

The Challenge connection

aboutchallenge.org

FALL 2008

P U T T I N G A B I L I T Y T O W O R K



CHALLENGE'S ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

On October 14th Challenge celebrated its 40th Anniversary at Ithaca College's Emerson Suites with a gathering of staff, clients, board members, business partners and friends. Our Annual Awards Ceremony is always a moving and inspirational event, but it was particularly meaningful this year as we reflected on 40 years of personal achievements, professional successes, and incredible collaborative victories.

Now more than ever Challenge's mission is a community effort. The dedication to opening doors of employment and personal opportunity to those with physical, psychological, emotional and economic disabilities extends far beyond the walls of Challenge, as we work to integrate our clients into a healthy community life. With the cooperative support of many businesses and organizations we continue to move in a positive direction. Our clients are able to work, play, volunteer, shop, explore, learn and contribute in more places throughout the community than ever before.

The journey from 1968 to 2008 has been an amazing one, where unimaginable progress has been made for those with disabilities, and it's a journey that all of us at Challenge are proud to continue into the next 40 years.



CHALLENGE ANNUAL AWARDS

Perseverance Award Eric Hull
Sherry Brown
Robin Blackman

Progress Award Tina Andrews
Michael Griffin
Tara Adsitt

Longevity Award Sandy Waterman
Ginny Whitted
Mark Jacoby

Employer of the Year Wal-Mart of Ithaca

Partner of the Year Beechtree Care Center

*Volunteering Partner
of the Year* Sciencenter

Employee of the Year Nan Pollard
Michael Christopher
Larry Workman
Rich Roman

CHALLENGE ANNIVERSARY AWARDS

Businesses Ithaca College & Cornell

Staff Kevin Nickerson
Marian Brown

Consumers Johanna Baker
Alan Washer
Michael Kirkwood

BOARD RECOGNITION AWARDS

Greg Hartz
Les Buchanan

Top Left: John Alvarez del Castillo of the Sciencenter accepts his award. Top Right: Challenge Board Chair Jan McCracken addresses the audience. Bottom: Board Member Alan Pedersen and his wife Nancy

FROM PATRICK'S PEN...



Patrick McKee
Challenge President

The Challenge 40th Anniversary Awards Dinner recognized not only a past year of achievement, but also the long history of growth and success that began with our founder Bob Sprole, Sr. It was a great evening and a clear demonstration of the community commitment that sustains our effort.

In thinking about the number 40, you have to take a look back at 1968.

Challenge was founded in a time of great turmoil as well as opportunity. It began as part of the movement that took individuals out of institutions and allowed them to begin a life in the community. There were movements a plenty in 1968 and some of the best ones have lasted. Challenge has grown and expanded.

We have taken what was once viewed as a sheltered experience and broadened our view. There can still be a need for shelter but it is always within the context of a social, community oriented life and we strive to assist anyone who comes through our door to live the life they desire. As we look at 2008 we find ourselves again in a period of great turmoil.

Perhaps the opportunity is not as evident when we learn of budget cuts and stock market losses each day, when we still are confronted with war and electoral strife. I believe though if you know anything about the recipients of our annual awards: consumers, staff, and community members, you can see that opportunity not only continues to exist but can thrive.

We will perhaps need to be more creative about how we support our efforts, and willing to consider ways of working that are new, but then creativity and risk taking are things that I have seen consistently in place at Challenge over my five years here.

What we will need is the energy, the commitment, and the strength that has been regularly demonstrated by our award winners. I want to thank you for that example and for continuing to show the rest of us just what it takes to be a productive and successful member of our community.

Patrick J. McKee
President

CHALLENGE BOARD MEMBERS

CHAIR
Janice McCracken

TREASURER
Charles Hamilton

SECRETARY
Mary Ann Colbert

BOARD
Drake Bassett
Les Buchanan
Mark Coldren
Richard Couture
Joanne DeStefano
Todd Edmonds
Greg Hartz
Dean Hawthorne
Sue Hemsath
Joseph Kiely
Amy Newman
Alan Pedersen
Dina Zemke

SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

PRESIDENT
Patrick McKee

VICE PRESIDENT
Patrick Sayer

DIRECTOR OF
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
& QUALITY ASSURANCE
Marty Gold

DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
Jan Lynch

Longevity Award Recipient

MARK JACOBY

P&C Foods



On September 9, 1987 at three o'clock in the afternoon, Mark Jacoby began working at the East Hill Plaza P&C Foods. Even though it has been twenty-one years, Mark still remembers the exact date and time that he started work there, "3:00 p.m. It was an after school shift".

