

Access Abilities!

History in the making...preserving the office of Henry Viscardi, Jr.



The late Dr. Viscardi sat in his office, working tirelessly on behalf of people with disabilities, on a daily basis.

Thanks to a donation of \$100,000 by the Robert E. and Marie Orr Smith Foundation, we are now in the process of relocating and preserving the office of Dr. Henry Viscardi adjacent to the Star Lobby. Our goal is to create a museum about his life and the history of the Center.

Fifty-five years ago, Henry Viscardi, Jr., who was born without legs, founded Abilities, Inc. to demonstrate the employability of workers with disabilities. Then, in 1962, he founded a school which would eventually bear his name. Dr. Viscardi was truly a visionary whose actions changed the lives of thousands of individuals with disabilities.

The contents of his office not only reflect the legendary figures

he connected with—from Eleanor Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan—but also the students who inspired his life of advocacy. He earned doctorates from colleges and universities all over the world, despite the fact that he did not graduate from high school, which further demonstrates the respect he garnered. Dr. Viscardi's love of sailing is also evident by the many artifacts that are displayed.

In addition to recreating his office space, the museum will have an ante-room which is going to include video testimonials by people who knew Hank well and have stories that remind us about his character and legacy.

We are so grateful to Mr. & Mrs. Robert E. Smith for the opportunity to honor Dr. Viscardi's memory in this special way.

A Letter from the President & CEO

There is a proverb that says, "No matter how long the Winter, Spring is sure to follow." In the spirit of the season, our Spring edition of *AccessAbilities!* goes to print with messages of hope and renewal. We have stories about children who make a difference through personal charity, a group of disabled children who inspire us with their music, and Alex, whose 90th birthday comes at a time that he is marking more than 55 years at Abilities!. We celebrate the generosity of the *Reach for a Star* Committee, which has made so many of our programs and dreams possible. And in keeping with Spring's themes of renewal and hope, we proudly announce the renovations of the HVS Home Economics room and the OSI Pharmaceuticals training classroom, along with the construction of a new museum that will honor our founder and recall the values upon which Abilities! was built.

These stories reflect our optimism and faith in our future, even in these most difficult of times. Abilities! is strong because we have a compelling mission, a dedicated staff, a committed board, and donors who believe in what we do. Like Spring, they sustain and renew us, year and after year.

~Edmund L. Cortez



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A Call to Action

For several months now, President Obama has encouraged Americans to engage in some kind of community service to make a difference in our world today. Similarly, in recent years, many synagogues and families have asked bar/bat mitzvah candidates to complete social action projects as part of this "rite of passage." Two teens in our community have taken this request seriously and proved to be an example to all.



Jonathan Blum holds one of the many baskets he donated to the "Adopt A Family" program at Abilities!.



HVS students prepare "home-made" treats for all the guests who were present at the ribbon-cutting of the new Family and Consumer Science Lab at HVS.

In order to prepare for her Bat Mitzvah service in September, Juliette Hyat decided to do something special to honor her cousin, who is an elementary school student at the Henry Viscardi School. Her Mitzvah project was to sell candy bars and donate the proceeds to the school. This fund-raising effort mirrored the actions of another in the family; Juliette's Aunt Amy has been a dedicated member of our *Reach for a Star* Committee for many years.



Juliette Hyat poses with her cousin, Erin, an elementary school student at HVS.

Rather than purchasing flowers as centerpieces at the luncheon following Jonathan Blum's Bar Mitzvah service in November, Jonathan suggested to his parents that they purchase toys for kids who may not otherwise receive holiday gifts. The family purchased toys and books to put in baskets, displaying them as centerpieces at the event with a note on each describing the programs at Abilities!, stating that each basket was being donated to our 2008 "Adopt a Family" program. For more information about our "Adopt a Family" program, please call Pat Birbiglia at 516-465-1496.

Redesigning Home Economics

On September 16, 2008, The Henry Viscardi School (HVS) at Abilities! held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the complete renovation of the "Family and Consumer Science Laboratory" (formerly known as the Home Economics room). With design input from Nancy Beardsley, the Family and Consumer Science Laboratory teacher, the classroom now has more accessible equipment and better use of space than the original Home Economics room. The improvements, referred conceptually as "universal design", will help prepare HVS students to function more independently in their home environment.

Steve and Deborah Sloane of the Scott Sloane Foundation generously donated \$40,000 to help fund this project. The Scott Sloane Foundation is committed "to assisting individuals and families who are challenged by life-altering disabilities." The Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli also secured a \$50,000 State grant for this renovation while working as the NYS Assemblyman of District 16.

In addition to members of the Sloane family, Assistant Comptroller Joseph Galante attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony representing Mr. DiNapoli, who is now NYS Comptroller. Guests were delighted to sample some "home-made" treats at the event.

