



# Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

# ACCESS NEWS

Summer 2007    NUMBER XIII

## Access to Home Success Earns Agency Another Two-Year, \$200,000 Grant

On Thursday, August 9, Mary Ewing, Executive Director of Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc., announced that her agency had been awarded a \$200,000 grant from the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) to administer a program to provide accessibility modifications to low and very low income households.

The new grant will run from April 2008 through March 2010. Along with additional matching funds from Access to Independence and Thoma Development Corporation, the agency aims to implement up to 15 housing modifications.

Ms. Ewing said that Access to Independence will partner with Cortland County Area Agency on Aging, Cortland County Community Action Program, and Cortland Housing Assistance Council, among others, to provide services and

structural modifications for assisted households.

Adaptation work must meet the needs of those with physical disabilities, and seniors with an age-related disability. Examples of modifications include: wheelchair ramps and lifts, handrails, expanded doorways; roll-in showers with grab bars, bathtub grab bars and seats; kitchen modifications; modifications for the visually and hearing impaired; and relocating a bathroom or bedroom.

Rob Ferri, Access to Independence Architectural Barrier Specialist, manages the agency's existing Access to Home project, which is funded through an initial DHCR grant of \$200,000. That project started in April 2006 and runs through March 2008, with a goal of completing at least 15 home modifications.

Since July of last year, Mr. Ferri has seen through to completion a total of 11 projects, including the installation of 10 ramps, three bathroom renovations, two interior door modifications, and installation of a fire alarm system for a person with a hearing impairment.

Another five projects are currently underway, with seven more set to begin this year and two more in the spring.

"With eight applications currently on hold and a waiting list that is growing by

the week, the announcement of additional funds couldn't have come at a better time," said Mr. Ferri.

Mr. Ferri and Access to Independence Program Coordinator, Fran Pizzola, were recently featured in a video prepared by the NYS DHCR to show-off the state's success in its efforts to remove architectural barriers and to help keep people who have disabilities at home rather than in nursing homes. That video shares the stories of a dozen benefactors of the Access to Home project, including two in McGraw that Mr. Ferri and Access to Independence completed. The video is available online at <http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/general/multimedia.htm>.

Access to Independence has been contacted by organizations and families across the region seeking consultation on accessibility and assistance with barrier removals. Some of those who have contacted the agency include the Cortland Free Library, Glenhaven Library, McGraw Methodist Church, McGrawville Baptist Church, Town of Scott, YWCA, Walden Oaks, Cortland County Board of Elections, and the Suffolk County DSO.

For more information, contact Rob Ferri at 753-7363 or by email: [rferri@aticortland.org](mailto:rferri@aticortland.org).

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*Above: Before and after pictures of a recently completed Access to Home project in Cortland County. Residents now have independence to get in and out of their house.*

## Cortland's Access Office a Presence in Washington, D.C.

Staffers from Access to Independence of Cortland County descended upon the U.S. Capitol on July 10 to demonstrate support for the independence of persons with disabilities.

About 500 marchers converged in front of the Capitol for an empowering rally featuring a number of invigorating speakers from the disability rights movement, as well as members of Congress. Following the rally, Mary E. Ewing, executive director of Access to Independence, and Chad W. Underwood, of Access to Independence, weathered strong downpours of rain amid lightning and thunder to meet with Rep. Michael Arcuri, Sen. Hillary Clinton, and Sen. Charles Schumer to discuss affordable and accessible housing, Americans with Disabilities Act, health care, personal attendant services, accessible transportation, youth issues, and independent living issues, including funding for Cortland's Independent Living Program and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, provide fundamental civil rights protections. As stated in the Rehabilitation Act of 1992, disability

is a natural part of life, which does not diminish the rights of individuals to live independently, make choices, contribute to society, pursue careers or enjoy integration into the mainstream activities of American society.

There are five basic characteristics of Independent Living Centers (ILCs), of which Access to Independence is one. They are consumer controlled, community based, provide cross-disability service, are non-residential and are not-for-profit. ILCs serve individuals with all kinds of physical and mental disabilities, and all age groups.

Ewing and Underwood were in Washington, D.C., participating in the 2007 National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. This year's theme celebrated accomplishments from the past and strategies for the future. Over four days, attendees chose from nearly 20 different workshops to partici-

pate in. Workshops focused on leadership, outcome-based programs, expanding community involvement, reaching youth with disabilities, and fund development.