This October, in recognition of his

determination and hard work over the past twenty-one years, Mark Jacoby was presented with Challenge's Longevity Award. This he graciously accepted, thanking his family, his Challenge Employment Advisor, Briggs Seekins, and the many friends he has worked with over the years. In presenting Mark with his award, Briggs put twenty-one years into perspective. "Twenty-one years ago, very few people had even heard of the internet; almost nobody depended upon it for conducting large amounts of daily business or social interactions. Twenty-one years ago, nobody had a cell phone. And there are baseball players going into the Hall of Fame now who I remember watching as rookies."

When Briggs started working with Mark, he noticed that Mark seemed to know everyone who walked into the shop; his face was well recognized in the community. At their first meeting Briggs asked Mark how many people he thought he knew. "Thousands," Mark replied. It's true. In just five minutes, Mark is likely to greet five or six people while performing his everyday tasks at work. "When looking at the faces of many of those people, it is clear that encountering Mark's million-dollar smile and cheerful personality is one of the highlights of their day. Interaction with Mark makes them feel good about coming to the store, and in a retail environment, that's an extremely valuable skill."

Mark has certainly enriched his work environment over the past twenty-one years. Here's to another twenty-one years of great service to our community!

Progress Award Recipient

TINA ANDREWS

Country Inn & Suites



After job-searching for months with her Challenge Job Developer, Maureen Curtis, Tina Andrews began in May 2008 as a Breakfast Attendant at Country Inn & Suites in Ithaca. With the grand opening of the facility delayed a few months, Tina attended training sessions, waiting with anticipation to begin her new job. Now, with a perfect attendance

record, Tina has demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment to her job. Since initiating her employment at Country Inn & Suites, Tina has become a valued and appreciated member of the facility's team. In honor of this achievement, Tina was presented with Challenge's 2008 Progress Award.

Maureen Curtis commented on Tina's progress, "Tina persevered in her job search, followed my vocational suggestions, kept a positive attitude and was a pleasure to work with".

The theme at Country Inn & Suites, 'Come Home to the Country', is clearly expressed through Tina's welcoming attitude towards guests. Ilana Bobroff, the General Manager of Country Inn & Suites, stated that "Tina hit the nail right on the head" when commenting on the service standards of the facility. Guests at the hotel have often left comment cards with the General Manager, complementing Tina on her skills and attentiveness during their stay. She has also been referred to as a 'Star Employee' by Jay Bramhandkar, the owner of Country Inn & Suites.

Owing to her growth, Tina certainly deserves the recognition she has received for her progress. Congratulations on a great job, Tina!

LARRY WORKMAN

Enclaves

Throwing on a shirt and tie at the last minute, Larry Workman left his post in the Ithaca College Dish Rooms to accept his award as one of Challenge's 2008 Employee's of the Year.

In December of 1986 Challenge signed a contract to operate all three dish rooms at Ithaca College. This agreement was the beginning of a long-term enclave program. Currently, Challenge's enclave and group work sites include the Ithaca College Dish Rooms, Cornell Campus Life Custodial, Challenge Custodial Services and Challenge's Hydroponic Greenhouse, Finger Lakes Fresh.

"The enclaves create a very supportive environment for workers. They allow more flexibility and individual support than a regular community employment situation... When we have that awareness of our folks' individual needs, we can take care to place them in work environments that are well suited to them. We take the time to get to know a lot about our people, and that really helps to make things flow smoothly. The Challenge Employment Advisors who work with our folks are really great. They work very well with the assistant dish room supervisors to make sure needs are met and any issues that come up are resolved quickly," commented Larry.

Since his start at Challenge in February 2003, Larry has worked as an Employment Specialist with a focus on individuals working in the Ithaca College Dish Rooms, as well as the Ithaca College Dish Room Coordinator. Currently Larry manages the IC Dish Rooms, where he organizes the staffing and works in partnership with Sodexo Management. Challenge provides the dish room staff for Sodexo, the Food Services Company of the Ithaca College Dining Halls.

"The management at Sodexo has been extremely supportive of our program, and they are very understanding of special situations. We really appreciate the opportunities they provide for us, and they have told me many times how much they appreciate what our crew brings to their dining services. It's definitely a mutually beneficial situation – together we get the job done."

Through his commitment and dedication to his staff and Ithaca College, Larry has become an indispensable part of the Challenge team, ensuring the on-going success of the Ithaca College partnership with Challenge.

