

Access Abilities!

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to announce that Abilities! and Just One Break (J.O.B.) have entered into a partnership that will have significant benefits for both organizations. In December, C. Jeffrey Knittel, the President of CIT Aerospace and Chairman of the J.O.B. Board of Directors, and I signed an affiliation agreement that maintains the independence of both organizations while allowing us to work closely together to advance our common mission and goals.

Just One Break has nearly sixty years of experience in placing people with disabilities into competitive jobs. Under the leadership of its founder, Orin Lehman, J.O.B. became one of the first organizations in the country to focus on the employer, rather than just working with the employee, in finding employment for workers with disabilities.

The J.O.B. partnership will allow Abilities! to establish a New York City presence, thus affording us the opportunity to extend our employment services into Manhattan. J.O.B. will benefit from the extensive administrative support that can be provided through Abilities!. At the same time, through joint efforts, both organizations will enhance their ability to obtain additional government and foundation funding.

There is another connection that we have with J.O.B. It was in 1949 that Orin Lehman asked a young businessman with a disability to become the first director of J.O.B. The young businessman's name was Henry Viscardi. ■

IN HANK'S OWN WORDS

November, 1949. *"Mr. Orin Lehman is calling. Will you speak to him?"*

"Hello, Hank" Lehman's voice was friendly, assured. I envied him. It was the voice of a man who was doing something he enjoys. "We'd like to know if you would care to head up J.O.B." Lehman asked.

My mouth dropped open like that of a stage yokel. Orin went on rapidly. "I realize you're well on your

way to success. This is a pretty small endeavor in its present form, and of course, it has limited resources, but I believe in it."

"That's why it will succeed," I said softly.

"It seems to me," I said, "that we've got to persuade management to accept the disabled worker. I don't mean that we should stop trying to place individuals, but if we can change the thinking that's preventing the hiring of people with disabilities, then the man with the hand amputations can get his own job."

It would be a long time before J.O.B. was set up in every town, alongside the church and the post office, as a permanent institution accessible to everyone in the community. But we could not let that deter us. It was a rough road ahead. But it was a road that we knew would lead somewhere important. ■

SPORTS NIGHT KICK-OFF

To kick-off Abilities! 40th Anniversary Sports Night, celebrated sports legends showed up weeks in advance to provide a morning of mentoring to Henry Viscardi School (HVS) students. The all-star athletes shared techniques and encouragement with our young athletes as they prepare for the Empire State Games for the Physically Challenged.



(L to R) Steve Webb; Peter Hawkins; Mick Foley; Emily and Sarah Hughes; Susan Gordon Ryan, V.P. Development; Ed Charles; and Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!

It was truly amazing to witness the excitement as these young children learned, played and interacted with their sports heroes at our own JK Kids Park.



Henry Viscardi School students with retired New York Met Ed Charles

Mick Foley, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) champion; Steve Webb, retired New York Islander; Ed Charles, retired New York Met; Sarah and Emily Hughes, Olympic ice skaters; among other sports icons, were on hand for personalized coaching, instruction and encouragement. ■

EXECUTIVE DISABILITY COMMITTEE

More than 25 representatives of The New York Federal Executive Board, Disability Awareness Committee visited Abilities, Inc. on April 25, 2006. Their visit was one in a series of activities that Disability Awareness Committee sponsors to foster closer relations between the disability community and federal employers. These collaborations provide an opportunity for the federal community to gain a greater awareness of the potential of persons with disabilities and of the agencies that assist them in entering the workforce. Federal agencies have worked closely with Abilities, Inc. placement staff to identify and hire appropriate graduates for positions within the federal government. According to Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities, Inc., “for more than twelve years, the two organizations have enjoyed a long term and mutually beneficial working relationship to increase employment of persons with disabilities”.

Presentations made by Abilities, Inc. personnel provided valuable information about the services available to job seekers with disabilities and the array of skills they bring to the workplace. The committee’s visit concluded with a tour of the Abilities, Inc. training programs and the Henry Viscardi School. ■

REACH FOR A STAR LUNCHEON

Many of Long Island’s most prestigious women were in attendance for this year’s annual Reach for a Star Spring Luncheon benefiting students with disabilities at the Henry Viscardi School (HVS). Since its inception over 24 years ago, the luncheon has raised over \$2 million for HVS and has become one of the best-attended social events on Long Island, attracting over 500 influential people from the community.



(L to R) Event sponsor Sharon Grosser, Executive Director, Roslyn Savings Foundation; Iris Katz, HVS Board Member; Matilda Cuomo, former NYS First Lady; and Susan Gordon Ryan, V.P. Development, Abilities!



