

Nassau County to Host 38th Games for the Physically Challenged

By Kim Brussell



Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman announces the Games at a presser at The Viscardi Center, which featured its basketball players and cheer squad.

Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman had barely uttered that he was proud to announce the County would once again host the Games for the Physically Challenged when a small, enthusiastic voice from the audience exclaimed, "Yay!" The young Henry Viscardi School student, along with a group of her classmates, was in attendance at the press conference held on May 8, 2024 in the school's gymnasium at The Viscardi Center. The students' eagerness to participate in the Games being held May 31-June 1 at Mitchel Field Athletic

Complex and Nassau Community College was palpable.

County Executive Blakeman opened the press conference saying, "We are always happy and proud to be here at Henry Viscardi School, a premiere school in the United States, and I'm honored Nassau County gets to host the Games." He thanked the supporters who make them possible, as well as the volunteers and first responders for the critical roles they play during the weekend events. New York State funding for the Games was eliminated several years ago and the office of the



Nassau County Executive, with the help of private sector sponsors, has kept them alive. Participation is free for athletes.

There is great excitement surrounding the 38th Nassau County Games for the Physically Challenged, founded by Susan Gordon Ryan in 1985. Over 1,100 athletes from around New York State, ages 5 to 21, with a wide range of physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, will travel to compete in track & field, slalom, archery, swimming, wheelchair basketball and table tennis.

Brianna Pace, a speech therapist at Henry Viscardi School, gave a powerful acapella performance of the national anthem just before tip-off of a wheelchair basketball demonstration by the school's junior varsity team. Viscardi's cheer

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 2-3

National and NY Disability News

Page 4

"All of Me" – A New Disability Play

Page 8-9

Games for the Physically Challenged Athlete Profiles

Page 11-14

Commentary and Opinion

Sign Up to Receive the Digital Edition of Able News!

Scan this code.



squad was in full force cheering on the Cougars.

Dr. Chris Rosa, President & CEO of The Viscardi Center, shared that students from Henry Viscardi School have been participating since inception and the event is a place to showcase their talent and an opportunity to be a part of the community. "Inclusive basketball was founded here at Viscardi, and the Games are a celebration of inclusive, adapted sports. The competitive events are enjoyed by the students and their families each year and become some of

Continued on page 11

Two Key HHS Rules Ensure Protections for Disability Community

By Emily Ladau

As part of its ongoing efforts to advance equity for people with disabilities and protections against discrimination, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has recently issued two key rules.

The first, announced on April 26 by the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), is a final rule under Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that advances protections against discrimination in health care on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, and disability. Among key aspects of

this rule are reduced language access barriers, expanded physical and digital accessibility, and a focus on reducing bias in health technology.

Following this, on May 1, HHS OCR finalized a rule titled “Discrimination on the Basis of Disability in Health and Human Service Programs or Activities.” The rule advances equity and bolsters protections for people with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 is a law that prevents discrimination based on disability by entities that receive federal funding.

In a public statement, Maria

Town, the President and CEO of the American Association for People with Disabilities, lauded this rule as momentous for the disability community. “While this rule will not end ableism,” she said, “it provides us with a meaningful tool if and when we do encounter bias while interacting with child welfare systems, adoption agencies, and in healthcare settings that receive federal funds. This rule is going to save and lengthen lives, keep families together and keep people in their communities, and improve access to and quality of medical care disabled people receive.”

National Disability Employment Awareness Month Theme Announced

By Emily Ladau

In 1945, President Truman’s administration declared the first week of each October to be “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” By 1988, this observance evolved and expanded to National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Each year, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) announces a theme for the month. The theme for 2024 is

“Access to Good Jobs for All.”

This theme announcement is particularly timely, as June is National Employee Wellness Month. A key to accessing good jobs is ensuring that all employees have access to supports both within and beyond the workplace, including reasonable accommodations on the job, and healthcare to maintain wellbeing. These are just some examples of the inclusive employ-

ment practices that are spotlighted during NDEAM.

As Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy Taryn M. Williams explained in a statement from ODEP, “Good jobs change lives and all workers — including disabled people — deserve the opportunity to prepare for success in high-quality, good-paying jobs in workplaces free of discrimination.”

ABLE NEWS
201 I. U. Willets Road
Albertson, NY 11507
ablenews@viscardicenter.org
516-465-1416
ablenews.com

Published By
The Viscardi Center

Managing Editor
Kim Brussell

Editor
Emily Ladau

Designer
Neil Esposito

Contributors
David Block
Kathryn Carroll, Esq.
Marcus Johnson
Esme Mazzeo
Dr. Sharon McLennon-Wier
Warren Shaw
James Weisman, Esq.
Rebecca Willford, Esq.