The *Reach for a Star* Committee Always Shines for HVS

The *Reach for a Star* Committee was founded in 1982 by the late Clara Carucci and the late Marie Giffiuni. The Committee's original goal was to provide funding for special activities for the children of the Henry Viscardi School.

Today, the Committee, co-chaired by Iris J. Katz, Denise Wolfbiss, and Ruth Geismar, continues to dedicate their time and energy to raising funds for the special needs of the students. The *Reach for a Star* Spring Luncheon, taking place this year on April 2, 2009 at the Crest Hollow Country Club in Woodbury, New York, consistently raises over \$250,000 to support a variety of programs and services.

Through its efforts, the *Reach for a Star* Committee has purchased a modified school bus for student field trips, hosted lunch-



Pictured here (l.-r.) at the 2007 Spring Luncheon are Ruth Geismar, Denise Wolfbiss, Madeline Schuster, Rita Castagna, Nan Bernstein, Amy Miller, Ed Cortez, President & CEO, Abilities!, Lucile Viscardi, Iris J. Katz, Donna Rom, and Gloria Boritz. Not pictured are Elly Hammerman, Margaret Cuomo Maier, Vicki Murphy, Merry Slone, Rita Syracuse and Robin Wagner.

eons at different restaurants for graduating classes, and contributed to the annual Halloween party festivities. In addition, they have financially supported the Transition Program at HVS, known as *RAMP* or "Reaching All My Potential", the renovation

of the medical suite, as well as outdoor gardens and patios.

We greatly appreciate the members of this wonderful Committee for their tireless dedication to providing the very best of experiences for the students of the Henry Viscardi School.

Music: The International Language

On January 27, 2009, elementary students of the Henry Viscardi School (HVS) enjoyed the music of LIYANA, an eight member band of self-taught musicians with severe physical disabilities from Zimbabwe. LIYANA is currently on tour in the United



LIYANA band members perform their Afro-fusion sound of gospel, reggae and traditional Zimbabwean Shona music.

States thanks to the PG Family Foundation and the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus. Our students were able to enjoy this concert in the HVS gymnasium via video streaming from Columbia University's Teacher's College where 100 children from Harlem, New York were watching the performance live.

The band's music is an "Afro-fusion" and blends the sound of gospel, reggae and traditional Zimbabwean Shona music. They perform it through vocals, marimbas, African drums, shakers, keyboard and piano. The group met as students at King

George VI School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and began as a class project which challenged them to work in teams. LIYANA often conveys a school mantra, "Never Give Up", through a same titled song with audiences across the world.

The students and teachers of HVS were intrigued by how LIYANA formed and were inspired by the perseverance and positive thinking they promote. They were also very impressed by their music and the fact that they currently perform internationally in seven languages.

OMRDD's "Works For Me" Initiative, Works For "Jeremy"

The NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) chose to honor four businesses that have not only hired people with disabilities but also made a difference in the lives of those individuals. The ceremony took place in Albany on October 7, 2008. Abilities, Inc. nominated Baker, Sanders, Barshay, Grossman, Fass, Muhlstock and Neuwirth, Attorneys at Law, and our consumer, Jeremy Glass, who were chosen to represent a medium-sized business with 25-99 employees. Jeremy participates in the supported employment program at Abilities, Inc.

Jeremy has become pro-

efficient and independent in completing all the work tasks that he is required to perform. He maintains an above average level of daily productivity, currently scanning approximately 5,000 documents per day, and his work is consistently accurate. His supervisor reports that on average an employee can scan just 2,000 documents per day. His level of efficiency and productivity is invaluable.

The staff at Baker and Sanders has been very supportive of Jeremy and the needs of his job coach. A few months after Jeremy started working for the firm, his department relocated. Because Jeremy is

such a valued employee, they gave him a salary, instead of an hourly wage, and built other flexibility into his schedule so that his new commute would be manageable.

Jeremy has successfully integrated into the workforce culture and engages in after work activities with co-workers as well. He has also joined a bowling

league. When Jeremy started this job, he was living at home with his family. He has recently moved into his own apartment with supports from a residential habilitation counselor. Since working at Baker and Sanders, Jeremy's self-confidence has grown and he is on his way to living the life that he has always wanted.



(l.-r.) Attorney, Doug Sanders, Employee, Jeremy Glass, and Attorney, Todd Fass, accept the award from OMRDD on Oct. 7, 2008.

Adecco and GAP Inc. Executives Honored at Legacy Luncheon



(l.-r.) Tig Gilliam, President and CEO of Adecco North America, Ed Cortez, President and CEO of Abilities!, Eva Sage-Gavin, Executive Vice President for Corporate Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility at Gap, Inc. and Neil Romano, Asst. Secretary of Labor pose with the bronze statues of Henry Viscardi, Jr.