Each year, approximately 500 representatives from ILCs across the nation meet to discuss national and state legislative initiatives, as well as to participate in networking and info-sharing activities relating to independent living.



*Above: Mary Ewing, ATI Executive Director, joins 500 other Independent Living Center representatives in a March to the U.S. Capitol.*

### Access to Employment Conference Springboards ATI Initiatives

ATI held a three module Employment Conference in the Spring to engage existing and potential consumers interested in gaining community employment and introduce them to the Peer Mentoring Program and other Access to Independence services. The three-week conference featured a variety of themes relating to employment, including: (1) Employment & Disability – Trends & Legal Issues; (2) Barriers to Employment Success & Local Resources; and (3) Job Search Attitude & Work Incentives.

Each week's session featured an individual with a disability who had successfully overcome personal barriers to accomplish certain life goals. Each of the three speakers had a very different story to tell about their particular disability, the problems they faced, and how they achieved success. Common themes among the speakers' experiences were that they did not give up and they kept a positive attitude. Speakers included Paul

Hamilton, an engineer with Pall Trinity; Kenny Fernald, Vice President of Operations at Binghamton's Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (AVRE); and Sharon Kaufman, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with VESID.

The Employment Conference offered participants insight into the complex world of community employment. Representatives from Employment Connection, VESID, AVRE, and Cortland Works Career Center each spoke on their agency's specific programs. Dr. Hannah Rudstam and Shammi Carr of Cornell University's Employment & Disability Institute shared their knowledge on employment and disability trends and legal issues faced today by individuals with disabilities. Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator at Access to Independence, discussed disability disclosure when applying for a job or to college. Aaron Baigr, Peer Mentoring

Specialist at Access to Independence, discussed the benefits of the Peer Mentoring Program during one session, and networking techniques during another. Sue Lewis, Independent Living Advocate at Access to Independence, highlighted Social Security benefits and work incentives offered to individuals seeking employment.

Two separate interactive assessments offered participants an opportunity to learn more about themselves. One assessment, "Barriers to Employment Success Inventory" helped individuals identify particular barriers that might impede their getting and keeping employment. The other assessment, "Job Search Attitude Inventory" helped individuals identify attitudinal barriers that might impede their identification of the right job.

Going forward, ATI intends to offer a similar event each spring and fall.

## Access Raises Awareness Through Active Community Involvement

Five years ago, few people in the community knew of Access to Independence. Thanks to a dedicated Board of Directors and an excellent staff of nine employees and 10 volunteers, the agency has more than doubled its budget, areas of programming, and services provided. How has this happened, you ask? There is one fundamental strategy that the agency has undertaken: being active in the community to understand the needs of persons with disabilities and to raise awareness.

One way that Access to Independence remains active in the community is by way of participation on local committees, boards of directors, and programs, and its partnerships with local businesses and agencies. As an agency, Access is a member of or a partner with the following organizations: National Council of Independent Living (NCIL); New York Association of Independent Living (NYAIL); Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID); Cortland County Chamber of Commerce; Community Action Program (CAPCO); Cortland City School District; Cortland Works Career Center; and Employment Connection / JM Murray Center.



The agency's staff members are associated with another 31 local and statewide organizations, including the NYS Independent Living Council, Cortland County Transportation Committee, YWCA, Catholic Charities, Community Services Board, Cortland Area Communities that Care; League of Women Voters; Mental Health Stigma Task Force; Affordable and Accessible Housing Committee, and Long Term Care Coalition and Community Assessment Team. Four staff members serve on organization Boards of Directors.

Another way that Access to Independence raises awareness in the community is through its participation in local events. For example, over the past three months, Access to Independence sponsored a booth at Kidsville, spearheaded a partnership with the Crown City Lumberjack Invitational and offered a concession stand at the June Dairy Parade.

For the third year in a row, Access to Independence brought its fully accessible playhouse, complete with dolls in wheelchairs, along with a variety of accessible games, to Kidsville, an annual event organized by the Cortland Area Child Care Council. The event took place on April 28, at the Cortland County Office Building Gymnasium as a fun way for children and their parents to learn about local agencies and organizations. The highlight of the event was the interest and intrigue many expressed with Aaron Baier (Peer Mentoring Specialist) and his service animal, Maxie.