Ed Cortez and Abilities! Board Chairman Ralph Palleschi

The Luncheon provided an opportunity to acknowledge the HVS students who helped to create new beginnings for children with disabilities in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This past September, just two short weeks after Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, the students of the Henry Viscardi School held a fundraiser to support students with special needs who had been affected by the hurricane. The students solicited pledges from family, friends, neighbors and local businesses. Each student earned his or her pledge by doing laps around the school’s JK Kids Park track, a difficult task for many students (84% of the students of HVS cannot transfer from their wheelchairs). The students raised over \$6,700, which was used to

repair wheelchairs and buy therapeutic equipment for students with disabilities in Louisiana who were displaced from their homes. The acclaimed New Orleans Garden District Trio showed their appreciation in a special tribute performance for the efforts to assist their community in its time of need. ■

EMERGING LEADERS EXPANSION

The Johnson Scholarship Foundation has taken a leadership role in promoting workplace inclusion for minority students with disabilities. The Foundation remains committed to the philanthropic vision of its late founders, Theodore R. Johnson and his wife of 52 years, Vivian Chesley Macleod Johnson, that education can empower disadvantaged people to improve their economic circumstances and quality of life. With a recent \$97,300 grant to the Emerging Leaders program managed by Abilities!, the Johnson Scholarship Foundation is empowering workplace inclusion for individuals with disabilities.



The Emerging Leaders Class of 2005

Even today, 16-years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, people with disabilities face barriers entering the workforce at levels commensurate with their skills and abilities. “While the number of students with disabilities entering and completing postsecondary education has increased dramatically in the last decade, people with disabilities are still underrepresented in the employment arena. Despite many advances, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities remains at an astounding 70%. The Emerging Leaders program was created to address the needs of college students with disabilities, as well as the needs of employers who are seeking to assure that a diverse pool of new talent is in their employment pipeline” stated Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!.

Statistics have indicated that the prevalence of disability in the African American community is

higher than that of other racial or ethnic groups. As such, the Johnson Scholarship Foundation is committing its resources to expand the Emerging Leaders program to include historically black colleges and universities. It is anticipated that the expansion of this program will continue to assist corporations in changing their corporate cultures to be more accepting of workers with disabilities.

In today’s business world, the majority of companies recognize the value of having programs in place to ensure a diverse workforce. Together, the Johnson Scholarship Foundation and Abilities! will remind companies that diversity includes disability. Emerging Leaders will enable its partners and clients to broaden and diversify their workforce and meet today’s business challenges by taking advantage of every talent available. ■

KESSLER EXPANDS LAB TRAINING

A \$491,000 community employment grant from the Henry H. Kessler Foundation has been awarded to replicate one of Abilities, Inc. model programs that train 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 will focus 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 workforce.

“This program will address the need for employment opportunities for New Jersey residents with disabilities who are currently unemployed,” said Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!. “Training people with disabilities for working lives and equal treatment in all aspects of life is a major goal of Abilities!”

The Henry H. Kessler Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of people with physical disabilities and encouraging self-sufficiency. “In the spirit of Henry H. Kessler, an innovator in rehabilitation medicine, the Foundation seeks to support programs that will have the greatest impact on employment and help people with disabilities improve their lives by overcoming barriers to employment and encouraging strategies to support disability recruitment, placement, retention, and advancement,” stated W. Thomas Margetts, Chairman, Kessler Foundation. “It is our privilege to support the good work of organizations that in turn will benefit thousands of people disabled by accidents, injuries or disease.” ■

PUBLIC / PRIVATE / NON-PROFIT COLLABORATION

Abilities, Inc. recently dedicated two new computer laboratories thanks to the generosity of Verizon and the Town of North Hempstead. This unique public / private / non-profit collaboration provides much needed technology enhancements for job readiness training programs for adults with disabilities.

“In today’s business world, proficiency with technology and basic computer programs is essential. It also empowers individuals and provides them with the skills necessary to become productive members of our local workforce” stated Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!.

Verizon has a longstanding reputation of supporting programs that improve critical skills in literacy and technology and their recent \$25,000 grant for a computer-training laboratory for people with disabilities clearly demonstrates their commitment to diversity and inclusion. “Valuing diversity provides us with the ability to understand and better respond to the needs of our customers. At Verizon, diversity includes the whole range of human differences, including age, ethnicity, education, sexual orientation, work style, race, gender, disability and more. It is this understanding which provides a critical link to our communities and customers,” stated Janet Jones, Director, Community Affairs, Verizon.