Abilities! honored Tig Gilliam, President and CEO of Adecco North America, and Eva Sage-Gavin, Executive Vice President for Corporate Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility at Gap, Inc., at its annual Henry Viscardi, Jr. Legacy Award Luncheon on December 3, 2008.

Mutual of America in Manhattan, hosted the event on behalf of Abilities!. Tom Moran, Chairman, President & CEO of Mutual of America, welcomed everyone and introduced the honorees. Each received the award for an outstanding commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. Their leadership positions not only allow them to influence policies in ways that will have a national impact, but also directly support Henry Viscardi, Jr.'s lifelong vision.

OSI partners with Abilities, Inc. to create new space for growth

Abilities! hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on February 4, 2009 to commemorate a \$90,000 grant that was awarded to Abilities, Inc. by OSI Pharmaceuticals Foundation, Inc. This generous gift enabled us to renovate the Laboratory Assistant Training (LAT) classroom, increasing the square footage from 6,000 to 13,000. The expanded space will increase the number of participants in the program from 60 to 88 trainees per year.

LAT was initiated in 1992 at Abilities, Inc. to meet the staffing needs of environmental, clinical, research, and pharmaceutical laboratories in the greater New York City/Long Island area that were having difficulty recruiting and retaining entry-level staff.

Dr. Colin Goddard, President & CEO of OSI

Pharmaceuticals Inc. graciously described working with the staff of Abilities, Inc., as “interacting with champions of possible.” The Honorable Wayne H. Wink, Jr., Nassau County Legislator from District 11, presented a citation to Dr. Goddard honoring the dedication of OSI Pharmaceuticals, Inc. to this program. A few graduates provided a demonstration of the curriculum and alumni now working at OSI, returned to show their support.

Other graduates of LAT have accepted positions at companies such as: American Analytical Labs Inc., Cascade Water Services, Long Island Blood Services, North Shore-LIJ Health System, Queens Hospital Center, Quest Diagnostics, Inc. and Shiel Medical Laboratory, to name a few. Due to the success of this program it



(l.-r.) Jessica Swirsky, President & COO of Abilities, Inc., Dr. Mary Curtis, Nassau County Deputy Executive for Health & Human Services, Dr. Colin Goddard, President & CEO of OSI Pharmaceuticals Inc., Ann McDermott-Kave, Director of OSI Pharmaceuticals Foundation, Inc., G. Morgan Browne, Chairman of OSI Pharmaceuticals Foundation, Inc. and Edmund L. Cortez, President & CEO of Abilities! cut the ribbon to celebrate the renovation of the Laboratory Assistant Training (LAT) program at Abilities!

has been replicated at the Brookhaven National Laboratory with donated laboratory space and support, and in New Jersey through a grant from the Henry Kessler Foundation.

One Moment In Time

One Moment In Time intends to educate readers on some of the historic events associated with Abilities!.

Alex Alazraki is as much a part of Abilities! as the mural in the cafeteria, the portraits along the main hallway, or a Henry Viscardi book, all of which reference him in some way. On January 18, 2009, the staff celebrated Alex's 90th birthday. He was able to share some stories of the early

days in the organization and told of this **One Moment In Time** which was most memorable to him.

“Hank (Dr. Viscardi) and I went down to Washington to testify with Bernard Baruch against a bill that was going to set the disabled back. While we were waiting, Mr. Baruch told me he was going to take out his hearing aid and take a nap. As Hank came over to us, I was pretending to talk with Mr. Baruch, calling him

Bernie, telling him off-color jokes, etc. You should have seen Hank's face; he could not believe I was talking to him that way. I finally told him not to worry he didn't have his hearing aid in.”



(l.-r.) Bernard Baruch, Henry Viscardi, Jr. and Alex at the Parade of Progress Exposition in Washington, D.C. on April 29, 1954.

Funds Needed for Adapted Driver Education

Acquiring a driver's license can make a critical difference in the life of a disabled person. A driver's license makes it possible to commute to work, get to the doctor, drive children to school, grocery shop, access community resources, and, in general, lead a more independent life.

Since 1971, Abilities! has offered Adapted Driver Education and has evaluated over 10,000 individuals, assisting 7,000 in obtaining NYS driver's licenses. All are taught to drive in Abilities!-owned vans and cars that have been outfitted with a variety of assistive devices and modified to accommodate a wide range of disabilities.