Access to Independence took on an expanded role at this year's Crown City Lumberjack Invitational, partnering with the Wheelin' Sportsmen, to provide door prizes, sell commemorative items, organize a 50/50 raffle, and advocate for individuals with disabilities interested in outdoor activities. Wheelin' Sportsmen is an outreach program that provides people

## Access Celebrates 20 Years of Grassroots Advocacy

On May 16, nearly 100 visitors attended a special open house at Access to Independence to celebrate its 20-plus years of service. For about five hours, interested people toured the office using a recently developed map and learned about what each of the nine staff and up to 10 volunteers do each day. The agency's Community Room featured a PowerPoint presentation of agency activity. Attendees flipped through scrapbooks that meticulously archived ATI's efforts since its grassroots beginnings in 1986 as the Cortland County Accessibility Committee.

Located at 26 N. Main St., in Cortland, the 10-room facility offers peer counseling, information and referrals, architectural barrier consultation, environmental modifications services, programs for health and wellness, peer mentoring, and youth transition, systems advocacy, houses a number of local support groups, provides consumer access to computers and the internet, has a resource library of books and videos, and offers a variety of adaptive equipment, such as wheelchairs and walkers, for loan.

with disabilities the opportunity to participate in outdoor activities. For more information, check out its magazine, Wheelin' Sportsmen, or its website, [www.wheelin'sportsmen.org](http://www.wheelin'sportsmen.org).

The Cortland Regional Sports Council organized and promoted the June 2nd event, which was held at the J.M. McDonald Sports Complex and included 14 men and 8 women from Australia, Canada, and the United States. For the second year in a row, Crown City Lumberjack Invitational Trophies were awarded to Matt Bush and Peg Engasser as overall event winners.



**Above Left:** Janet Brown, Aaron Baier, Fran Pizzola, Steve Potts, Chad Underwood, and Rob Ferri pose at the Lumberjack Invitational.

**Left:** Aaron Baier and his service dog, Maxie, introduce themselves to curious Kidsville attendees.

**Right:** Mary Ewing, ATI Executive Director, meets with Christina Curry, Harlem Independent Living Center Executive Director, during a recent visit to New York City.



## Decision 2008: Candidates Views on Disability Issues

With interest heating up in the 2008 Election, the American Association of People with Disabilities has asked all the declared candidates to respond to several questions concerning persons with disabilities. Their web page lists these questions and the responses that they have received from each campaign: <http://www.aapd.com/News/election/index2008.php> This is one of the best sources to begin to research the views of the candidates on disability issues.

## NYS Accessible Housing Registry Now Online

If you are a person with a disability looking for housing, or you are helping someone look for accessible housing, check out the following online housing registry: <http://www.mnip-net.org/NY/nyhr.nsf/pages/home?open>. The easy-to-use Registry supplies extensive information concerning affordable and market-rate housing throughout New York State, including information on accessibility features. There are many additional properties that are still not listed but this is a good starting point.

The Registry allows you to search for housing by: location including by town, zip code and major cities; and income, age or disability requirements.

Each listing contains contact information for the sites' owners and property managers.

If you have any questions or need help in accessing the site, please contact [access@cidny.org](mailto:access@cidny.org).

## TENANTS RIGHTS

**Do you rent an apartment in the Cortland area?**

**Do you have questions regarding your legal rights as a tenant?**

**Access to Independence of Cortland County would like to hold a Tenants' Rights Informational Meeting.**

**Please call Susan Lewis at 753-7363 if you are interested.**

## Federal Happenings: The Community Choice Act

U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and House of Representative member Danny Davis (D-IL) have introduced the Community Choice Act of 2007, S.799/H.R.1621. Formerly known as MiCASSA, this legislation would increase access to community-based services and other supports for Americans with disabilities and older Americans. The Act is being co-sponsored by Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL).

The Community Choice Act builds on Money Follows the Person, paving a way to Real Choice in long-term care. The bill will allow people who are eligible for nursing homes or other Medicaid funded institutions to have the choice of living in the community through various services and supports.

The legislation also provides enhanced federal matching funds to help states develop their long-term care infrastructure and grant funds to help states increase their ability to provide home and community-based services. Finally, this bill creates a demonstration project to evaluate service coordination and cost sharing approaches for those eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare services.