Town of North Hempstead Supervisor Jon Kaiman (far left) is joined by Janet Jones (far right), Director of Community Relations, Verizon, for grant presentations to Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities, Inc. and Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!.

Jon Kaiman, Town of North Hempstead Supervisor, stated “for over 50 years, Abilities!, which is located in the Town of North Hempstead, has been a leader in providing training and work placement programs for people with disabilities. We are extremely proud to be able to assist Abilities! with their technology upgrades, as the training received in this facility ensures these individuals can compete for employment and become self sufficient members of our community.”

“Supporting Abilities! is in line with our goal to help create and maintain jobs in the Town, as well as to help residents and visitors alike become familiar with the wealth of resources, both natural and created that the Town has to offer.” ■

DEAR JOURNAL

Students from two Long Island Schools were united for a unique collaboration that culminated in a live performance of a one-act play entitled “Dear Journal.” Written by students from the Henry Viscardi School (HVS), the show was produced and performed by theatre arts honor students from Walt Whitman High School. The play provides a unique perspective of life through the eyes of a child with a disability. Performances were attended by students, family and friends of HVS as well as Walt Whitman High School and Middle School students. The performance enlightened all with an appreciation for creating a truly inclusive society. ■



Students from the Henry Viscardi School and Walt Whitman High School collaborate on “Dear Journal.”



“Dear Journal” performed at HVS

CAREERS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Long Island Fund for Women and Girls collaborated with the Henry Viscardi School on a gender equity initiative. The program entitled “Smart Careers for Girls”, funded by Symbol Technologies, encourages high school girls to consider careers in math, science, technology and engineering. Dr. Jonna Coombs, Department of Biology, Adelphi University; Dr. Ray Ann DePrisco Havasy, President, The Center for Science Teaching and Learning; Dr. Greta Rainsford, Pediatrician; and Dr. Jacalyn Giacalone Willis, Director of PRISM, Montclair State University, provided inspirational discussions encouraging these young students to pursue their interests in science and technology. ■



HVS students and staff are joined by the distinguished panelists and representatives from the Long Island Fund for Women & Girls

ABILITIES, INC. GRADUATION CEREMONY

On May 3, 2006 Abilities, Inc. hosted its 20th Annual Consumer Graduation Ceremony. The event recognized and honored individuals who have successfully completed training in one of the Abilities, Inc. training programs during the past year and are now gainfully employed or actively seeking employment.

Although our graduates are adults of varying ages, cultures, backgrounds and having many different types of disabilities, they share one common goal—to become self sufficient and productive members of society. The skills they have received through the Abilities, Inc. programs will enable them to compete for a variety of jobs in our local labor market.

Numerous elected officials and business representatives, along with friends and family of our graduates, were on hand to celebrate their individual accomplishments. Dr. Edward Placke, Assistant Commissioner, Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) provided the keynote address. ■

Abilities! would like to commend the following NBDC member companies for being named to the prestigious 2006 Diversity Inc. *Top 50 Companies for Diversity*:

Verizon Communications / Wireless; The Coca-Cola Company; PricewaterhouseCoopers; JP Morgan Chase; HSBC; Sodexo; Cingular Wireless; Wells Fargo; Macy's / Bloomingdale's; Marriott International; Ernst & Young; Bank of America; Citigroup; Sun Trust Banks; Toyota North America; Hewlett-Packard; Starwood Hotels; Merck & Co.; Ford Motor Company; Sprint Nextel; Novartis Pharmaceutical; DaimlerChrysler; Merrill Lynch & Co.; Starbucks Coffee Company; SC Johnson; Prudential Financial; and Darden.

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EVENTS CALENDAR

HENRY VISCARDI SCHOOL 2006 GRADUATION

The Henry Viscardi School Class of 2006 graduation ceremony will be held on June 22nd. On behalf of the staff we would like to extend our congratulations and wish them all the best in fulfilling their dreams and aspirations.

NBDC SUMMIT / SEMINAR

The National Business & Disability Council will conduct a business and disability summit on June 20th. Booz Allen Hamilton will host the event at their Hemdon, VA facility. Topics will include: What's New with Legislation and Compliance; What's New in Assistive Technology; Best Practices – Private & Public Sectors; and Emerging Leaders Alumni Updates. For additional information, please contact Linda Tibbals at (516) 465-1517.

2006 KNICKERBOCKER CUP

The Knickerbocker Yacht Club in Port Washington, NY will host their 24th Annual Knickerbocker Cup on August 30th to September 3rd. Net proceeds from the event will be donated to support the employment, education and technology programs of Abilities! For additional information, please call (516) 883-7655 or log on to www.kyc.net.

Abilities!

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