Publisher (emerita)
Angela Miele Melledy

Advertising Rates
Furnished Upon Request



Postmaster: Send address changes to Able Newspaper at 201 I.U. Willets Road, Albertson, NY 11507. Periodicals are being paid for at Bethpage, NY post office. Able Newspaper is published by The Viscardi Center, 201 I.U. Willets Road, Albertson, NY 11507. Able welcomes article suggestions for consideration. Submissions are the author’s warranty that the material is not an infringement of the rights of others and that the material/photos may be published without further approval. Editorial material does not necessarily reflect the view of the editor/publisher of Able Newspaper. Advertisers are responsible for the content of advertisements. No part of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of the publisher. Able is not responsible for errors in advertisements beyond the price of the space occupied by the error. The publisher reserves the right to decline advertising for any reason.



READ ABLE NEWS ONLINE
ablenews.com

Stay Connected With Us

Able News @able_news

Interested in Submitting News Content or Placing an Ad?

Email: ablenews@viscardicenter.org

Call: 516-465-1416

The deadline for the July issue is June 15th.

Expanding Access to Primary Care

By Independence Care System

Independence Care System (ICS) was named the recipient of a \$200K New York Health Foundation (NYHealth) grant to further develop a Center of Excellence in Primary Care for People with Physical Disabilities in partnership with New York City Health and Hospitals (H+H), the largest community hospital system in the country.

The NYHealth grant recognizes the vital role primary care plays in maintaining health. The funding from NYHealth will allow ICS and H+H to work in a primary care clinic in Woodhull Hospital to directly understand the specific care needs of people with physical disabilities, and to create a model of care with crucial feed-

back on their complex needs.

The project will allow for effective data collection to establish what constitutes quality primary care to reduce health disabilities and ensure for accessible health-care for people with disabilities. This in turn will help in establishing trainings for staff to provide disability competent care, as well as the development of a curriculum and materials for healthcare professionals to deliver equitable, quality care.

With earlier funding from NYHealth, ICS previously developed “A Blueprint for Improving Access to Primary Care for Adults with Physical Disabilities,” a report on standards for primary care, patient-centered care, and ambu-

latory care featuring interviews and focus groups with people with disabilities, physicians, administrators, and policy experts.

“We’re grateful to receive this funding from NYHealth, which will allow us to continue developing a primary care center of excellence for people with physical disabilities,” said ICS President and CEO Regina Martinez-Estela. “We commend NYHealth for recognizing the importance of our center as an investment in the disability community. This grant will allow us to focus on research to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and to work toward getting them consistent, life-saving quality primary care from healthcare providers.

This funding will also help us further the health, mobility and independence — ICS’ three foundational pillars — of people with disabilities for the advancement of health equity in this community.”

“The Center of Excellence holds promise to improve the accessibility, quality, and equity of primary care for people with physical disabilities,” said David Sandman, Ph.D., President and CEO of NYHealth. “Through their work together, ICS and H+H will be poised to help patients across the hospital system and across New York State get the screenings and preventive services they need to stay healthier and avoid unnecessary hospitalizations.”

Autism Flag Raised in Downtown Glen Cove

From the Office of Assemblymember Charles Lavine

A flag representing the neurodivergent community is now flying over the City of Glen Cove. Thanks to the efforts of Assemblymember Charles Lavine (D-North Shore), the flag, designed by Jericho constituent Josh Mirsky, was raised on April 25, 2024 during Autism Awareness Month at a special ceremony attended by Lavine and other dignitaries including the city’s mayor and representatives of the City Council.

Mirsky is a member of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Advisory Board and is Co-founder and Host of the Sounds Like Autism podcast. Josh was recently officially introduced by Assemblymember Lavine on

the Assembly floor. He has been working to get a bill passed in the legislature establishing his flag as the official state flag for raising awareness of neurodiversity. As Assemblymember Lavine shared, “Josh is a stalwart and hardened advocate for human rights. He stands for community and for respect for people who are neurodivergent.”

Reflecting on the new flag, Mirsky said, “By raising the neurodiversity strength flag, the town of Glen Cove is showing that they stand up with progress and inclusion and that they stand with the neurodiverse people and showing them that we see you, we hear you, and we respect you.”



Celebrating the flag raising in Glen Cove. Photo courtesy of Assemblymember Charles Lavine.