Both NY Senators Hillary Clinton (D-NY), Charles Schumer (D-NY), as well as Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Joseph Biden (D-DE), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), and Christopher Dodd (D-CT) have signed on as co-sponsors of the Community Choice Act of 2007. We now need all members of the House of Representatives to sponsor and support this bill. You can communicate with your Representative by linking to: <http://capwiz.com/rochestercdr/issues/alert/?alertid=9489731>

## Local Elections Set for Sept. 18 and Nov. 6

All County Legislature and most city, town and village elections will be held this fall. These are the officials who most directly affect our lives and property. It is important to inform ourselves about the candidates and what they stand for. Watch for articles in the *Cortland Standard* about the candidates and for the League of Women Voters' Candidate Forums during September and October.

The County Board of Elections website contains the election and the political calendars giving dates for individuals to register by mail and in-person as well as deadlines for applying for absentee ballots. <http://www.cortland-co.org/election/ccboe.html> and <http://www.cortland-co.org/election/images/content.pdf>

## Are You Registered To Vote?

**For more information, contact:**

**Access to Independence at 753-7363  
or  
the Board of Elections at 753-5031**

Access to Independence has registration forms, as does the Board of Elections and its website. For the Sept. 18<sup>th</sup> Primary Elections, registration must be completed by Aug. 25. If you have moved since the last election, you must file a change of address form by Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>.

For the General Election on Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>, registration must be completed by October 12<sup>th</sup>. Change of address forms must be filed by Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>.

Be sure to check with the Board of Elections (607) 753-5031 or its website for details.

## Accessible Voting Outlook

Because of delays in certifying new voting machines, the existing lever machines will continue to be used for some time in New York. Please call the Board of Elections or Access to Independence if you want to use the accessible voting machine but lack transportation to get there. We can answer other questions about the voting process as well.

The County Board of Elections is continuing to update the physical accessibility of polling places. Please report any problems you may have in exercising your right to vote to the Board.

## **Affordable and Accessible Housing Remains Persistent Barrier to Independent Living in Cortland County**

Lack of affordable and accessible housing continues to be one of the greatest barriers to independent living for people with disabilities. The supply of affordable housing units continues to dwindle in Cortland as college landlords convert units to house students and others demolish housing to add parking spaces. There has been limited discussion on additional accessible/affordable housing?. The senior housing units in Homer have been completed and occupied but not without years of controversy and delay.

Rent and utilities continue to increase, while benefit payments and minimum wage do not. A federal agency that tracks rental rates reports that a one or two bedroom apartment in Cortland County costs \$509 to \$545. This is more than the basic DSS stipend and about \$100 less than a SSI stipend. How would people living on these benefits be able to afford housing? With the limited number of Section 8 housing subsidy

vouchers available, only a small portion of the disabled population could afford independent housing. Many disabled people live with and are cared for by family members. What happens when these family members are no longer able to perform these tasks or need care themselves?

This lack of community housing means that people are more likely to be housed in expensive and inappropriate institutional settings such as hospitals and nursing homes, often at public expense. Expanding the availability of affordable and accessible community housing would not only save tax dollars but improve the independence and quality of life of persons with disabilities.

It is our responsibility to advocate for more affordable/accessible housing at every opportunity. Join our affordable/accessible housing committee and help educate the Cortland community on this important issue.

## **ATI Hosts Benefits Training on 2007 Social Security Work Incentives**

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, Access to Independence hosted "Benefits and Employment in the Year 2007," a workshop presented for the second year in a row by Mr. Michael Walling. Mr. Walling, a national benefits trainer and consultant, spoke to about 30 guests from around the region at ATIs Community Room about the impact of income on Social Security benefits and associated medical benefits.

Work incentives allow persons with disabilities who receive Social Security (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to work and still receive monthly payments, and Medicare or Medicaid.

If you receive SSDI benefits and go to work, you will be entitled to a nine-month Trial Work Period (TWP) in which you can test your ability to work without losing benefits. During the TWP, you will receive your full SSDI benefit regardless of the amount of your earnings. The TWP continues until you have worked for nine months. However, the nine months need not be consecutive. When you have used up nine TWP months within a 60-month period, the TWP is finished.

If you are an SSI recipient and you go to work, most of your earnings will not be counted in calculating your benefit. As a general rule, a little more than one-half of your earnings are excluded. First, you are entitled to a general income exclusion of \$20 per month and an earned income disregard of \$85 per month. Then, for every two dollars that you earn, you will lose one dollar in SSI. You may also deduct Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs).

