

Access Abilities!

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"Abilities was founded in the fall of 1952, in a vacant garage, on borrowed capital hardly sufficient to start a newspaper stand." So begins *The Abilities Story*, written in 1967 by our founder, Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr.

I thought of Hank today, as the Director of our Global Institute briefed me on a recent visit of 12 educators from Belfast and Dublin, Ireland. We had invited these teachers to participate in a two-week seminar that had been created through a partnership among staff from Abilities!; the Henry Viscardi School; and Teachers College, Columbia University. Our Irish visitors had come to learn about how we deal with technology, inclusion, and inter-program cooperation, but we learned much about dealing with these issues from our visitors, as well.

During the past three weeks, we have had visitors from the Netherlands, Russia and Israel. Next week, we will welcome visitors from Japan. They all come to observe and learn about how an idea that started in a vacant garage became a model program that is now providing state-of-the-art education and employment programs to thousands of people with disabilities.

We are proud of what our staff has done to create this model, a "pilot program for all the world to copy." I know that Hank would be proud, too.

IN HANK'S OWN WORDS

In describing how Abilities grew, Hank spoke of three phases.

"Education, research and training, and work. To us, Abilities was the priceless clinical laboratory where we could study disabled people in school and at work, and the effects of different training techniques, modifications of tools, and machines. It was as important to our final efforts on behalf of the disabled person as a large hospital is to a medical school.

"All people and things are engaged in the making of history. The legacy we leave to the future is what we do in the present. Perhaps, in another generation,

a mother holding a crippled child to her breast with the prayer that he may live a full, rich life, with dignity and self-sufficiency, may have the comfort of knowing that this prayer is within the realm of realistic fulfillment, because of what Abilities as a pilot plant has done to lead the way."

40TH ANNUAL CELEBRITY SPORTS NIGHT

On May 18th Abilities! hosted its 40th Annual Celebrity Sports Night raising more than \$2 million to support the programs and services of the Henry Viscardi School and Abilities, Inc. that benefit children and adults with disabilities.

Abilities! was privileged to honor Vicki and Stephen Murphy for their outstanding commitment to the organization. Frank Comerford, President of WNBC-TV NY was recognized as business Sportsman of the Year. Golf legend Jack Nicklaus and football legend Jim Brown were named Executive Sports Stars and the world renowned Irish Tenor and double amputee, Ronan Tynan received the Roy Campanella award.



A cast of celebrity athletes and students from HVS as they performed in a short musical for guests at Sports Night.

In his remarks, Ed Cortez, President and CEO of Abilities! stated, "We are extremely grateful for the overwhelming generosity of the individuals who participated in this year's Sports Night—from the celebrity athletes who graciously gave of their time signing autographs, taking photos and having dinner with our guests—to the corporations, foundations and individuals who responded with unprecedented

financial support. Our goal this year was to raise \$1 million but your strong commitment to the work we do on a daily basis and your benevolence enabled us to double our goal!” Cortez continued, “The significance of this fundraiser is that it enables Abilities! to provide thousands of children and adults with disabilities the necessary tools, through our education and employment programs, to become independent and self sufficient members of our society.”



(L to R) Ed Cortez, President & CEO, Abilities!; Mike Pascucci, President, WLNY TV-55 and Abilities! Board Member; golf legend Jack Nicklaus; and former NHL great Rod Gilbert.

Michael Pascucci, President, WLNY TV-55, who chaired the event stated, “I’m truly honored to chair this 40th Annual Celebrity Sports Night. This place (Abilities!) is so great! It has helped literally thousands and thousands of people with disabilities for over 50 years.”



Jim Brown is presented with the Executive Sports Star Award from event Chairman Michael Pascucci.

This year’s Executive Sports Stars provided heartfelt recognition for the opportunities the organization provides for all who walk through its doors. In addition to his own generosity, Jack Nicklaus gave special thanks to all of the athletes “for coming out tonight and supporting the exceptional work being done at Abilities!” In his moving and closing remarks, Nicklaus acknowledged those in the room “for guiding and supporting people with disabilities to succeed where circumstances have failed them.”

Jim Brown also provided inspiring words, “In life, when you deal with these kids and you deal with their capabilities and you deal with each one of them as an individual and you encourage each one of them to do the best that he or she can do, that’s the way we have to be”... with one another.



Ed Cortez with sport stars Emily Hughes, Ed Charles, Mick Foley, and students from HVS.



Sports legend and NBA great Walt Frazier with HVS students Brian Hopkins and Mary Rom

As he addressed the audience prior to conducting the live auction, Marty Lyons said, “On behalf of all the athletes that came out tonight it’s truly our pleasure, to witness these young athletes at Abilities! and everything they have accomplished—the way that they challenge life, the way that they live life—they truly are an example to each and every one of us.”