"All of Me": A Raw and Real Depiction of Disabled Life

By Esme Mazzeo



Lucy and Alfonso communicating with AAC devices in "All of Me." Photo by Monique Carboni.

There's a scene toward the end of the first act of "All of Me" in which the main character Lucy (Madison Ferris) and her mom Connie (Kyra Sedgwick) both fall while Connie is trying to help Lucy transfer from her scooter to her bed off stage.

The cheap wooden ramp that Lucy used to get over a step between her living area and bedroom had rotted and collapsed, causing the scooter to get stuck, leading to a fall as Connie tries to get Lucy off the scooter.

While lying on the floor, Connie, who has an injured back and self-medicates with wine, begs Lucy (a recent college graduate with muscular dystrophy) to do her exercises, apply for a job at Walmart, and for goodness' sake, pray to God for help.

"If anyone deserves a miracle, it's our family," Connie says from the floor.

Lucy, who prefers to use alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) to talk, indicates to her mother that rather than

pray or exercise or think about her future at Walmart —she'd like to lay on the floor in complete silence until her sister Jackie and brother-in-law arrive home from a suspiciously long trip to Dairy Queen to help them up.

It's one of the saddest moments in the romantic comedy written by Laura Winters and directed by Ashley Brooke Monroe — but also a raw and honest depiction of disabled life.

Such is the magic of "All of Me," which centers on Lucy and her love interest, Alfonso (Danny J. Gomez), who meet at the hospital after a doctor's appointment and both use AAC.

Layers of sadness and joy exist in the story between layers of humor and tragedy all while portraying the complexity of the human condition.

Ferris said that after seeing the play, many people often tell her, "I have seen every aspect of my life in this production."

The core message of the play is that everyone's life is messy,

so thankfully we don't have to go through it alone.

Gomez and Ferris are proof of this. They're breaking boundaries together as two disabled actors starring in an off-Broadway play, and Gomez reflected on the effect that sharing the stage has on the production.

"It just gives us a different type of power and command of the stage," he said, adding that it's often easy for the audience and actors to forget that the characters are using AAC to speak rather than their bodies.

Ferris said she feels more "comfortable" and less "isolated" with Gomez on stage and crew members who have disabilities helping make the story come to life behind the scenes.

When she meets Alfonso, Lucy is a quick-witted former jazz singer and recent college graduate forced to face the impact her progressive disability is having on her life and the lives of her loved ones, financially and otherwise.

By contrast, Alfonso has an es-

established career and has moved to Schenectady, New York, from Manhattan to start a new job and build a fully accessible home for himself. He and his mother have had decades to acclimate to his life with paralysis and have the money to bypass the red tape involved with needing government assistance.

"All Of Me" explores the nuances of dating, working, and even having sex with a disability while simultaneously reminding the audience that Lucy is also a sister who sometimes makes mistakes and Alfonso is a son trying to temper his mother's expectations for his life.

"It's really important that we tell these stories that are closer to real life than what we usually see on TV and movies," said Gomez, who is making his theatrical debut in the play. "The way that we do it is the way it should be done."

Alfonso and Lucy's love story reminds the audience that the mistakes you make when you're desperate often feel empowering. And acts of love sometimes require great personal sacrifice.

Every scene serves as a reminder that even on the floor in your darkest moment, you can reach out and find a hand to hold.

And it's a powerful moment for disability representation. Seeing a character like Lucy in a rom-com when she was younger would've made her feel jealous of the actor playing the part, Ferris joked. "Growing up, there's nothing to compare my work to. So it's both liberating and very isolating."

"I think people are just so excited and just finally relieved to see themselves in a piece of art," said Ferris. In an industry only just beginning to acknowledge disabled artists and stories, "All Of Me" sends a clear message to the community — every aspect of your story matters.

Disability History

Meet Douglas C. McMurtrie, a Great Disability Ally

By Warren Shaw

Douglas Crawford McMurtrie was born in 1888, the son of a prominent chemist, in Belmar, New Jersey. He was a star sprinter and high jumper—surprising for a young man described by his biographer as “a veritable giant . . . well over six feet tall, seemingly almost a yard across the shoulders and weighing, in his prime, approximately 400 pounds.”

McMurtrie’s work as a reporter, businessman, and print designer rapidly earned him a career in printing, magazine publishing, and editing. He designed several typefaces, and later helped establish the trademark look for a fashionable new magazine, *The New Yorker*. He was a bon vivant, a lover of food and fine wine, a well-liked, engaging man. Though he never finished college, he had strong scholarly leanings. In years to come he would publish highly regarded books on the history of printing, bookmaking, and typography.

