

Access Abilities!

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT WE'RE ABILITIES!

People who visit the Abilities! programs are so impressed by what they see that they often ask, "What is it that makes this place so special?"

I tell them, "It's because we're Abilities!"

Saying, "We're Abilities!" has greater meaning than just the words would suggest. It refers to a talented staff that is highly competent and completely dedicated to our cause. It means that we believe in the abilities of the children and the adults we serve. It speaks of the pride we feel when somebody we have worked with succeeds.

Saying, "We're Abilities!" also reflects an attitude that no challenge is too difficult to overcome. Whatever the problem, we can find a solution. Whatever the obstacle, we can find a way to overcome it. Anything is possible, because we're Abilities!

It's why 70% of our graduates go on to higher education programs, it's why they continue to succeed two and five years after they leave our school. It's why our trainees go on to get competitive jobs, and why they continue to stay employed and advance in their careers years after they leave us.

It's because we're Abilities!

Edmund L. Cortez

IN HANK'S OWN WORDS

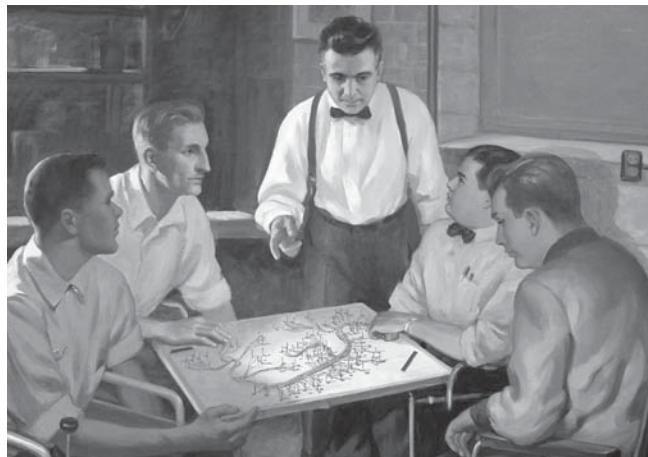
Hank often told us the story of [Alice in Wonderland](#), and I would wonder why that story held such special meaning for him. Then, I re-read [the Abilities story](#), which he wrote in 1967, and I found this passage, in which Hank was describing the challenges he faced in creating Abilities:

"When Alice was talking to the Queen, she said, 'There's no use trying. You can't believe impossible things.' The Queen said, 'I daresay you haven't had much practice. Why, when I was your age, I did it for half an hour every day. Sometimes, I believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'

"This, then, is a story, like [Alice in Wonderland](#), of six impossible things... It's not easy when you're serving

the cause of disabled people to think of cutting the price, to remember that high volume at reasonable profit is what makes the balance sheet blossom in any good, well run operation. To the urgency of proving that disabled people can work, must be added the drive to compete in a changing economy and an increasingly competitive industrial world... This is the story of what that simple but implacable arithmetic has meant to the extraordinary force we call Abilities, Inc."

I can't help but think that Hank's words are as meaningful and important to the existence of Abilities! today as they were 39 years ago. ■



Portrait of Hank Viscardi (center) at Abilities, Inc., 1953

PROJECTS WITH INDUSTRY (PWI)

During the fourth quarter 2005, Abilities, Inc. received four Projects With Industry (PWI) grants from the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration to assist persons with disabilities in securing meaningful employment. These projects will collectively serve 2,220 individuals and provide gainful employment for 1,770 of these individuals in seven states over the three-year grant period. Service sites include the New York metropolitan area, including Nassau and Suffolk Counties; Atlanta, GA; Ann Arbor, MI; Birmingham, AL; Las Vegas, NV; Orange County, CA; and Orlando, FL.

Projects With Industry programs were initiated by the federal government in 1968 to create partnerships between the business community and organizations assisting persons with disabilities in finding employment.

To our credit, Abilities, Inc. is the only organization in the country that has successfully competed for and received these grants since their inception and the only one that received more than two grants for this program cycle. In total, 230 proposals were submitted, of which only 72 were selected for funding. Abilities, Inc.'s four grants represent \$3,825,000. ■

A GROWING TREND!

Corporate America – Discovering the Value of Hiring Individuals with Disabilities

In December, Abilities, Inc. hosted its 5th Annual Employer Appreciation Breakfast. Representatives from more than ninety corporations with operations in the New York metropolitan area were in attendance and recognized for their outstanding efforts to increase employment of people with disabilities. Among those acknowledged were representatives from Adecco, Cardholder Management Services, Citigroup, GEICO, Internal Revenue Service, JPMorgan Chase, KPMG LLP, Modell's Sporting Goods, OSI Pharmaceuticals, Quest Diagnostics, Washington Mutual and many more.

