Theme announced for National Disability Employment Awareness Month, October

By Suzanne Peins

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) began in 1945 when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October of each year as “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.” Then in 2001, upon its establishment, The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) assumed responsibility for NDEAM and has worked to expand its reach and scope ever since.

Every May the ODEP releases the theme for the year. This year’s theme is “Because We Are EQUAL to the Task”. The theme reflects the reality that people with disabilities have the education, training, experience, and desire to be successful in the workplace.

According to the government’s website in August 2013 14.1% of all the people living with a disability are unemployed versus only 7.1% of people living without a disability. The website goes on to point out that only 20.5% of the labor force is made up of people living with a disability. ODEP hopes that this year’s theme will help even out the playing field.

continued on page 3
With bipartisan support, Republican Ander Crenshaw from Florida in the U.S. House of Representatives and Democratic Senator Robert Casey from Pennsylvania reintroduced the ABLE Act this year. The ABLE Act legislation (H.R. 647 and S313) is seen by advocates of the disability community as a key role in providing a better future for people with disabilities and their families. The ABLE Act allows families to set aside funds in a tax advantaged savings account that allows the funds to be withdrawn to cover costs of health care, employment support, housing, transportation, the purchase of technology, and lifelong education. The funds will supplement benefits provided through Medicaid, Social Security, and private insurance. The income earned on amounts contributed to an ABLE Account would be tax exempt and would not be counted as a part of any asset limits for eligibility to federal programs.

ABLE Act Reintroduced
By Suzanne Peins

Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL) is working together with Advancing Opportunities (AO) to help make voting machines accessible to all. PCIL has years of experience educating the community about voting and voting accessibility. Advancing Opportunities has expertise in assistive technology and how people with disabilities can access most kinds of technology. Together, they are selecting people to test today’s voting machines to see what needs to be improved to make them more accessible to all.

Some voting machines that people use today have accessibility features such as a way to have the candidates’ names read aloud by the machine and going through choices using large buttons. However, many of the features were made by the voting machine manufacturers themselves without getting input from large groups of people.

PCIL and AO are asking individuals who have trouble using voting machines to test the accessibility features that are available today, and give their input on to how to improve the

continued on page 11
NJ Senate Special Election 2013
by Matthew Daly

On October 16, New Jersey will be holding a special election to fill the seat of Senator Frank Lautenberg, who passed away in June. The winner of the election will serve the remaining fifteen months of his term. An interim senator, Jeff Chiesa, was appointed by Chris Christie after Lautenberg’s death to hold the seat.

On August 13, the special election primaries were held. In the primary members of the same party compete against each other for the opportunity to represent their party in the general election. The democrats will be represented by Cory Booker. Cory Booker, the former mayor of Newark, is a fast rising star in the Democratic Party, and is viewed by some as a future presidential candidate. The republicans will be represented by Steve Lonegan. Steve Lonegan is a former gubernatorial candidate and the former mayor of Bogota.

The voter registration deadline for the October 16 election is September 25. If you are not a registered voter, there are a couple of ways to register. You can call the NJ Division of Elections at 609-292-3760 to get a registration form mailed to you, or you can go to www.lwnj.org. The form is now available online. Please do not hesitate to call PCIL if you need help getting a form or registering to vote.

NDEAM Theme Announced
continued from Front Page

these statistics.

The Office of Disability Employment’s ongoing employment campaign emphasizes positive employment outcomes and expands ideas about what young people with disabilities can do when they receive encouragement and support. Our Transition Specialists, while working with young people with disabilities in the workplace through PCIL’s Gateway Program, have found that employment opportunities are an exciting and motivating source to young people with disabilities, and encourages them to pursue their dreams of becoming independent adults. More information on the ODEP’s employment campaign is available at http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org and at The Office of Disability Employment website at http://www.dol.gov/odep.

This year’s NDEAM theme: “Because We are Equal to the Task”.

PAGE 3
New Jersey CILs are ready to start a major pilot project this fall that was initiated by NJ DVRS in 2012. There was a lot of work put into designing this project over the past year by CILs, consultants, and DVRS, with input by OSEP.

*It’s All About Work* is a fee for service project that puts an emphasis on young adults with disabilities in high school preparing for the transition process. The program will also focus on recent graduates and adults to prepare them for competitive employment opportunities.

Through a collaborative partnership with DVRS, the CILs will continue to build their relationships with schools from the “Promoting Self-Advocacy” grant period. That grant was co-funded by NJDOE and NJDVRS and ran successfully for nearly nine years.

This is a new era for NJ CILs, DVRS and the schools. This project will put students in a position to be eligible for DVRS services after they are 16 years or older prior to graduation. Mandated by this project is that schools must contract with CILs for group sessions that prepare them for DVRS eligibility and additional services.

CILs are uniquely qualified to offer this fee for service program to schools and individuals with disabilities who are seeking the real chance for competitive employment success. This project also is right in line with the Governor’s “Employment First” initiative that seeks to give everyone the chance for real jobs which will reduce the number of people with disabilities who are not employed.