For more information on whether you might be eligible to take advantage of the various 2007 Social Security work incentives, contact Sue Lewis at Access to Independence: 607-753-7363, or visit the SS website: [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

Free online educational services on the SSDI process are available for those within the disability advocacy community, as well. For more information, contact: [m.sutherland@allsu-pinc.com](mailto:m.sutherland@allsu-pinc.com).

## **Access to Independence Eyes Entrepreneurial Activities**

While Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. has experienced a steady growth over the past five years (budget, staff, and services have more than doubled), the agency's ability to expand services to satisfy the unmet demand of persons with disabilities has been roadblocked by its limited funding streams.

To combat this dilemma, ATI sent a team to Houston, Texas, to participate in an intense three-day workshop on entrepreneurship for not-for-profits. The Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) put on the seminar, themed "High-Impact CILs: Supercharging Your Mission!" The June workshop brought independent living center leaders from across the nation together to learn about how to move beyond bake sales and selling t-shirts to more profitable earned income opportunities.

The Access to Independence Board of Directors recently established an Earned Income Task Force, which has been charged to begin exploring more entrepreneurial activities, including fee-based services.

## **ATI Proudly Introduces:**

### **Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Program**

**September 5<sup>th</sup> - October 10<sup>th</sup>  
Wednesday's 1:00 - 3:00 pm**

**Please call Fran Pizzola by 08/27 at  
753-7363 if you are interested.**

## **Interested in becoming a volunteer?**

ATI is currently seeking volunteers to help:

- \* Advocate for removal of community architectural barriers.
- \* Organize social, recreational and educational events to include PWD.
- \* Advocate for changes in legal / social / business systems to provide equal access.
- \* Assist with computer & clerical tasks.

**Please call Shirley Martini at  
753-7363 if you are interested.**

## Access Develops Youth Transition Program

During the first half of 2007, ATI undertook an intensive ramp-up on youth transition issues in order to expand the reach of its quality and unique services to youth with disabilities. Those efforts paid off on June 11<sup>th</sup>, when the agency hosted a half-day Youth Transition workshop for Maria DeRado's CHS School-to-Work class in the ATI Community Room.

Access to Independence also participated in five Orientation programs for the Cortland County Summer Youth Employment Program. Close to 100 youth learned about the independent living philosophy and how to apply it to their transition out of school and into the community.

Access to Independence has developed the foundation of a new youth transition program, called EASY DOES IT! (Empowerment and Advocacy Services for Youth, Determination in Overcoming Barriers & Encouraging Successful Individual Transition). The program aims to offer youth with disabilities an opportunity to work one-on-one with a mentor to gain independent living skills, as well as to gain unique perspective on their future by way of workshops and assessments on problem-solving, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills, among others, as they transition from school to work or post-secondary education.

For more information on this program, please contact Access to Independence at 753-7363, or visit the agency website at [www.aticortland.org](http://www.aticortland.org).

Access To  Independence  
OF CORTLAND COUNTY, INC.

**E** EMPOWERMENT &  
**A** ADVOCACY  
**S** SERVICES FOR  
**Y** YOUTH  
**DOES IT!**

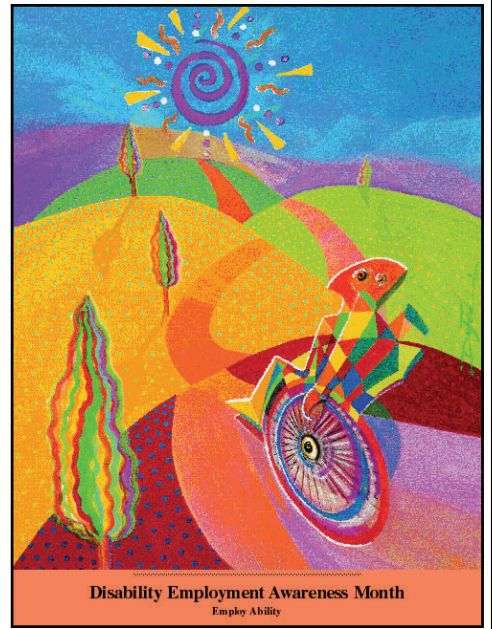


## Access Plans for 2007 National Disability Employment Awareness Month and Disability Mentoring Day

Access is poised to help plan, promote, and implement this October's 2007 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team!" is the official 2007 theme. This year's recognition event will be held on Wednesday, October 3, at the Elk's Lodge, and will include the recognition of an outstanding youth employer and employee. Each year, Access joins with the J M Murray Center, Cortland Works Career Center, and VESID to plan the event, which aims to increase the public's awareness of the contributions and skills of American workers with disabilities.