“Despite a dismal national unemployment rate of over 70% for people with disabilities, a new trend is beginning to emerge as more and more companies are discovering the value of this previously untapped labor pool” said Edmund Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!. “Abilities, Inc. is extremely proud of the fact that over 80% of the individuals with disabilities that are trained in its programs are able to find gainful employment. The key to our success is working in close partnership with business leaders to identify the skill sets required for today's competitive business environment. Abilities, Inc. is then able to ensure that its students master these skills prior to graduation”, said Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities, Inc.

Russ Cusick, Vice President, Recruitment, Forrest Solutions articulated to his peers his company's dedication to diversity, which now includes disability. Russ was quoted as saying, “At Forrest Solutions, we are passionate about getting the right talent into the right job at the right time. Sometimes, the talent is an individual who simply needs the opportunity to succeed. We will continue to partner with Abilities, because it is a good business decision, and the right thing to do.”

Bijoya Routh, a graduate of Abilities, Inc. Retail Training Program spoke of her employment as a Customer Service Sales Associate at Gap, Inc. She expressed the many challenges she had to overcome as a deaf individual integrated into a non-deaf working world. Bijoya relayed to the audience the

many support services Abilities provided in reaching this pinnacle.

As another event highlight, Aramark at C. W. Post University was presented with the 2005 New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA) Business/Industry Recognition Regional Award for which Abilities, Inc had nominated them. The award was presented in recognition of their commitment to partnering with Abilities to provide employment opportunities to individuals with severe disabilities in a supportive environment that allows for full integration and socialization.



Pictured (L to R) Francine Tishman, President and COO, Abilities, Inc. presents Russ Cusick, Vice President, Recruitment, Forrest Solutions with an award for his leadership in employing qualified people with disabilities.

NEC FOUNDATION OF AMERICA EMPOWERING WORKPLACE INCLUSION

NEC Foundation of America continues its leadership role in promoting workplace inclusion for individuals with disabilities through a \$40,000 grant to Abilities!.

NEC Foundation of America's grant provides for the development and dissemination of a multimedia educational program designed to increase awareness about the potential and use of assistive technology in the workplace. The Kornreich Technology Center in collaboration with the National Business & Disability Council, which are programs of Abilities!, will be responsible for the creation of this training program. Upon completion, the web based training program will provide employers across the nation with information about ways in which technology can assist qualified individuals with disabilities in employment settings. Over the past decade, significant advances in research, development and application of assistive technology tools have demonstrated that assistive technology can make a significant difference in restoring or acquiring functional skills necessary for individuals with disabilities in

educational and employment settings.

Despite all advances, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities remains at an astounding 70%. Many of these individuals want to and have the ability to work, have aspirations of a successful career and being a contributing member of society. Despite legislation designed to promote opportunities and decrease discrimination, people with significant disabilities and in some cases with advanced degrees are experiencing disproportionate difficulties in locating appropriate employment and career advancement.

Susan Fridie, Co-Director, Kornreich Technology Center at Abilities! stated “the collective goal is the development of a national education program designed to increase the awareness among employers about the potential of assistive technology for people with disabilities. Once developed, the educational program will be disseminated via the World Wide Web to reach the largest audience and be available for all. Our desired impact is to foster knowledge, changes in attitudes and subsequent increase in employment for qualified job candidates who require accommodations in the workplace.”



(L to R) Marie Speranza, Assistant General Manager, Human Resources, NEC USA, Inc., representing NEC Foundation of America, presents Edmund Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!, with \$40,000 grant for a project titled A Functional Approach to Workplace Accommodations.

“While technology is available and affordable, the awareness may still be absent in the general population. This knowledge gap will continue to be a barrier unless we can find ways to bridge it,” stated Sylvia Clark, Executive Director, NEC Foundation of America.

Edmund Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities! stated “Our vision is to create a world in which people with disabilities will live simply as people. To that end we are proud to collaborate and partner with NEC

Foundation of America to enhance opportunities that promote independence and self-sufficiency for people with disabilities.” ■

EMERGING LEADERS SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

National Business & Disability Council (NBDC), a program of Abilities!, has been selected to manage and expand Booz Allen Hamilton’s National Internship Program for college students with disabilities.

Founded by Booz Allen in 2001 along with guidance from prominent members of the disability community, Emerging Leaders is a competitive program that places college students with disabilities in fulfilling internships and provides them with leadership development opportunities.

“I’ve seen first-hand that employees with disabilities are among the most dedicated, least cynical, hardest working people in any organization,” said Dr. Ralph W. Schrader, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Booz Allen Hamilton.

