

# Access Abilities!

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is difficult to believe that Thanksgiving is just around the corner! Nevertheless, the calendar year is rushing to a close. Before we slip into 2008, let's look together at the progressive Research, Innovation, and Expansion projects supported by our Annual Fund in 2007.

The Annual Fund makes it possible for Abilities! to stay on the cutting edge, creating and implementing programs that make a tremendous difference in the educational and employment opportunities available to adults and children with disabilities, locally, nationally and worldwide. These unrestricted funds allow us to finance a special category of projects entitled Research, Innovation and Expansion (RIE).

Research, Innovation, and Expansion projects are usually generated at the grassroots level by our program staff and managers. Their ideas are taken to the Board of Directors for their review and approval. Finally, the Development Office works with the philanthropic community to raise the funds necessary to make each program a reality.

In 2007, through the generosity of our donors, we have managed to execute a wide range of creative Research, Innovation, and Expansion projects. Here are descriptions of just a few of these projects:

*Making On-line Training a Breeze* is a multi-year program that offers "state-of-the-art" on-line training (virtual classrooms, web conferencing) for teachers, physical therapists, employers and others who want to use assistive and instructional technology in the classroom and the workplace.

The *Intermediate Learning Center* targets those students who struggle with the most severe disabilities at the Henry Viscardi School. It provides these students with two teachers who can create and implement a customized curriculum for the intermediate years, a creation in line with the reputation of HVS as a "model" school for children with disabilities.

*Project Search* is an Abilities, Inc. program that trains youth and adults with disabilities for non-traditional work in the healthcare industry. A multi-year program, Project Search began at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and has since been replicated at hospitals around the country.

*Driver Training for Veterans and Older Americans* reaches out to the many physically and emotionally disabled veterans returning from the Iraq War, retraining them to drive using adaptive devices. It also retrains senior citizens whose capacity to drive has diminished due to strokes or other illnesses.

As you can see, the fulfillment of the Abilities! mission is tightly linked to our successful partnerships with the philanthropic community. Working together, we can continue to develop and implement exceptional programs that offer unparalleled opportunities to the people we serve.

Enjoy the holiday season. ■

## CLOSING THE EMPLOYMENT GAP FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



On August 21, 2007, Abilities Inc. and partners the Gap Inc., the Tranfo Family Foundation, and Motorola hosted a dedication ceremony for the grand reopening of a state-of-the-art training facility that will be used to prepare people with disabilities for competitive employment. The newly renovated facility will provide 'real world' vocational training for many of the 600 people who participate each year in one or more of Abilities Inc.'s onsite training programs. The facility will also be used as a demonstration site to increase awareness of accessible workplaces that employ universal design principles as a means to stimulate employer replication. As such

it will provide a functional demonstration of these principles in action and educate employers about the cost benefits and work-related advantages involved in accommodating and incorporating a diversity of people into the workplace.

Edmund L. Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities! stated “this is the first phase of renovations planned for our training facility located at our Albertson, NY headquarters. Our Universal Design Workplace Access Demonstration Center will not only serve as a modern training facility, but will also be used as a demonstration site for the replication of accessible workplaces that employ universal design principles. The center will be a state-of-the-art facility comprised of nine training workrooms, classrooms and laboratories, all of which will be used to prepare people with disabilities for competitive employment. The center will serve as a prototype for business, both public and private, for the select purpose of increasing employment opportunities for Americans with disabilities.”

This first phase of the renovation project includes a retail shop where our consumers will learn retail management, merchandising, cashiering, etc.; a mail center that will enable our consumers to learn how to operate postage, duplicating and assembling machinery; a commercial food preparation kitchen to prepare consumers for food service occupations; and a hospitality suite where our consumers will learn various housekeeping skills.



Francine Tishman, COO of Abilities, Inc., praised representatives from the Tranfo Family Foundation, Gap, Inc. and Motorola for their significant contributions and support. “On behalf of Abilities, Inc., I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your selfless dedication and generosity in support of this project. Together you have provided us with the financial resources and business expertise to renovate our vocational

employment training facility to better replicate today’s modern retail world.”

Constantina Petallides-Markou, a Gap store manager from Bayside, New York, and Anita Zimmerman, Manager, Employment Services, Abilities, Inc., were the driving force behind this project. In 2006 she was awarded Gap Inc.’s second annual Founders’ Award for her community service work with Abilities, Inc. and received \$50,000 and 80 hours of paid time off to modernize Abilities, Inc.’s mock retail store where youths and adults with disabilities learn key retail skills to gain successful employment. “I grew up with many friends and family members who had disabilities, and I witnessed firsthand the struggles they faced when looking for a job,” said Tina. “The training at the mock store provides real world experience that helps people to find solid jobs and enables them to excel in these positions. This real world experience in a simulated business environment will definitely result in a competitive advantage for people with disabilities entering the workforce. At the Gap Inc. corporate social responsibility includes empowering people of all abilities in the workforce. I’m honored to work for a company that has empowered me to make an impact in these people’s lives through this program.”