This year’s all-star cast of celebrity athletes also included former NFL greats—Frank Gifford, Ahmad Rashad, Gale Sayers, Tucker Frederickson, Wesley Walker and John Dockery; former MLB greats—Bud Harrelson, Mike Schmidt, Tom Seaver and Ed Charles; former NBA greats—Walt Frazier, John Starks and Jack Garfinkel; former NHL greats—Rod Gilbert, Pat LaFontaine, Bob Nystrom and Steve Webb; figure skating greats—Oksana Baiul, Sarah Hughes, Emily Hughes and JoJo Starbuck; WWE champion Mick Foley; and many more.

UPS FOUNDATION - DELIVERING OPPORTUNITIES

What can brown do for you? For people with disabilities they are assisting in the expansion of employment opportunities and setting a national example for other companies to follow. The United Parcel Service (UPS) Foundation recently provided a \$40,000 grant in support of Abilities! National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) and Steps Toward Employment Program (STEP).



(L to R) Kevin DiLiberio, Human Resource Manager, and Stephanie Kacerow, Communications/Community Services Supervisor for UPS Long Island District, present Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities Inc., and Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!, with a \$40,000 grant on behalf of the UPS Foundation.

The grant will enable NBDC to enhance its national information services to employers seeking to hire employees with disabilities and foster greater links to jobseekers with disabilities. “National unemployment statistics indicate that 70% of people with disabilities are unemployed. Many of these individuals are qualified, well educated and highly motivated, but unable to obtain employment commensurate with their skills and abilities. Funding from the UPS Foundation enables NBDC to work with companies across the nation to eliminate stereotypes and change corporate cultures with regard to the employment of people with disabilities.” stated Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!.

The grant also provides for the purchase of bulk mailing equipment and software for the STEP training program, which will be used to prepare students for competitive jobs in today’s modern business office. Using state-of-the-art technologies and popular business software, participants learn practical job skills ranging from data entry and administrative assistant functions to accounting and Microsoft Office application specialist functions. Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities, Inc. stated “UPS Foundation has had a long-term commitment to promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the business world. They understand

that diversity encompasses more than ethnicity, gender, and age.” Ms. Tishman also went on to say, “The purchase of this modern equipment will ensure that our students have the skills necessary to obtain gainful employment and become self sufficient contributors to our society.”

LUMINA FOUNDATION

A grant from Lumina Foundation has expanded and strengthened a program designed to meet the transitional needs of high school students with learning disabilities. These individuals have the ability and desire to go to college, but require more intensive vocational guidance and additional support in order to successfully transition into higher education and employment.

The Learn and Earn Program was established by Abilities, Inc. and implemented in collaboration with Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) through programs at both Nassau and Queensborough Community Colleges. This unique partnership developed because of the strong commitment of these two colleges in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities and their longstanding relationship with VESID. The goal of the program is to bridge the gap for those students who might never have had the opportunity to enter into higher education. Prior to receiving funding from Lumina Foundation the program operated as a one-year program. Now due to the generosity of the Lumina Foundation’s \$220,000 grant over a two-year period, the program has expanded its support to students for an additional year. Funding has also provided for the inclusion of an in depth orientation to introduce students to the college environment, building relationships with peers, skills based tutoring, career exploration and internship experiences, ongoing mentoring and frequent discussions and mini-workshops about effectively succeeding in an academic and vocational environment with a learning disability.

“The program has the potential to serve as a national model for other organizations that work with at risk youth,” stated Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities Inc. With a national unemployment rate of 70% for adults with disabilities, youth in this category are at greater risk for inadequate education/training, unemployment, economic instability, dependence on public supports and lack of independence.

Learning disabilities are characterized by normal to superior intelligence and potential, but sometimes erratic performance and processing difficulties in educational settings. Ms. Tishman went on to say, “These students frequently have low self-esteem

and low expectations. They are often disadvantaged by a lack of knowledge of compensatory strategies and awareness about how to access appropriate modifications and supports. Students with learning disabilities are often steered away from academics and into vocational programs without having the opportunity to succeed academically, but this program is designed to change that practice.”

The results from a student survey administered after the first semester of this newly expanded program indicate that more than half of the students enrolled in this program feel that they would not have been able to remain in college and/or be doing as well as they are with their academics if it were not for this program. Juliana Cortes, Queensborough Community College student stated, “I would probably have been lost without this program ... it has really helped... it motivated me to do better in school.”

YOUNG LIVES TURNED AROUND

On June 1st Abilities! hosted a graduation ceremony for its PROSPER (People Reaching for Opportunities to Succeed Personally Educationally and Realistically) drop-out prevention program.

PROSPER works with at-risk juniors and seniors from Freeport and Uniondale high schools that have learning and/or emotional disabilities. In addition to one or more of these disabilities, most of these students are also dealing with a multitude of other social issues that often include gang involvement, foster care, absentee parents, teenage pregnancy, etc.

The primary objectives of the program are to improve school attendance, self-esteem and encourage students to gain an understanding of the relevance of education as it relates to the world of work. The program incorporates career assessments, career guidance, counseling, tutoring and corporate internships related to students’ short and long-range vocational interests. PROSPER instructors provide much needed one-on-one instruction and act as positive role models for these students. The results have been admirable as an astonishing 90% of the students enrolled in the program graduate from high school. To date the program has had a profound impact on hundreds of young lives.