Over the last five years, Booz Allen has reached out to other businesses to expand the Emerging Leaders network and offer students internships in a greater number of fields. Over 150 applications were received for this year’s program, from which 12 outstanding students were selected for placements at Booz Allen, Barclays Group, Lehman Brothers, Lockheed Martin, and SunTrust Banks. The transitioning of the program management to NBDC will allow for even greater future participation.

“Emerging Leaders is one of the most proactive and effective initiatives to integrate people with disabilities into competitive levels of the workplace as fully participating, productive employees,” said Edmund Cortez, President and CEO of Abilities!. “Our familiarity with the existing program, our affiliation with higher education institutions and the national business community will help bring more leading companies on board in the future.”

In reference to the Emerging Leaders program, John H. Hager, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education said, “Developing a strong future workforce is a critical factor in securing our lead in the global economy. We have to start now to prepare well-educated, skilled students with disabilities who will compete for and attain good, promising jobs leading to fulfilling careers.” ■

SETTING HIGHER STANDARDS FOR AT RISK YOUTH

Bank of America, typically known for setting 'Higher Standards' within the banking industry is now helping to set higher standards for at-risk high school students with disabilities. Bank of America recently provided a \$10,000 grant to Abilities, Inc. in support of their PROSPER (People Reaching for Opportunities to Succeed Personally, Educationally and Realistically) Tools for Success program.

The Tools for Success program currently works with at-risk youth from Freeport and Uniondale high schools that have physical, learning and/or emotional disabilities. In addition to one or several of these disabilities, most of these students are also dealing with a multitude of other social issues that may include gang involvement, living in foster homes, absentee parents, teenage pregnancy, or being economically disadvantaged, to name a few.



(L to R) Walter Dillingham, Jr., Director, Institutional Investment and Magda Hayden, Senior Vice President, Client Management for Bank of America presenting a \$10,000 check to Susan Gordon Ryan, Vice President, Development and David Okorn, Vice President, Corporate Relations for the PROSPER program, which serves at-risk youth.

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

PROSPER instructors provide much needed one-on-one instruction and act as positive role models for this student population and the results are admirable. This remarkable program has had a profound impact on hundreds of young lives. An astonishing 88% of the students enrolled in the Tools for Success program graduate from high school. Of these students 55% have become gainfully employed; 38% have continued their education through college studies; 3% have

entered the military; 2% have gone to vocational school; and only 2% are unemployed. ■

SYMBOL INVESTS IN IMPROVING THE LIVES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Symbol Technologies has recently partnered with the Henry Viscardi School for students with severe physical and medical disabilities by purchasing a new reading technology program for its elementary school students (K-6).

Technology is the equalizer for the severely disabled students as it maximizes the students' learning and independence, while allowing them to compete on the same level as other children. Without assistive technologies and compatible software programs, students depend upon assistants and volunteers to be their eyes, ears, voices and hands, as well as researchers, writers, and typists. *In some cases a child may need to rely on someone to do something as basic as turning a page in a textbook.*



Henry Viscardi School students (front row) Salma Shams, Juaquan Jones-Taylor; (middle row) Amber Madrigal, Joey Pernice, Ron Kort; (back row) Susan Gordon Ryan, VP Development, Abilities!; Ed Cortez, President and CEO, Abilities!; Beverly Lee-Wo, Manager Community Relations, Symbol Technologies, Inc.

The implementation of this reading program, in conjunction with the Inclusive Technology classrooms, will afford the students the opportunity to reach their fullest potential in reading and language arts, thereby allowing greater progress in all subject areas. It will also provide students with the tools needed for greater independence and success in the secondary program. ■

COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT GRANT

Abilities! has been awarded a \$491,000 Community Employment Grant from the Henry H. Kessler Foundation to establish a New Jersey-based program to train adults with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment in pharmaceutical,

clinical, environmental, or research laboratories. Structured to meet the needs of unemployed adults with disabilities, the program will focus on short-term job training that will lead to career path positions, while assuring companies in the pharmaceutical and related industries new talent in their employment pipeline.

“The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is far above the national average and this program will address the need for employment opportunities for New Jersey residents with disabilities who are currently unemployed,” said Mr. Cortez. “Training people with disabilities to become gainfully employed, while receiving equal treatment in all aspects of societal life are major goals of Abilities!”

The Henry H. Kessler Foundation awarded a total of \$850,000 in signature employment grants to three organizations in New Jersey that work toward improving the employment and career advancement of people with disabilities, helping fulfill the foundation’s mission of improving the lives of people with physical disabilities and encouraging self-sufficiency. Grant recipients are selected based on their public impact and the proven success of their programs.