In 1910 McMurtrie moved to New York City where, his biographer reports, a chance encounter led to extraordinary outcomes. He met a woman connected with one of the many organizations then working on behalf of children with disabilities. Her group had received a sizable donation, which she proposed to use for fundraising. How about ads in the subway? McMurtrie answered that people who had that kind of money didn’t use the subway. Instead, McMurtrie penned a short story, “Dorothy’s Dilemma,” about a disabled woman in the able-bodied world. Printing it up in pamphlet form, he distributed it to a list of wealthy New Yorkers, then followed up a few weeks later with fundraising letters, achieving results that were “astounding.”

“Dorothy’s Dilemma” was an unusual piece for its time, but it was only the beginning of McMurtrie’s transformation into

one of the first great allies of the disability population. Two years later, McMurtrie published a booklet, “The Care of Crippled Children In The United States.” Its most notable finding was that there were 67 organizations around the country dedicated to disabled children—far higher than anyone had suspected, and more than enough to constitute a movement. The problem was that these organizations had for the most part developed independently, in response to local issues and under individual leadership. There was little cross-communication and even less coordination. Changing that situation was one of the primary intentions behind the little book.

One of the significant features of “The Care of Crippled Children” was its bibliography, which listed over a hundred recent works on the subject (including a dozen pieces by the author). Over the next decade McMurtrie would collect as many as ten thousand ancient and modern written works about disability, the largest such collection anywhere.

In 1914, McMurtrie became editor-in-chief of “The American Journal of Care For Cripples,” a new professional journal for social workers, medical practitioners, educators, and administrators. It was an effort to seed a national network for what was coming to be called “the rehabilitation movement.” Published quarterly for nine years, the journal was focused on, as a new phrase put it, “crippledom.”

The rehabilitation movement surged with the nation’s entry into the First World War. Ever since its beginnings at the hands of the pioneering activist May Darrach, circa 1899, the movement had mainly focused on disabled children. But suddenly disabled adults came into the picture. Credible projections showed huge numbers of veterans were

likely to come home with combat-related disabilities.

The upshot was a new preventive focus on soldiers who were not yet veterans and not yet disabled. The Surgeon General and the Red Cross created a new semi-public body to handle the anticipated flood of returning vets—the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. It was a national effort, undertaken with the involvement of the Federal Board for Vocational Education.

The director was none other than McMurtrie. He took on this new project with his customary gusto, constantly in view as a spokesman, author, and editor. Between 1917 and 1919, the Red Cross Institute’s publications appeared in newspapers, popular magazines, professional journals, and book-length collections. It direct-mailed some eight million pieces of literature into American homes, including three million that were included in telephone bills.

The basic argument was straightforward. Veterans had proven themselves to be tough and resourceful. They were likely to transition successfully given public support, and that support was well warranted given the sacrifices the men had made for their country. The publications of the Red Cross Institute spoke of the public’s “duty to the war cripple,” and encouraged readers to understand that the refusal to employ disabled veterans confronted them with “a more baffling difficulty than the loss of a limb.” Together with a massive veterans’ pension program that was being debated in Congress, a new dawn for disabled Americans seemed near at hand.

The Red Cross Institute quickly found measurable improvements in employment of disabled adults in the New York City area. By 1919, Henry Ford had hired over



A photograph of Douglas C. McMurtrie, c. 1938-1939.

9,000 disabled employees. There were even men with disabilities playing Major League Baseball.

But the new dawn failed to materialize. The Progressive Movement lost much of its force under the combined weight of the Great Polio Epidemic of 1916, the Great War, the Flu Pandemic of 1917-1918, and the Red Scare that began in 1919. The disaster-dulled public’s interest in people with disabilities evaporated. The standalone children’s charities began to close. And not long after, McMurtrie quit the rehabilitation movement, never to return.

McMurtrie remains a major figure in the history of printing. The Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men still exists today, under the name Institute for Career Development. But McMurtrie’s world-class disability library has vanished without a trace, and awareness of one of our first great ally’s pioneering work all but disappeared, long ago. Until now.

For more of Warren Shaw’s work in disability history, please go to www.DisabilityHistoryNYC.com

Sports Report

Achilles Hope & Possibility Race Set for June 23

By David Block

The 22nd annual Achilles Hope & Possibility® 4M Presented by TD Bank takes place this June 23 in Central Park at 8:15 am.