In his remarks, Joseph A. Tranfo, a member of the Abilities, Inc. board of directors and the major contributor for this project, stated “This Center will serve as a prototype for increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In the past, persons with disabilities were at a disadvantage to their non-disabled peers when it came to workplace hiring. Now, we will be able to provide students with a state-of-the-art employment training facility. This is crucial to providing a competitive advantage to the students with disabilities who participate in these programs – offering hands-on experience using state-of-the-art equipment and providing real world experience in a simulated business environment.” ■

## ABILITIES INC. RECEIVES COVETED ‘FREEDOM TO COMPETE AWARD’

On September 26, Naomi C. Earp, Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), presented Abilities Inc. with the third annual “Freedom to Compete Award” for its Experience Counts program that assists mature workers with disabilities or age-related limitations to regain meaningful employment. The program aims to educate employers about the value of hiring or retaining older workers and to assist mature job seekers in realigning their careers. As a result, 187 mature workers have obtained meaningful employment. Of those, over 70 percent were

unemployed for more than six months prior to receiving services.

The award is part of the EEOC's Freedom to Compete Initiative, a national outreach, education and coalition-building campaign launched in 2002 to provide free and unfettered access to employment opportunities for all individuals. The central theme of the initiative is that every individual deserves the opportunity to compete and advance as far as his/her talent and ability allow without regard to discriminatory barriers. "In today's competitive global economy, employers must cast a wide net to attract the most diverse range of talent available," Chair Earp said at a morning ceremony at agency headquarters. "The Freedom to Compete Award showcases the most innovative employer programs to promote fair and open competition in the 21st century workplace without regard to race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age or disability. We applaud the 2007 winners, whose practices serve



*EEOC Chair Earp presents Francine Tishman, President and Chief Operating Officer, Abilities, Inc. with the "Freedom to Compete Award".*

as models for the employers across the nation."

"It is truly an honor to be recognized by the EEOC for our Experience Counts program as it attests to the equity needed in the workplace for older workers with disabilities" stated Francine Tishman. "We have all read stories and reports depicting the looming worker shortfall in the United States as the baby boom generation continues to age. The fact that our nation's workforce is getting older presents a host of challenges for both mature employees and employers. That is why we are so proud of our Experience Counts program, which currently operates out of the Bronx, NY; Ann Arbor, MI; and Birmingham, AL and provides appropriate training for both mature workers and employers — enabling older Americans to continue to compete in the workplace and enjoy gainful and productive lives."

Edmund L. Cortez, President and Chief Executive Officer, Abilities!, stated "It is truly rewarding to receive such a prestigious award and to be recognized for this important work that enables older workers with disabilities to continue to be productive and self sufficient members of our society. The key to our success has been both our close working partnerships with business leaders to identify the skill sets required for today's competitive business environment, along with our expertise in identifying workplace accommodations that may compensate for functional limitations and enhance productivity and job performance. It is our hope that more and more companies will continue to discover the value of this often overlooked labor pool."

The other 2007 award winners included: Emory Crawford Long Hospital; the City of Norfolk; the Internal Revenue Service; and the Johns Hopkins Health System. Prior years Freedom to Compete Award recipients included PK USA, Inc., Giant Eagle, Inc., Minority Corporate Counsel Association, International Business Machines, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor of the State of Maryland, McDonald's Corporation, Department of Defense Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program, North Broward Hospital District, Fluor Corporation, Public Service Electric & Gas Company, Arizona Public Service Company, and Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential. ■

## LONG ISLAND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AWARD

The Long Island Business Development Council (LIBDC) presented their Sustainability Award to Abilities!. The LIBDC annual awards recognize individuals and organizations that not only commit to the overall health and well being of Long Island but also represent economic development and "sustainability" for the greater good of our community.

The award was bestowed at LIBDC's 38th annual conference on September 26, 2007 at Gurneys Inn Resort & Spa. The award represents recognition by Long Island's public and private sector leaders, which comprise the Long Island Business Development Council's membership, of Abilities! contributions to society and the overall economy and well being of Long Island.

Edmund L. Cortez, President and Chief Executive Officer, Abilities!, stated "It is truly rewarding to receive such a prestigious award and to be recognized for this important work that supports people with disabilities while helping to grow our

local economy.” He later continued “An award like this also demonstrates that local business leaders understand and appreciate the work we do on a daily basis and it provides me with the hope that more and more companies will continue to discover the value of this often overlooked labor pool.” ■

## LEARN AND EARN PROGRAM

The Henry Kessler Foundation recently awarded Abilities, Inc. with a \$483,000 grant over two years to replicate a college support program for students with disabilities in New Jersey. The Learn and Earn program at Abilities, Inc. was established over a decade ago in two New York community colleges to assist students with disabilities pursue a community college education. Recognizing that capable students with disabilities are often disadvantaged by poor educational preparation, low self esteem and lack of supports, the Learn and Earn program is a supportive transitional program that has three primary components: career counseling, prevocational instruction and placement. Services are provided via classroom instruction and through individualized or group counseling sessions and workshops. The program is individualized and supports the colleges’ Office of Supportive Services (OSS) or Disabled Student Services (DSS).