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**Many More People Now Eligible for Medicaid**

*Taken from Horizon NJ Health Blue Notes*

New Jersey is one of the states that has chosen to expand its Medicaid program as part of health care reform. This means hundreds of thousands of people throughout the state will now be eligible for Medicaid benefits.

The new income limit for Medicaid is 133 percent of the federal poverty level, or about $32,000 a year for a family of four.

Open enrollment will start on October 1, 2013. Once someone enrolls benefits will start on January 1, 2014.
Amazon.com entered the world of fine art the week of August 12, 2013 and highlighted artists with developmental disabilities. About 150 art galleries and dealers were included in the launch of Amazon Art. Included in the debut is The DAC gallery, based in Los Angeles who represents 140 artists with developmental disabilities. The DAC gallery is part of the nonprofit Exceptional Children’s Foundation. They offer a handful of art studios where individuals with developmental disabilities hone their craft. The artists in the program have previously shown their work at the Smithsonian Institution and the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C..

Amazon described the new marketplace as “one of the largest online collections of original and limited edition artwork”. The pieces range in price from less than $100 to several million dollars. The gallery has more than 500 works ranging from watercolors to mixed media available for purchase.

Congratulations to Fraser Fund Recipients: Robert Jones and Andrew McGeady

“I am so grateful for being the recipient of the Colleen Fraser Fund. This fund will allow me to pursue my goal of attending Mercer County Community College this fall. I plan to utilize the fund to purchase needed books and material for classes. I want to thank everyone at the Progressive Center for this wonderful opportunity.”

- Robert Jones

“I am so grateful and humbled to have been chosen for the Colleen Fraser Scholarship Fund Award. This is truly an honor for me! The award will enable me to purchase a desperately needed new lift-equipped vehicle, so that I may continue to go to college, work, and remain active in my own community. I sincerely appreciate and thank you for your generosity!”

- Andrew McGeady
The definition of transition is a process or period in which something or someone undergoes a change and passes from one state, stage, form or activity, to another. Transition has a second meaning, which is a connection of two sections. Our lives continuously move through transitions, which often seem difficult and confusing. PCIL is dedicated to helping people with disabilities make smooth transitions.

In our efforts to provide quality services to transition aged youth, the NJ Association of Centers for Independent Living (NJACIL) has created an exciting initiative for people of all ages with disabilities, to enhance their adult lives. These course offerings will be provided by personnel with experience in working with youth and adults, planning their lives as it relates to the requirements of IDEA and the State Core Content Standards required for college and career readiness.

NJACIL Transition Specialists will assist in guiding transition aged youth, 14-21 years, through a decision making process to identify career and lifestyle preferences, potential transition goals and objectives, as well as needed adult services and supports. Each student will complete a strength-based transition profile at course completion. This will provide information pertaining to their strengths, interests, abilities, and preferences directly relating to school, career/employment and inclusive community living. In addition, NJACILs have an ongoing relationship with NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, (NJDVRS), who has made the commitment to work with eligible students in this initiative prior to graduation. NJACIL’s, work in this initiative does not stop there! We offer an a la cart menu of services for any eligible individual with disabilities in need of skills training pertaining to employment.

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NJDVRS has funded another transition focused program for PCIL called, “Career Gateway.” This program is designed for DVRS eligible individuals with disabilities 17 – 25 years, in need of career/job preparedness skills. We tap into talent, recognize personal management abilities, explore in-demand career choices, prepare for interviews, develop a resume, job search, develop peer relations, and career sample while building community relations.

PCIL is working in the community to facilitate ease in transition for every walk of life. Mercer and Hunterdon Counties send sincere thanks to the organizations and businesses that graciously supported our Career Gateway Program to date.

Career Gateway Update
by Renee Pfaff and Pamela Vernon

Career Gateway Summer 2013
I am very excited, but a little nervous about starting the next chapter of my life. After graduating from Mercer County Community College, I am preparing to go away to a four-year college and away from home by myself for the first time. I am going to be attending the Richard Stockton College of NJ. I am nervous about being able to live independently and away from my parents for the first time. My parents are planning to come with me and stay for a little while so I will be able to get more comfortable with the campus. After that I will have my own room but share the community room and bathroom with other students. I will be able to come home every month or so because we live so close to the College.

I feel my biggest challenge will be speaking to my professors and asking them questions. I am sometimes shy and find it difficult to speak to people that I don’t know. While I was at Mercer County Community College, I was shy and uncomfortable asking for help and going to the tutor center. Because of this, I sometimes got lower grades than I wanted to on essays and writing assignments. My mom was able to hire a tutor who worked with me independently on my writing assignments, and helped me become more comfortable speaking with my professors. Before leaving Mercer County Community College I actively practiced communicating with my professors by emailing them, asking them questions and asking to meet them in person.

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Recreation Update
by Drew Zimmerman

We had an incredible summer of events with the Community Connections Recreation Program. The Miracle League Softball Game at the Sawmill YMCA saw a record in attendance for a single PCIL event! There was close to 100 PCIL consumers along with their friends and families who either played or just cheered along. Hot dogs, snacks and soda were served. The weather was perfect and the game was very close too. The red team won by just 2 runs. Thank you to Killarney’s Publick House for sponsoring the T-Shirts used in the game.