“In the spirit of Henry H. Kessler, an innovator in rehabilitation medicine, the Foundation seeks to support programs that will have the greatest impact on employment and help people with disabilities improve their lives by overcoming barriers to employment and encouraging strategies to support disability recruitment, placement, retention, and advancement,” said W. Thomas Margetts, Chairman of the Foundation. “It is our privilege to support the good work of organizations that in turn will benefit thousands of people disabled by accidents, injuries or disease.” ■

ADVANCING EDUCATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The Inclusive Technology Project (ITP) at the Henry Viscardi School (HVS) is a model program that is significantly altering the means by which teachers are able to deliver educational instruction and expand its students’ educational horizons. Each and every one of the HVS classrooms has been equipped with interactive whiteboards, laptop computers, and individually selected assistive technology to help teachers customize instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Video conferencing technology further enhances instruction by giving students entry to otherwise inaccessible settings, such as museums, remote locales, and integrated education programs. In addition, video conferencing can also be used to allow students to attend classes from home or hospital during long-term absences due to surgery or illness.

Through funding provided by the Peter J. Sharp Foundation, the Kornreich Technology Center, a program of Abilities!, was responsible for the implementation and setup of the ITP and continues in its leadership role by providing hands-on training for HVS staff, as well as continuing to develop educational content that takes advantage of this technology. ■



ITP converted classroom with notebook computers, height-adjustable desks, whiteboard that enables students to view their teacher’s computer screen, and a plasma screen that can be used to view television, video, or videoconference programs.

ABILITIES! BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman
Ralph F. Palleschi
President & Chief Operating Officer
First Long Island Investors, LLC

Gene M. Bernstein
Northville Industries

John R. Bransfield, Jr.

Honorable Richard Conway Casey
United States District Court
Southern District of New York

Edmund L. Cortez
President & CEO
Abilities!

James J. Daly, Esq.
McKeen Fund

John J. Gutleber
President & CEO
Castagna Realty Co., Inc.

Stephen L. Hammerman

Iris J. Katz

John A. Kornreich
Senior Managing Director
Sandler Capital Management

Celeste V. Lopes, Esq.
Deputy Bureau Chief
Kings County DA’s Office Civil Rights Bureau

Joseph L. Mancino

Kevin McGilloway
CEO
Aqua-Nova LLC

Stephen V. Murphy
President
S.V. Murphy & Co., Inc.

Michael C. Pascucci
President
WLNY TV-55

Joseph C. Tranfo, Esq.
Tranfo & Tranfo, LLC

PRESIDENT’S ADVISORY BOARD

Frank Castagna
Principal
Castagna Realty Co., Inc.

Leonard Genovese
Former CEO
Genovese Drug Stores

Eric Krasnoff
Chairman & CEO
Pall Corporation

Robert J. Malito, Esq.
Davidoff Malito & Hatcher, LLP

Thomas J. Moran
President & CEO
Mutual of America

EVENTS CALENDAR

2006 SPRING LUNCHEON

The 24th Annual Reach for a Star Spring Luncheon will take place on April 6th at the Crest Hollow Country Club. The highly acclaimed Bree Walker, celebrated newscaster / actress, will provide the keynote address. The program will also include a special tribute performance by the New Orleans Garden District Orchestra. For additional information, please contact Barbara Kilarjian at (516) 465-1520.

2006 CELEBRITY SPORTS NIGHT

Please join us on May 18th to celebrate Abilities! 40th Anniversary Celebrity Sports Night honoring Vicki and Stephen Murphy for their outstanding commitment to Abilities!; Frank Comerford, President of WNBC-TV NY as Sportsman of the Year; and Ronan Tynan will receive the Roy Campanella award.

This year's exciting roster of athletes joining in celebration includes: Jack Nicklaus, who is being honored as Abilities! Executive Sports Star, Joe Namath, Sarah Hughes, Frank Gifford, Ahmad Rashad, George Brett, Mike Schmitt, Tom Seaver, and many more of your favorites.

Michael Pascucci, President of WLNY TV-55 is chair of the dinner fund-raiser, which benefits Abilities! employment, education and training programs that for over 50 years have served thousands of adults and children with disabilities nationwide. For additional information, please contact Barbara Kilarjian at (516) 465-1520.

NBDC SUMMIT / SEMINAR

The National Business & Disability Council will conduct a business and disability summit on June 20. Booz Allen Hamilton will host the event at their Herndon, VA facility. Topics will include: What's New with Legislation and Compliance; What's New in Assistive Technology; Best Practices – Private & Public Sectors; and Emerging Leaders Alumni Updates. For additional information, please contact Linda Tibbals at (516) 465-1517.

Abilities!

201 I.U. Willets Road
Albertson, NY 11507-1599
www.abilitiesonline.org

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
Paid
Albertson, NY
Permit No. 7