Access will also participate in Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) activities scheduled for Wednesday, October 17. This year's theme is "Disability Mentoring Day: Career Development for the 21st Century." Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) is a national program that promotes career development for students and job-seekers with disabilities through job shadowing and hands-on career exploration. This year, Access to Independence, the J M Murray Center, Cortland Works Career Center, and VESID will join local communities

around the country to organize activities to bring students and employers together. Informational sessions about career opportunities and one-on-one mentoring with volunteers at public and private places of employment are being scheduled. Cortland began implementing Disability Mentoring Day in 2005 with just 15 participants. That number grew to 35 in 2006 and is expected to exceed 50 this year.



## ATI Celebrates 17 Years for the Americans with Disabilities Act

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, Access to Independence celebrated the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA). Amidst bouquets of balloons, donated by Dan Mullins, over 100 consumers, family members, friends and business partners braved strong winds, thunder, and rain at the Suggett Park Rotary Pavilion to celebrate the 1990 law which aims to ensure equal access and opportunity for the 54 million Americans with disabilities.

"While the ADA has had significant impact in society, it remains up to advocates and legislators to ensure that the law is upheld and properly implemented," according to Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator at ATI. Pizzola teamed with Shirley Martini, the agency's Operations Manager, to plan the event.

"As an advocacy agency, ATI is very fortunate to have the support of our local County Government," remarked Pizzola, noting that Access to Independence Board Member, Tom Hartnett, is also a County Legislator. During the celebration Hartnett announced that the Cortland County Legislature had adopted a proclamation in support of the ADA the prior night. In it, the Legislature resolved to "call on all Americans to celebrate the many contributions of individuals with disabilities as we work towards fulfilling the promise of the ADA to give all our citizens the opportunity to live with dignity, work productively, and achieve their dreams." A copy of the Proclamation hangs on the wall at the agency.

Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton shared her thoughts on the ADA and spoke about a bill that she is sponsoring (A.7653) and that is currently awaiting

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## Access Kicks off Second Year of Peer Mentoring Program

Less than two weeks after graduating the agency's first Peer Mentoring Program (PMP) group, Access to Independence began intensive outreach at more than a dozen local agencies and initiated a six-week long public awareness campaign in the Cortland Standard, Sunday Democrat, and local radio stations to get the word out on the existence of the program and its benefits.

PMP aims to provide access to the skills and resources necessary for PWD to gain and retain community employment. PMP seeks to train participants on how to improve their independent living skills, such as problem solving techniques, self-determination, and self-advocacy. The six-month program offers a variety of workshop styles, ranging from peer support sessions, to interactive assessments on attitude and barriers to employment, to co-sponsored community events.

The key component of PMP is the peer mentoring aspect. Each participant is matched with a Mentor, who provides one-on-one feedback opportunities on a regular basis. Mentees and Mentors

meet for at least six hours each month to discuss topics relating to each person's life experiences or personal goals.

The program also provides insight to overcoming barriers by way of guest speakers who share their own success stories. PMP features local agencies such as VESID, Employment Connection, and Cortland Works Career Center, that highlight the various services they can provide to consumers. This year's PMP already has 16 Mentees and 9 Mentors enrolled. Anyone that is interested in participating in this program should contact ATI at 753-7363, or visit the ATI website ([www.aticortland.org](http://www.aticortland.org)) for more information.

ATI began its PMP in 2006 using grant resources secured from the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC). ATI is looking to make its peer mentoring initiative self-sustainable well into the future. The agency strives to offer services that are consistent with the independent living philosophy. Peer mentoring opportunities and transition services are just two more for ATI to add to its list.

## Familiar Faces in the Office...

Meet **Cheryl Williams!** For over two years, Cheryl has been a much appreciated member of the ATI team. Cheryl fills in at the reception desk, answers the phone, helps with mailings, faxing, copying, and more recently has been developing her typing and computer skills. Cheryl also serves as a Mentor in the agency's Peer Mentoring Program. Cheryl has over 20 years work experience at Highgate, Marietta, and Crescent Corset.