"The [Employee of the Year] Award recognition was very much appreciated, but I don't do what I do for the recognition and awards. I'm just doing my job. It's a great crew of people I work with, and the whole dish room program deserves recognition for the dedication and teamwork they give to their work every day."



THE CLARITAS CONNECTION

Claritas is committed to community service and to supporting local organizations that seek to make a positive impact in Ithaca and the surrounding areas. One of the organizations they know and like to support is Challenge. Challenge has had the good fortune to have Drake Bassett, Vice President and General Manager of Claritas, serving on our Board of Directors for the past year. Recently Matt Grady, Claritas' President, approved a \$500 direct contribution to Challenge. This support helps to provide essential resources for the continuation of our employment services.

In another special connection between these two organizations, our 'Employee of the Year' Larry Workman is married to Michele Workman, one of Claritas' very valued staff members.

RICH ROMAN

Enclaves

As Manager of Challenge's Custodial Services Business, Rich Roman is a very busy and hard-working man. This hard work was recognized at the Annual Awards Dinner when Rich was presented with a well-deserved 'Employee of the Year Award'. "It was great to be at the awards ceremony," Rich said. "Since the custodial crew works on a different schedule from most of the Challenge operations, I don't get to see all that goes on. The awards ceremony gives you a much better sense of the bigger picture, and what our mission at Challenge is all about."

Rich first came to Challenge in 2004 as a supervisor in Custodial Services; a Challenge business enterprise that serves as a variation of a more traditional enclave work environment. "I was looking for a job that was both challenging and rewarding. I definitely found both in my work here at Challenge." In September of 2006 Rich became manager of the crew of approximately twelve workers who provide custodial services for businesses including:

- Sodexo/ Ithaca College Dining Services
- Cornell Alumni Magazine
- Emerson Power Transmission
- Greenstar Cooperative Market
- Ciaschi, Dietershagen, Little, Mickelson & Company, LLP

"These businesses are supportive of the kind of opportunities Challenge provides for its clients," Rich recognizes with appreciation, "and I work closely with them to make sure that we're meeting their individual needs and that they're satisfied with our services."

"The most rewarding part of my job is working with Challenge clients," Rich says. "I find it very gratifying to help match clients with the right job. We work with Employment Advisors, Job Developers, etc. in a team approach in order to be successful at what we do. Challenge is often like a family to our clients, and I keep that in mind with everything we do."



Top Photo: Rich Roman receives his award from Challenge Vice President Pat Sayer. Bottom Photo: Marty Gold, Jan Lynch, Patrick McKee and Greg Gizewski of Challenge are presented with a check by Kim Diefenbach and Dave Jacobson of Wal-Mart.

CHALLENGE & WAL-MART

The employment partnership between Challenge and Wal-Mart of Ithaca began as soon as the store opened its doors in November of 2004. Wal-Mart has employed several Challenge clients over the past four years, and has just added to its support of the Challenge mission with a \$22,500 grant. The grant money will be used to develop a more comprehensive employment program to help public assistance recipients to obtain the necessary training and work experience to maintain employment that leads to self-sufficiency. "Wal-Mart is proud to sponsor Challenge in their mission to provide people with disabilities meaningful work and job skills training," said Wal-Mart manager Dave Jacobson. "The mission of Challenge is: Putting Ability to Work. This grant will help make that mission a reality."

Challenge Anniversary Award Recipient

KEVIN NICKERSON

Benefits Advisement

If you've ever felt frustrated and defeated trying to navigate the Social Security System to explore benefit eligibility and options, you'll appreciate what Kevin Nickerson does for a living.

Kevin began his work for Challenge at the forefront of benefits advisement in 1994, and with tremendous commitment and personal initiative, has become a leader in his field. Kevin is not only a locally respected and highly well-informed Disability Program Navigator, but he consults, creates training materials, writes articles, and provides input for policy change on a national level. He has been called the "Quintessential Navigator" for his skillful and dedicated use of his extensive knowledge, accumulated experience, and professional connections to locate relevant resources and information for his clients. Kevin also makes it his mission to help improve the service model through which he operates.

Individuals with disabilities often enter Kevin's office, located at Workforce New York in Center Ithaca, feeling lost and confused. They come to him with questions about disability benefits, work incentives, education, job training, and more – often unaware of many of the services that are available to them. Almost invariably they begin to feel a tremendous sense of relief when they encounter a powerful advocate, who is determined to help them find the answers they're looking for.

