

Families at the Forefront

November 2008

Welcome to the latest edition of Families at the Forefront!

If you have any questions or concerns about anything in this issue, please feel free to contact the editor, Tricia Furnari, at (716) 297-6400 or tfurnari@opportunitiesunlimited.org.

New York State Budget Update

If you have been following the news stories recently, you are aware of New York State's dire economic situation. The downward spiral happened fast: the state budget was balanced on April 9th; but is currently \$1.5 billion in deficit, with a projected deficit for 2009-10 of \$12.5 billion.

This economic crisis translates into an impending challenge for Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara, which receives 98% of its funding from state and federal Medicaid dollars. NYSARC, our parent organization, has been actively advocating on behalf of this agency and our 50+ sister organizations across the state. In the meantime, we will be carefully monitoring the situation when our state legislators reconvene later this month to consider the budget.

Interested family members may contact their state legislators prior to November 18th to ask them to protect services for your family members. Please know, however, that we remain committed to providing the quality programs and services to our consumers and their families that the community depends on.

Nominate an Employee for a 2009 Award

Family members have a unique perspective on Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara employees, which is why we ask for your help nominating staff members for two special awards. Please spend a few minutes thinking about your interactions with agency representatives from your family member's program or residence. Perhaps one or more of these individuals are deserving of being nominated for one of two awards: (1) Direct Care Professional of the Year or (2) Manager of the Year. A nomination form is included with this newsletter, and all nominations must be received by December 31st. Award winners will be announced at the *2009 Awards Dinner & Gala* on March 20th.

A Thanksgiving Tradition Continues

Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara consumers and family members will gather again this year to share a special Thanksgiving lunch made by consumers and staff. Look for your invitation with specifics in early November. Dates for these lunches are as follows:

Thursday, November 20th - OUI Thanksgiving (Niagara Falls)

Friday, November 21st - OUII Thanksgiving (Lockport)

Tuesday, November 25th - Day Services Thanksgiving (Wheatfield)

Calling All Gift Wrappers!

The Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Foundation will be holding its annual *Charity Gift Wrap Booth Fundraiser* at the **Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls**. Sponsored by Upstate Pharmacy, this year the booth will run from Monday, December 1 through Wednesday, December 24. Volunteering at the booth is fun and easy and it's all for a great cause. It is also a wonderful opportunity to obtain community service hours for students. Please consider getting together with your friends, family, and/or organization to join us for one or more four-hour shifts. For more information or to reserve a shift now, contact **Kristen Cook** at 297-6400.

Holiday Greenhouse Sales

The Niagara Floral Center and Greenhouse at Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara is selling a variety of holiday floral arrangements on a pre-order basis. Poinsettias, fresh and artificial wreaths (each one unique), and decorative arrangements are available with prices ranging from \$9.99 to \$30. Orders are due by Monday, November 17th and may be placed in person at the Niagara Floral Center and Greenhouse, 2510 Niagara Falls Boulevard, Wheatfield, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or by mailing in the order form found at www.opportunitiesunlimited.org. Proceeds from all sales benefit the horticulture therapy and training opportunities provided for consumers.

Inside: Holiday Happenings

New Coterie Members

On October 15th, the Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Foundation held its *Annual Meeting and Leadership Donor Recognition Breakfast*. A highlight of the morning was the induction of four new members of the Coterie Society. The Coterie Society recognizes individuals who have made a provision for the Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Foundation in their estate plans or as the residual beneficiary of a supplemental needs trust or other planned gift. New members for 2008 are **Reverend Margaret Jackson, Jeff & Linda Mattiuzzo**, and an anonymous individual. For more information about joining the Coterie Society, please contact the Foundation at 297-6400.

Fun in the Sun

The 4th *Annual Consumer & Family Picnic* held on August 2nd at the **Shawnee Fire Hall** in Sanborn was a great success. More than 300 individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, friends, and agency employees enjoyed karaoke, bingo, and a picnic lunch. Thanks to a grant from the **Buffalo Bills Youth Foundation**, attendees had the opportunity to participate in sports activities as part of their picnic experience. Admission was free for consumers and nominal for other guests, thanks to the generosity of **Smith Brothers Construction**, the **Zonta Club of the Tonawandas**, and other families and local organizations.

Evening of Arts & Entertainment

On September 12th, several hundred consumers, family members, and friends gathered at Niagara Falls High School for the first *Evening of Arts & Entertainment*, which combined two former events, the *Consumer Art & Fine Craft Show* and the *Consumer Talent Show*. **Independent Health** and **Tops Lockport** sponsored the events of the evening that included a light buffet for all guests. **Wegmans** provided additional financial support. This occasion was chaired by longstanding volunteer **Merry Hedges** and dedicated in memory of **Gerry Holly**, her former co-chair, fellow agency family member, and volunteer. The highlight of the evening was the artwork and performance talents of opportunities Unlimited of Niagara consumers. Artwork by fifteen consumers was selected as "Best in Show" and the top six talent show acts received special recognition.

Family/Siblings Group

Siblings and other family members gathered in September for a light buffet and discussion with agency psychologist **Dr. Robert Minkhoff**. The topic of the evening was "Family Dynamics and Developmental Disabilities," and discussion was informal and lively. Watch your mailbox for information about upcoming seminars. For questions or more information in the meantime, please contact Cindy Hyde at 297-6400.

Scholarship for College Students

Applications are available for the *James F. Reville Scholarship* through NYSARC, Inc. for full-time students pursuing a career in special education or related fields. Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara will select one local candidate who will compete for two \$3,000 scholarships awarded statewide. Applicants must be actively involved in serving individuals with developmental disabilities in some capacity. The deadline for completed applications is December 10th. For more information, go to www.opportunitiesunlimited.org or call 297-6400.