmental, or research laboratories.

Structured to meet the needs of unemployed adults with disabilities in New Jersey, the program focuses on short-term job training that will lead to career path positions, while assuring companies in the pharmaceutical and related industries new talent in their employment pipelines. The New Jersey Department of Vocational Rehabilitation is also playing an important role in the success of this project through a contract established with the JFK

Johnson Rehabilitation Institute to support students eligible to participate in the training program.



*(L. to r.) Anthony Cuzzola, VP, JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute; Tom Jennings, Director, NJ Vocational Rehabilitation; David A. Belowich, Chair, JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, Executive Board Committee; Harriet Findlay, Director, Vocational Rehabilitation, JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute; Francine Tishman, President & COO, Abilities, Inc.; Elaine Katz, VP, The Kessler Foundation; Ed Cortez, President & CEO, Abilities!; Brian Fitzgibbons, Assistant Director, NJ Vocational Rehabilitation*

As partners in this collaborative effort, the Henry H. Kessler Foundation was recognized first and foremost for their financial support, a multi-year grant totaling just under a half a million dollars, which made the entire project possible. Abilities, Inc. was recognized for the expertise, training and support it provided throughout the grant period to replicate their successful program, which has successfully trained hundreds of individuals with disabilities who have gone on to be gainfully employed. The National Business & Disability Council was acknowledged for their contributions to engage and involve New Jersey based pharmaceutical companies. ■

## UPS FOUNDATION



*(L. to r.) David Okorn, VP Corporate Relations, Abilities! along with Bruce Trotter, UPS Foundation, as he presents a \$40,000 grant to Joseph C. Tranfo, Abilities, Inc. Chairman, and Ed Cortez, President & CEO, Abilities!*

The United Parcel Service (UPS) Foundation recently provided a \$40,000 grant in support of Abilities! National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) and the construction of a model universal design access center at Abilities, Inc.

Abilities! is extremely grateful to the UPS Foundation for its long-standing commitment to improving the lives of people with disabilities. Through the funding of programs and initiatives they continue to enable people with disabilities to accomplish what was once seen as unattainable. Their leadership role is helping to alter societal attitudes through the expansion of employment opportunities and setting a national example for other companies to follow. ■

## BANK OF AMERICA

Bank of America's philosophy is to help build stronger communities by helping people achieve their dreams. With a recent \$10,000 grant, Bank of America is enabling Abilities, Inc.'s dream of constructing a modern Universal Design Access Center become a reality. The new universally designed training center will enable the organization to better meet the training needs of people with disabilities and those looking to hire them. It will also enable our graduates to reach for higher standards everyday. ■

## A CORPORATION'S MOST VALUABLE ASSETS

On December 12, 2006, Abilities, Inc. hosted its Annual Employer Appreciation Breakfast. Representatives from more than ninety corporations with operations in the New York metropolitan area were on hand to be recognized for their outstanding efforts to increase employment of people with disabilities. This year 'Above and Beyond' awards were presented to Verizon and Town of North Hempstead for their collaborative project to upgrade the Abilities, Inc. computer laboratories. The Gap, Inc. was also recognized as Tina Petallides-Markou, a Gap Associate Store Manager in Bayside, N.Y., recently won the second annual Gap Founder's Award. The award provides a \$50,000 grant and 80 hours of paid volunteer time off, which will be utilized to renovate Abilities, Inc.'s retail training facility. Adding to the excitement, OSI Pharmaceuticals was presented with the 2006 New York State Rehabilitation Association Award.

This year's keynote speaker was Mr. James Brown, New York City Department of Labor, Economist and Labor Market Analyst. His comprehensive presentation included data collected on employment trends and projections of future

availability of labor for the New York metropolitan area. His remarks included national and regional labor market trends; statistics on employment rate including individuals with disabilities; growth and decline of industry on Long Island and the Tri-state area; and forecasted worker shortages. ■



(L. to r.) Mike Dolan, Manager, Employment Services, Abilities Inc., Caren Unger, Deputy Human Resources Director, and Linda Auriemma, Disability Employment Manager, Social Security Administration, and Anita Zimmerman, Manager, Employment Services, Abilities Inc.

## PEN PALS

Henry Viscardi School students are showing their support for the young men and women presently serving in the U.S. armed forces in Afghanistan. Inspired by a presentation by Courtney Hartnett, an employee of Abilities! and the wife of a soldier stationed at an air base in Afghanistan, students enthusiastically penned holiday letters to each of the fifteen members of her husbands unit. Thanks to the wonders of technology, the students began receiving responses via e-mail on New Year's Day. At this time HVS students have received dozens of responses from the servicemen. The correspondences are displayed on a hallway bulletin titled "Amigos Abroad: Albertson to Afghanistan and About Face!" for all students to enjoy. ■

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The Nathaniel Kornreich Technology Center (KTC) at Abilities! has been awarded a contract to deliver assistive and instructional technology consultative services to the Plainview–Old Bethpage School District (POB). This pilot program enables KTC staff to work directly with staff from two classrooms, in two separate POB schools. The programs objective is to create more accessible and malleable instructional materials for students, better integrate assistive and instructional technology into designated classrooms, and develop a process to replicate the training. ■

## TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME

The excitement could not be contained within the walls of the Henry Viscardi School gymnasium as New York Mets players Tom Glavine, Julio Franco and John Maine visited on January 31. The trio of all-star athletes spent much of their morning playing wheelchair wiffle ball with the HVS baseball team, while the rest of the schools students, teachers and Mr. Met cheered them on. In the end, Glavine took his first unofficial loss of the season as they lost to the 'Junior Mets' 4-0. Off the field, it was a totally different story as Glavine, Franco and Maine scored big with the kids by taking the time to sign autographs and answer what seemed to be a never-ending stream of questions. ■



HVS students pose for a photo with NY Mets players and team mascot, Mr. Met. (From l.) John Maine, Kilby Pena, Michael Loeser, Oswald Millan, Julio Franco, Tom Glavine, and Matthew Skolnick.



NY Mets Julio Franco, John Maine, and Tom Glavine playing wheelchair wiffle ball with students at HVS.



HVS students enjoy the challenge of playing wheelchair wiffle ball against their baseball idols. (From l.) Julio Blanco, John Paul Terribile, Shane Walsh, Yvette Tavarez, and Matthew Skolnick.

## MISSION

*Abilities! is a non-profit agency that is dedicated to empowering people with disabilities to be active, independent, and self-sufficient participants in our society. Through education, training, research, leadership, and example, Abilities! seeks to provide the highest quality services and to influence national attitudes, policies, and legislation in ways that will lead to the greatest benefits for the people we serve.*

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## EVENTS CALENDAR

### 2007 SPRING LUNCHEON

On Tuesday, March 27, 2007 the *Reach for a Star Committee* will be hosting its **25th Annual Spring Luncheon** at the Crest Hollow Country Club in support of the **Henry Viscardi School**. For additional information, please contact Linda Tibbals at (516) 465-1595.

### 2007 CELEBRITY SPORTS NIGHT

Please join us on May 17th to celebrate the **41st Annual Celebrity Sports Night** at Abilities!. This year's event will be a NY Mets – NY Yankees Subway Series and as always will include an exciting roster of athletes. Tickets will be going fast, so make your reservations early! For additional information, please contact Denise Bedeian at (516) 465-1590.

# Abilities!

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