It's no accident that Kevin has such compassion for the individuals he serves. He himself suffered physical disabilities and personal setbacks that took many years and great self-motivation to overcome. During this difficult period of his life, Kevin was inspired and mentored by some amazing people he met along the way. "I can look back at some 'Ah-Ha' moments and see how these people helped me to redefine my life and steer me in a new direction." This appreciation for the guidance he received when he was struggling has transformed itself beautifully into a very sincere interest and natural aptitude for helping others with similar struggles.

Along the journey that led Kevin to his current vocation,



Kevin and his wife Carol enjoy the Awards Dinner together

he worked for a time at Unity House in Ithaca. He would hear residents there talk frequently and enthusiastically about their jobs. It drove the point home for him how important work was for a full and rewarding life, and he decided that he wanted to work for Challenge. "Challenge was the place to be if you were looking to make a difference in the area of employment for those with disabilities. I had so much respect for the work that went on there, and I'm very proud to be a part of it today." Of the Ithaca services community in general Kevin says, "There's a strong collaborative spirit here that makes my job easier. It's a model community for providing services to help people achieve their goals." Kevin is currently bringing together an Integrated Resource Team of service providers from several agencies to help insure that his clients get the best services available to them as efficiently as possible.

Kevin was honored at this year's Annual Awards Ceremony with the 'Challenge Anniversary Award' given for his long and exemplary service to Challenge and its clients. It's appropriate recognition for a man whose contribution to the service of those with disabilities has been, and continues to be, outstanding.

Meet a Challenge Employee

MELISSA MANN

Service Coordination

Melissa Mann came to Challenge from Schuyler County Child Care Coordination Council, where she worked as the Registration Coordinator. Since working as Challenge's Medicaid Service Coordinator, Melissa has become an indispensable member of Challenge's hard-working team. Her outstanding organizational skills and accessible nature have made her a definite asset.

Service Coordination, an assistance introduced at Challenge eight months ago, provides individuals with connections to valuable resources in the areas that will help them achieve their valued results.

When exploring the services that the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) offers individuals with disabilities, a service coordinator is an additional resource for these individuals and families. A service coordinator is someone who offers support and connects the folks to programs that would interest them. They can provide information about residential opportunities, arrange for habilitation services, match people up with employment supports and assist with finding new healthcare providers. Service coordinators want to see their clients achieve their personal goals and will use every resource available to help make their dreams become a reality.

This service is available for persons who have received an eligibility determination from OMRDD, have Medicaid and have made the choice to participate in the service. If someone does not have Medicaid or a determination from OMRDD, a service coordinator can help to obtain these requirements. Service Coordination is all about the individual; their needs, goals and dreams. It is the individual's opportunity to express how they want their life to be lived and the way they would like to live it.



"I would like to see Service Coordination grow at Challenge and reach more people [in our community]. You never know what you're missing unless you give it a try. I want people to see SC at Challenge as a person-centered service that is driven by the valued outcomes of that particular person. I believe that if you give a goal some time... that [goal] can eventually be achieved."

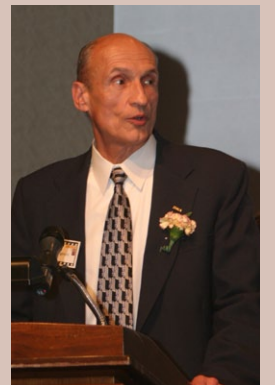
—Melissa Mann

CORNELL & ITHACA COLLEGE RECEIVE CHALLENGE'S ANNIVERSARY AWARD

Both Cornell and Ithaca College were recipients this year of the Challenge Anniversary Award, an award that has never before been given. These two institutions were selected for their long and outstanding partnership with Challenge in providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and other employment barriers.

It would be impossible to measure, or to adequately express appreciation for, the multitude of contributions that both of these organizations have made to further Challenge's employment mission. Over the course of decades - virtually from the beginning of Challenge's 40 year history - Ithaca College and Cornell have been partners in the truest sense; enabling and facilitating collaborations on significant projects that have given Challenge's services a far broader reach and much greater potential.

These institutions of higher learning serve the entire world with the education and research they provide. At the same time they are tremendously generous in the many ways they give back to, and take responsibility for, the community in which they operate. For that we are all very grateful, and are proud to highlight their contributions with our Anniversary Award.



Left: Gary Stewart — Cornell
Right: Carl Sgrecci —Ithaca College

SUPPORT Challenge THROUGH THE 2008 ITHACA ALTERNATIVE GIFT FAIR

Challenge participated in this year's Ithaca Alternative Gift Fair, which offers an opportunity to give charitable donations as Holiday Gifts for friends and relatives. The Fair was held on Saturday, December 6, at the First Presbyterian Church. But it's not too late to participate...