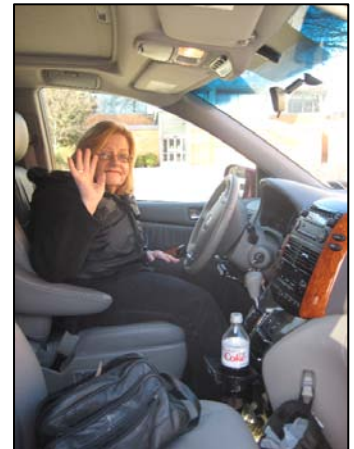
Adapted Driver Education is a two-step process. First, our team (an Adapted Driver Education teacher as well as a licensed occupational therapist) performs a cognitive-perceptual evaluation to assess whether or not an individual's disability will interfere with his/her ability to safely operate a

vehicle. If the individual passes this evaluation, then he/she learns to drive a vehicle which has been modified for his/her functional capabilities; in other words, for what they can do. For example, a person in a wheelchair will be taught to drive a modified car or van which does not require the use of foot pedals. A person with insufficient strength in their arms to move a gear shift will learn to operate a vehicle in which they press toggle switches (push buttons) to shift gears. Our modified vehicles also have variable steering: the size of the wheel and the power needed to turn the wheel can be adjusted for those with weak arms or limited range of motion. With the appropriate modifications, even an amputee can be taught to drive.

We seek funding in order to expand this essential program which is filled to capacity. Currently, we have only one Adapted Driver Education teacher. He evaluates and trains each

person who comes through our door, from physically disabled teenagers from local school districts (including the Henry Viscardi School), to newly disabled veterans returning from Iraq, and referrals from a variety of state agencies. This is a large population, since no other organization in downstate New York offers a comparable Adapted Driver Education Program.

Additional funding would not only allow us to expand the number of evaluations we perform; but also, enable us to outreach the community. This outreach effort would raise public awareness of Adapted Driver Education, giving hope to disabled individuals throughout the region, many of whom may have given up on getting a license. Our Adapted Driver Education is a proven program which makes a meaningful difference in the lives of people with disabilities.



Susie, a success story of the Adapted Driver Education program, gets into her newly modified van to run her daily errands.

**To Donate Online,
please visit our secure website:
www.abilitiesonline.org
and click on "Support Abilities!"**

You'll receive our Magnetic Bumper Sticker for your contribution.

Votes of Confidence for Emerging Leaders

We are pleased to announce three grants have been received to expand our Emerging Leaders program into a national program. Booz Allen Hamilton has recommitted \$25,000, Lockheed Martin provided \$12,500, and a new relationship has been established with The MENTOR Network Charitable Foundation, giving \$5,000.

Emerging Leaders is a unique initiative with a twofold purpose: to place highly qualified college students with disabilities

into competitive summer internships with the nation's leading employers and to provide employers with a pool of young workers with disabilities to diversify their workforce.

The program began in 2001 as a collaboration between Abilities! and Booz Allen Hamilton, which wanted to diversify its workforce to include more people with disabilities. From 2001 to 2005, Emerging Leaders was sponsored exclusively by Booz Allen Hamilton, with a generous

grant from the Johnson Scholarship Foundation. In 2005, Emerging Leaders transitioned to be fully managed by Abilities!. Internships are currently available in both Washington, D.C. and New York. This year, despite the economic downturn, we are thankful that firms like Cisco, G.E., and Microsoft have signed on as corporate partners and are reviewing the resumes of more than 70 highly qualified students. For more details, please visit us at www.emerging-leaders.com.

Abilities!

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Save the Dates

*April 23, 2009

Assistive Technology: Making the Right Choice and Augmentative/Alternative Communication: Breaking the Silence. The two-day conference explains various strategies and devices that may assist someone with a disability achieve greater independence. Specialists from the Kornreich Technology Center will be the presenters. Continuing Education hours are available. Please call 516-465-1431 for more information.

*May 6, 2009

Abilities, Inc.'s Consumer Graduation. The keynote address will be given by Ken Kunken, Esq. Mr. Kunken is a newly elected Abilities, Inc. Board member who serves as the County Court Deputy Bureau Chief for the Office of the District Attorney of Nassau County.

For more details on all events, please visit us on the web.
www.abilitiesonline.org

*May 14, 2009

Abilities! 43rd Annual Celebrity Sports Night. Event Chairman: Steven Witkoff, Founder & CEO, The Witkoff Group; Distinguished Honoree: Edward Kenney, Vice President, Mutual of America; Executive Sportsman of the Year: Stephen Ross, Chairman & CEO, Related Companies and Owner, Miami Dolphins; Special Guest: Tiki Barber, among other great athletes. Tables and sponsorships still available at 516-465-1597.

Special Thanks...

The Development Office would like to acknowledge these individuals' input and thank them for their efforts.

~Terri Zenobio, Editor

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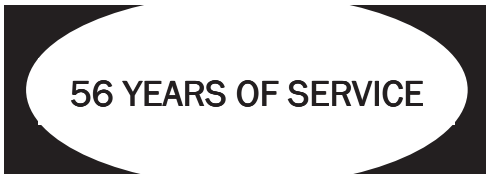
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For more details, or to donate online, visit our
website: www.abilitiesonline.org.



Abilities!

*"to create a world in which
people with disabilities live
simply as people"*

Our Mission:

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

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