“The PROSPER Program offers a viable vocational alternative to students who have not been successful on the traditional high school track offered through the public school system. The PROSPER program offers these students opportunities to obtain the skills necessary to get and keep a job or go on to post-secondary education” stated Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities, Inc.

The program is a unique partnership among high schools, colleges/universities and local business, which enables students to observe college courses and participate in peer mentoring / shadowing experiences. Classes are conducted during the school week—four days of instruction at either Nassau Community College, SUNY Old Westbury, Adelphi, Hofstra or Abilities, Inc. and one day participating in tours of local business and industries.

Freeport High School student Angel Lopez stated “PROSPER is a great program, it actually made me want to come to class. Before PROSPER I was the type who never went to class, but after I got into the program I started liking it and day by day I ended up coming even more.” Terron Channer of Uniondale High School provided special recognition to the corporations “that let us come on the tours as they provided a good opportunity for us to see what it is like to get a job in the real world. The PROSPER program provided me with a second chance. It helped me to mature and become reliable, dependable and responsible.”

2006 HVS GRADUATING CLASS



Ed Cortez performs the ceremonial tassel-turning for HVS graduate Marc Cummins as keynote speaker Barry Shapiro applauds.

On June 22, 2006 the Henry Viscardi School (HVS) hosted its annual commencement exercises for the graduating class of 2006 at its Albertson facility. With steadfast determination and support from their families and HVS staff, this year’s graduates have overcome a lifetime of extraordinary hurdles. Yet, their hard work and dedication has afforded them opportunities to continue their education as they now graduate from high school. An astounding 88% of the students graduating will continue studies at the college and/or university of their choice. Fifteen members of the graduating class will be continuing their education at postsecondary colleges or universities, while others will pursue vocational programs. HVS graduates have been accepted by such notable institutions as the University of Hartford; Johnson and Wales; Adelphi University; St. Joseph’s

College; Brooklyn College; Briarcliff College; and Nassau, Suffolk, Queensborough and Westchester Community Colleges.

Patrice Kuntzler, Executive Director, Henry Viscardi School stated “It has been such a gratifying experience to watch these children ... from their early elementary years ... to the mature and responsible young adults they have become. They are truly an inspiration and remind us that a positive attitude can help you overcome even the greatest of obstacles.”

“As you graduate today from high school, I am confident that our teachers have challenged your minds—I know that your parents have been supportive of your efforts—and that your friends and classmates have provided friendly competition. All of these things together have provided you with a solid foundation for the future, a foundation for you to build upon” Patrice Kuntzler continued, “Each of you possesses many talents and gifts that others would be envious of. Realize the many things you have to be proud of and the many things in your life for which you should be thankful. Use these things as your cornerstone to go out and excel in the world.”

Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities! stated “As we are gathered here this evening to celebrate your graduation from high school, we need to recognize that it is a major accomplishment—but it will not be your last. You are a diverse group, with different aspirations and backgrounds, bound for different paths in life. For some of you its on to college, for others its on to vocational training. Whichever path you choose, I know that you will continue to challenge yourselves and those around you ... as you are the leaders of tomorrow. I look forward to a better world which I know you will create.”

NBDC SUMMIT

On June 20, 2006 the National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) facilitated a disability summit for its corporate members. Hosted by Booz Allen Hamilton at its Herndon, VA facility, the summit provided a day of intensive training on disability related employment issues.

John Kemp, President of the U.S. International Council on Disabilities provided the keynote address. As a highly successful attorney and person with a disability, Mr. Kemp serves as an inspiration to persons with disabilities. He is a shining example to corporate leaders that people with disabilities are an invaluable resource to employers. His address focused on the One Percent Coalition (www.onepercentcoalition.org), which works with leaders from government, business and the disability community to improve competitive employment opportunities for severely disabled Americans. The One Percent Coalition has recently requested that the federal government create new incentives for the private sector to employ people with severe disabilities. Pending legislation would require federal agencies to establish a procurement advantage for its contractors or subcontractors that employ significant numbers of people with severe disabilities. This plan has the potential to create significant job opportunities for severely disabled Americans while saving money for American taxpayers.

Other Summit highlights included a review of recent court cases litigated under the Americans with Disabilities Act; presentation and demonstration of new assistive technology devices and reasonable accommodation solutions; best practice initiatives and activities as exceptional models for employers; benefits of hiring returning veterans; and the Emerging Leaders Program that provides summer internships for qualified students with disabilities. If you would like additional information regarding any of the summit topics, please contact Lana Smart at lsmart@abilitiesonline.org.

EMERGING LEADERS CLASS OF 2006

On June 18-20, 2006, the Emerging Leaders Class of 2006 convened for a three day Leadership Development Conference hosted by Booz Allen Hamilton at their Herndon, VA facility. The conference provided interns with an education on a variety of career

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