Meet **Chad Underwood!** Chad has been offering his services to ATI since last December. He is currently helping with the agency's Peer Mentoring and Youth Transition Programs to ensure their future self-sustainability. Chad returned to Cortland after five years as a corporate project manager and private consultant in San Diego, CA, and three years as Director of Government Affairs and Education for an Albany, NY firm that managed a number of national associations of state legislators. Chad earned his Bachelor's Degree at SUNY Geneseo and his Master's Degree at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.



*Above: ATI holds the ADA 17th Anniversary Picnic at Suggett Park on 07/27.*

*Below: Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton speaks to the picnic's attendees.*



## ADA 17th Anniversary (continued)...

passage. If enacted, the bill would waive the State's sovereign immunity and allow state employees to sue NYS for damages due to violations of the ADA, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993. The bill would ensure that state employees have the same protection as private sector employees under all these federal laws.

John Eves and Eric Mulvihill from WXHC 101.5 Oldies Radio entertained guests with their live broadcast at the picnic. Some revelers shared their praise for the ADA on air, while others feasted on BBQ chicken, salad, ice cream donated by Schwan's, watermelon, and a massive cake.

The agency's inaugural watermelon eating contest was a smash hit as men and women, adults and youth, dove face-first into giant slices of watermelon, hands behind their back, and with the crowd cheering them on.



*Above: Anthony Potts eats his way to first place in the Watermelon Contest.*

*Below: Mary Beilby, ATI Systems Advocate, speaks with Bob Messinger, Field Representative for Congressman Arcuri*

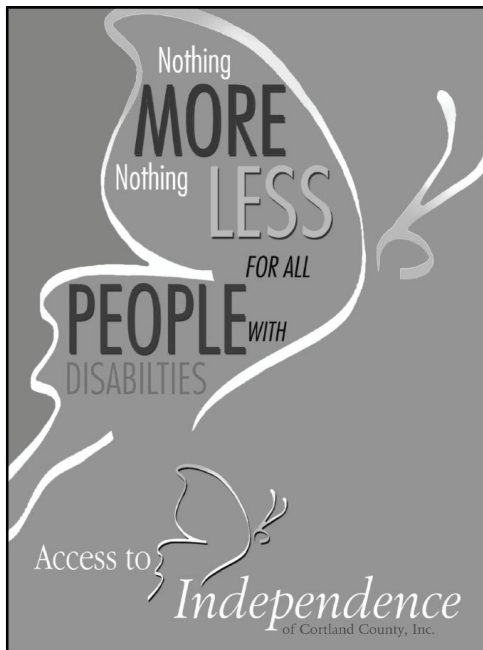


**Board Members**

Andrea Haenlin-Mott, Board Chair  
Joe Abdulla, Board Vice Chair  
Edward Lancelotti, Board Treasurer  
Ray Ackerman, Board Secretary  
Janet Brown  
Angela Burchfield  
Polly Cator  
Debbie Geibel  
Tom Hartnett  
Helene Maxwell  
Peter Morse-Ackley  
Theresa Shutts  
Linda Stock

**Staff**

Mary Ewing, Executive Director  
Aaron Baier, Peer Mentoring Spec.  
Mary Beilby, Systems Advocate  
Kim Christie, Receptionist  
Rob Ferri, Architectural Barrier Spec.  
Sue Lewis, Indep. Living Advocate  
Shirley Martini, Operations Manager  
Fran Pizzola, Program Coordinator



**Visit our website at:  
[www.aticortland.org](http://www.aticortland.org)**

**Email us at:  
[info@aticortland.org](mailto:info@aticortland.org)**

**Ongoing Events:**

Craft Classes  
Tuesday's - 10:00 am - 12:00 pm  
Thursday's - 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Caregiver's Support Group  
09/27 - 7:00 pm

Fibromyalgia Support Group  
09/04 - 5:30 pm

Mental Health Support Group  
Wednesday's - 7:30 - 9:00 pm

Peer Employment Support Group  
Last Wednesday Monthly - 5:00 pm

Worksite Wellness Program  
Wednesday's - 3:30 - 4:45 pm

Fun Night  
09/13 - 6:00 - 8:00 pm

**Upcoming Events:**

09/03 - Labor Day - Office Closed  
09/19 - Board Meeting - 4:00 pm  
10/03 - NDEAM Luncheon  
10/17 - Disability Mentoring Day



**26 North Main Street  
Cortland, New York 13045**