

NEW BEGINNINGS IN COMMUNITY LIVING

Newsletter of the Community Living Education Project

University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey School of Public Health/Health Systems and Policy Department

“Educating families and staff about the possibilities in community living!”



Spotlight on Success: North Brunswick Abilities Council Embraces the Power of ‘We’

By Antoinette S. Johnson

On Sunday, March 27, 2011, from noon to 4 p.m., the North Brunswick Abilities Council held its third annual Disabilities Awareness Day at the former Johnson & Johnson facility on Route 1 North in North Brunswick, NJ. “This year’s event is going to be an exceptional one! An extravaganza!” exclaimed Robin Turner, chairwoman of the North Brunswick Abilities Council.

As the event was underway, the large room filled with many family members and friends from the local community and beyond. People came from as far as northern and southern New Jersey to attend this great

event. The DJ played some oldies but goodies as well as new pop music. At one point, the floor was filled with many people eager to dance the afternoon away!

One attendee was so enamored when one of Elvis’ songs played that he seemed to “channel” Elvis to duplicate his moves. The Silent Choir of New Jersey members performed two spirit-filled and inspiring selections in sign language – *God Bless America* and *Amazing Grace*.

During this year’s event, Stephen Griscti, the inspiration for *Stephen’s Law* and lifelong North Brunswick resident, was honored. Turner, who was visibly moved, presented the award to Stephen and his family. Her warmth and personal connection to the Griscti family was prevalent as she

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Continued on the next page



Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula leads a Conga Line at the North Brunswick Disabilities Awareness Day

spoke through tears to give them the 2011 Disabilities Awareness Day Honoree Award. Stephen's Law was created to provide safer travels in motor vehicles for individuals who use wheelchairs throughout the state of New Jersey. The law requires that wheelchairs and passengers be secured properly while traveling in vehicles.

During Turner's presentation, she spoke about the importance of Disabilities Awareness Day. "Disabilities Awareness Day is a VERY significant event for North Brunswick - Not only do we bring together so many people to celebrate it, it is an occasion where we can reach out to one another to find out what truly reflects the needs and concerns of

so many." The mission for this organization is "...to seek independence, integration, and inclusion of all people with disabilities throughout the entire year," stated Turner. While helping individuals with disabilities to seek independence, integration, and inclusion is important for the individuals, family, and greater community, it is also important to raise awareness. Turner states, "Today is an important day...It provides the necessary opportunity for us to raise awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and also recognize their fantastic accomplishments." The council members assisted with speaking about the mission of the Abilities Council, they read resolutions, and danced with the invited guests. There was an appearance by

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McGruff the Crime Dog, and he connected with exhibitors and attendees. In addition to the many attendees, North Brunswick Mayor Francis Womack attended this event. The Mayor spoke with attendees and thanked exhibitors for coming to the event.

Exhibit booths lined the perimeter of the room and were occupied by many organizations. Some of those organizations included: the ARC of Middlesex County, Brain Injury Association of NJ, Community Emergency Response Team, the Middlesex County Office for the Disabled, North Brunswick Girl Scouts, North Brunswick First Aid & Rescue Squad, and our very own Community Living Education Project. In addition to these organizations, many more organizations were available to give away materials and fun items to community members, families, and friends. The event was a great way to merge the entire community together. The exhibitors and attendees engaged in conversation regarding what the exhibitors had to offer the attendees. One attendee spoke with



Disabilities Awareness Day Honoree Stephen Griscti and his father with McGruff the Crime Dog

members of the Community Living Education Project about her son's impending move from a New Jersey developmental center to a community residence, and she was very excited about that!

Events such as this are successful because of volunteers who put their time and energy into making sure that every detail is realized. They literally made sure that every "t" is crossed and every "i" is dotted. In an article written by Staff Writer Jennifer Amato and printed on March 10, 2011 in the North Brunswick Sentinel, Turner spoke about "... the depth of commitment and caring exhibited by the members of the North Brunswick Abilities

Council." It was obvious that the attendees felt the level of commitment that went into making this event

successful. A very important statement made by Turner was "...having a disability does not hinder one's ambition or their ability to live a full, productive, and rewarding life." As the North Brunswick Abilities Council tagline states, they have proven that they are "Embracing the power of 'We' by including everyone!"