The Kessler Foundation grant will allow the Learn and Earn program to provide pre-vocational instruction, career counseling and evaluation during the first two semesters of a degree or certificate program. Students will then receive more intensified career and placement services during their final year prior to graduation. This design will allow students to receive the supports needed at the time students need them most. By structuring the program in this manner, students with disabilities will receive a comprehensive array of vocational, counseling, evaluation and placement services that will better support their academic and vocational successes.

Additional services will be provided to include parent workshops and guest presentations through our relationship with the National Business and Disability Council. ■

## KOREAN ORGANIZATION TOURS ABILITIES! AND HVS

The Korean Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (KSRD) recently visited Abilities Inc. and the Henry Viscardi School to witness and learn about our model programs serving children and adults with disabilities. For half a century, KSRD

has supported the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities through research and development; promoting cooperation with member organizations and other international bodies; and realizing the goals of full participation and equality. ■



## JAZZ SAMPLER YEAR TWO

The Friends of the Arts *Jazz Sampler Project* has entered year two at the Henry Viscardi School. Year two of the project began with the lively presentation of “The Magic and Mechanics of Jazz” performed by the Eli Yamin Trio. Jazz Residency sessions, under the guidance of teaching artist Louise Rogers, began the following week. This fall, Louise will work with nine elementary school classes covering a variety of topics, including Jazz history, appreciation, lyric writing, instrumentation and performance. Louise will also work jointly with dance and movement specialist Beth Jucovey on an inclusive jazz residency program that will bring HVS 6th graders together with 6th grade students at Herricks Middle School. Students will work cooperatively on lyrics writing, song construction and dance choreography under the guidance of Louise and Beth. The residency sessions will culminate in presentations this December.

Fran Prezant, Director of Research & Evaluation, recently presented on behalf of the Jazz Sampler Project at the 2nd International Conference Art Beyond Sight: Multimodal Approaches to Learning, Creativity and Communication. The conference was hosted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum organized by Art Education for the Blind, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Columbia University. Fran presented in a panel session titled “Case Studies to Multimodal Approaches to Arts Access”

Upcoming *Jazz Sampler Project* events include

- Kim McCord, Music Education Professor at Illinois State University will return to work

with HVS students on instrumentation and will broadcast a residency session to her college students in Illinois.

- Kristi O'Rourke, Director of Career Service at Five Towns College will be discussing career and educational options related to the music and entertainment industry with HVS High School Students. ■

## ABILITIES! EMPLOYEE INSPIRES EAGLE PROJECT

After two and half years of working on plans, acquiring approvals from Suffolk County Parks Department, L.I. Maritime Museum and the Historical Research Department, Corey J. Lynch, Boy Scout Troop 383, built a handicap ramp at the L.I. Maritime Museum in Sayville. The inspiration for this project was Corey's aunt Susie. Susie Quinn is a former Henry Viscardi School graduate and is presently an executive assistant at Abilities!, where she has worked for the past 30 years. Peter Corey stated, "she may be in a wheelchair, but she is far from physically disabled — she has taught me that and much, much more — she has taught me never to give up or quit." ■



Please consider a gift to Abilities!, as we rely on the generosity of individuals and corporations to help fulfill 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 to influence national attitudes, policies and legislation in ways that will lead to the greatest benefit for the people we serve.*

On-line donations can be made by visiting our website at [abilitiesonline.org](http://abilitiesonline.org) and clicking on the "Support Abilities!" link.

You can mail a donation made payable to "Abilities!" at 201 I.U. Willets Road, Albertson, NY 11507.

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## EVENTS CALENDAR

### CHAMPIONS FOR CHARITY

Abilities! welcomes you to shop at the Americana Manhasset during Champions for Charity® from November 29, through December 1, 2007. This annual holiday shopping benefit is designed to raise funds for local Long Island not-for-profit organizations. During this event, participating AMERICAN MANHASSET and Wheatley PLAZA stores will be donating 25% of designated pre-tax purchases to the not-for-profit organization(s) of the customer's choice when they use their CHAMPION CARD. To register for a complimentary CHAMPION CARD visit [www.championsforcharity.org](http://www.championsforcharity.org).

### HENRY VISCARDI JR. ANNUAL LEGACY AWARDS LUNCHEON

The Henry Viscardi Jr. Annual Legacy Awards Luncheon will take place on December 3, 2007 at Mutual of America's headquarters in New York City. The event will honor corporate leaders who embrace and support the employment of individuals with disabilities. For additional information, please contact Linda Tibbals at (516) 465-1595.

### EMPLOYER RECOGNITION BREAKFAST

Abilities, Inc. will host its Annual Employer Recognition Breakfast on December 11, 2007. The event honors New York metropolitan area corporations that employ and promote persons with disabilities. For more information contact Anita Zimmerman at (516) 465-1546.

# Abilities!

201 I.U. Willets Road  
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