DONATIONS CAN STILL BE MADE ONLINE AT WWW.ITHACAALTGIFTFAIR.ORG

Thirty organizations were represented at the Fair, which started in 2004 and has grown each year. Gifts at the Fair start at \$5, and each gift you buy comes with a free greeting card and an insert describing the organization you are supporting. All of the money collected at the Fair goes directly to the participating organizations. The Ithaca Alternative Gift Fair is sponsored by the CRESP Center for Transformative Action and TCAction.

The gifts Challenge is offering this year are:

\$10 Cooking, Gardening, Athletic, or Craft Supplies for Teaching Healthy Life Skills to Disabled Program Participants

\$25 10,000 Boston or Romaine Lettuce Seeds for Production in our Finger Lakes Fresh Greenhouse Operation

\$35 Job Club Training Materials necessary for preparing public assistance recipients to locate, secure, and maintain meaningful employment

\$50 Educational Materials Necessary for an Individual to Complete a GED Program

Open Amount Funds to Support the mission of Challenge to assist individuals with disabilities and other employment barriers in developing their skills, interests and talents to meet the ever-changing needs of today's workplace.

The Gift Fair is a wonderful way to learn about our community, share holiday cheer with others, support Challenge, and give gifts that have a very positive impact on so many lives.

Challenge

402 East State Street | Ithaca, New York 14850
607-272-8990 | www.aboutchallenge.org

Non-Profit Organization

US Postage

PAID

Ithaca, NY 14850

Permit No. 34

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Parker
Meredith Collins
Patrick McKee
Marty Gold



MEMBER AGENCY

Challenge



OUR MISSION

FOR 40 YEARS Challenge has been supporting individuals with disabilities and other employment barriers in developing their skills, interests and talents to meet ever-changing workplace needs.

YOUR PARTNERSHIP WITH US

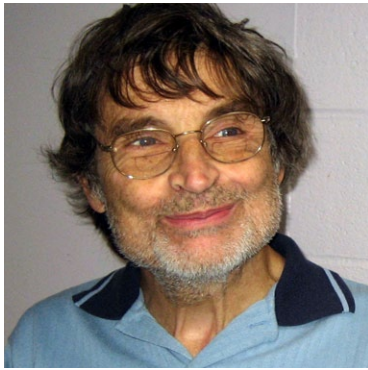
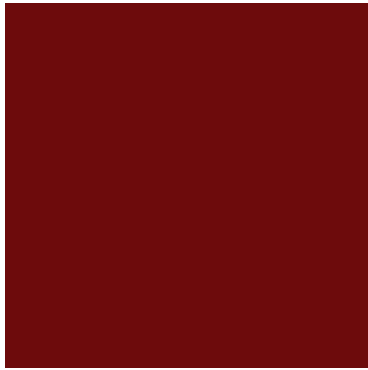
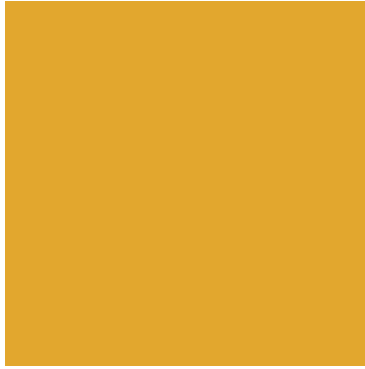
Today a deep commitment to our mission continues at Challenge, even as we face difficult financial hurdles in these rough economic times. It seems that during recessionary periods those who can least afford to do with less are the first to have to do so. They are the hardest hit by job layoffs, rising food prices, and cuts in funding for program services. The clients we serve at Challenge must often work harder for their success than the general population; overcoming disabilities, as well as personal and economic obstacles. When financial resources become seriously restricted, the hurdles grow even higher.

Through times of abundance and times of scarcity our compassionate and human service centered community has always remained dedicated to providing opportunity and support for those in need. This kind of support is particularly crucial now in the midst of state and federal budget cuts. As our staff works very hard to assist our clients to learn, grow, and prepare themselves for a more promising and independent future, your financial support can make all the difference.

As we continue our 2008 Annual Appeal, we ask you to please consider a donation in support of our mission. With the help of our community we will remain the strong and vital agency we have been for 40 years.

THANK YOU

To find out more about our programs, or to make a donation Call us at **607-272-8990**,
Or visit our website at www.aboutchallenge.org



Challenge

PUTTING ABILITY TO WORK

607-272-8990

aboutchallenge.org