The picnic with pontoon boat rides were also a terrific time. Once again, beautiful weather prevailed, and over 40 participants came. The boat rides were awesome, and we even saw an eagle or two while we were riding. Fred & Pete’s catered the event for us once again.

The Phillies, Mets, Yankees, and Trenton Thunder teams were all part of our summer offerings, as many individuals made their way to area ballparks to see their favorite teams. Over 80 people joined us at different baseball games over the summer. The Thunder picnic was a smashing success!

As fall approaches we have cool things on our schedule. Hooters in Lawrenceville will be hosting our next social club on September 25th. Also, be on the lookout for the next Movie Bunch. More events are sure to dot the calendar, so be sure to check your mailboxes for the bright yellow pieces of paper or visit our online calendars available on our Facebook page and website. Don’t forget kids, Santa will be stopping by in just a couple months. See you soon!

PCIL’s Scott Ellis Honored by White House
by Suzanne Peins

On September 24th PCIL’s Emergency Preparedness Training Coordinator, Scott Ellis, will be honored at The White House as a “Champion of Change”. He is one of three people that were selected as a “Community Preparedness Hero” for his work in the disability and first responder communities. Over the last eight years he has trained thousands of individuals in New Jersey and Pennsylvania to be prepared in emergencies and disasters.

Scott is a board member of Project Freedom and a member of Mercer County Disabled Advisory Council. He is currently the Access and Functional Needs Coordinator for Mercer County, the chair of the Mercer County Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD) group, a member of Mercer Emergency Response Team (CERT) and Vice Chair of NJ Group for Access and Integration Needs in Emergencies and Disasters. This is Scott Ellis’s second award. He has also received the “Champion of Change” award in 2012.
2013 Miracle League Softball Game

Thank you Killarney’s Publick House for kindly sponsoring the 2013 Softball Team T-shirts again this year!
Help Improve the Accessibility of NJ’s Voting Machines

Advancing Opportunities and the Progressive Center for Independent Living are working together with the Election Assistance Commission and Clemsen University to assess the effectiveness of Accessible Voting Systems. Fifty volunteers are needed to test the accessible voting machines and recommend improvements. Volunteers will receive a $20 Walmart gift card for their efforts.

Who We Need:

✓ People with disabilities who have trouble using the standard voting machine
✓ People with limited use of their hands
✓ People who have no upper extremity use and use switches to control things

What You’ll Need to Do:

✓ We will need about 30 minutes of your time
✓ You will need to get to one of our demonstration site on your own:
  Tuesday, September 24th
  Project Freedom of Hamilton

  Or  Friday, November 8th
  Project Freedom of Lawrence

✓ You will need to answer a few questions; try the voting machine and then answer a few more questions

Participants Must Register in Advance!

To find out if you are eligible and what times we have available, please contact Judy Nigl at 888-322-1918 ext. 595 or email jnigl@advopps.org

Advancing Opportunities provides services and supports to people with disabilities and their families. For more information, visit www.advopps.org
Voting, Accessible to All
Continued from page 2

design. Since voting machine design changes only once every decade or so, it is important that we give the companies that manufacture them our input now. We hope to influence the next generation of voting machine.

Advancing Opportunities, a statewide non-profit organization serving people with all disabilities, received a grant from Clemson University to be a partner on the RAAV Grant awarded to Clemson University from the Election Assistance Commission. AO’s part is to conduct Demonstrations of Accessible Voting Systems and then give the consumer hands-on instruction with the system after the demo. Four other states, Oklahoma, Illinois, Missouri and North Dakota, are also collecting this data.

Changing the way voting machines are designed is not a simple task, and it takes the work of many organizations and volunteers from across the country. We look forward to gathering everyone’s feedback, and sharing it with the voting machine manufacturers to make universal voting accessibility a reality.

My Next Chapter
Continued from page 7

year college. I am enthusiastic about getting ready to pursue my degree in communication at the Richard Stockton College of NJ. I am eager to learn to live more independently. I will have to learn to do my own laundry and eat meals in the dining hall on my own. I will also have to learn to wake up in the morning on my own so I can get to class on time. I am looking forward to meeting more people and making more friends in college. I will be able to be more social, join more clubs, and meet more people in college. I hope that going away to a four-year college will be a great experience for me in all. I hope that I will be able to become more socially acclimated when I go to Stockton College.

I feel that going away to college will better prepare me for my future and my independence. I think that because there is a required internship for my degree, I will become more prepared for a career in the field of communication. I am excited to get a job in communication and to be able to follow my dreams. I feel that this college experience will more fully prepare me for a career in sports media. I think that there will be challenges with going away to college, as any college student faces, but I am very prepared for the challenges that I may have to face.
ROOMMATE WANTED
Roommate wanted to share home in the Lambertville area. Single person preferred, homeowner is single & 60 years old. There may be an opportunity to reduce rental cost through assisting homeowner who has a disability. Asking for $900 a month. If interested please call 609.397.4692 and leave your name and phone number.

DIRECTORS:
Ann Freund
Gail Plumser

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Contact Peter Callas
609-259-6261

FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND AND HANDICAPPED