This 4-mile race's longevity surprised its founder Trisha Meili - The Central Park Jogger - who launched it in 2003.

"Honestly, I wasn't thinking that far into the future," said Meili. "The first year, Achilles International's late founder Dick Traum, and I wanted to have a successful race that brought people with challenges together to show the world, and each other, all that we could do. We wanted to invite the able bodied to join our race - it's usually the other way around."

According to Meili, the first year, 700 athletes competed. This year, the race reached its maximum number of entrants, 10,000 runners; this happened in less

than three days.

"That was incredible," said Meili.

What might have helped this race grow is that Meili received national attention as a result of being sexually assaulted while jogging in Central Park on April 19, 1989. She was known as the Central Park Jogger because for 14 years, she kept her identity secret.

During her recovery and rehabilitation, she learned about and then joined Achilles International, a track organization that helps people with disabilities run and walk.

Because Achilles International helped her recover, she decided to give back.

"I proudly serve on the Achilles International Board of Directors," said Meili. "I now watch near the finish line (of Hope & Possibility),

encouraging everyone to finish as strongly as they can."

Competing this year is Francesco Magisano, Director of Achilles's NYC Metro Region.

Magisano, 29, lost his vision 14 years ago due to retinoblastoma, a cancer that starts in the eye.

Prior to learning about Achilles seven years ago, Magisano had never run a mile in his life, neither when he was sighted nor blind.

"Seven years ago when I was in a grocery store, some man I never met started talking to me about Achilles," said Magisano. "He suggested I give it a try, so I did."

He enjoyed going to the Achilles workouts because he liked meeting people with different disabilities. He also enjoyed the physical workouts and then the fellowship afterwards.

"I kept coming back because it was about community," said

Magisano.

Last year at Hope & Possibility, his guide runner was former NY Giant, Tiki Barber.

"I'm a huge Giants fan," said Magisano. "Running with Tiki was surreal. For years, I heard his voice on TV and radio. Now that same voice was actually talking to me."

During the race last year, they pretended that they were in an NFL game, running from the 50 - yard line to the 20 - yard line.

"That was funny," said Magisano.

Although this year's Hope & Possibility Race is sold out, both nondisabled people and people with disabilities can sign up for an Achilles workout. Workouts take place seven days a week in all the NY boroughs.

For more information, visit achillesinternational.org/nyc

Team #NoLimits Rides in TD Five Boro Bike Tour

By The Lighthouse Guild

On Sunday, May 5, Lighthouse Guild and the Foreseeable Future Foundation joined forces by forming Team #NoLimits and riding in the NYC TD Five Boro Bike Tour. As a charity partner of the bike tour, Team #NoLimits raised over \$75K to support vision health and rehabilitation services, as well as sports and recreational programs for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Team #NoLimits included 37 cyclists, 16 of whom rode in tandem on bicycles built for two. The team included cyclists who are blind or visually impaired, staff, family members, friends, and volunteers. In addition to increasing awareness about the importance of eye health, Team #NoLimits encourages a healthy and active lifestyle through accessible sports for people who are blind or visually impaired. Adaptive sports such as cycling, baseball, goal ball and golfing enable everyone to participate, no matter their visual capacity.

Co-captains of Team #NoLimits were Kiana Glanton, Chief Development Intern at Lighthouse Guild, and Griffin Pinkow, founder of the Foreseeable Future Foundation.

"I started the bike tour at the corner of Courage & Accessibility streets. I ended it at the finish line of Triumph. There are absolutely no limits to what people who are blind or visually impaired can do, and we proved that yesterday," said Glanton.

"The TD Five Boro Bike Tour had a sense of camaraderie among cyclists of all backgrounds and abilities," said Pinkow. "As a visually impaired rider, advocate, and non-profit founder, participating in such an event was truly remarkable, showcasing the transformative potential of adaptive sports."

The TD Five Boro Bike Tour is the largest cycling event in the country and one of the most popular athletic events in New York City. Approximately, 32,000 cyclists participated on May 5.



Members of Lighthouse Guild Team #NoLimits gather for a photo prior to the start of the TD Five Boro Bike Tour.

Community Events

June 8

Get Outdoors & Get Together Day

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks), in partnership with the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and the NYS Department of Veterans' Services, are hosting free and low-cost events across New York to bring people of all abilities, ages, identities, and backgrounds together for fun, healthful activities as part of the state's initiative to broaden the diversity of users and ensure inclusivity of access to state public lands. **Learn more:** <https://opwdd.ny.gov/gettogetherday>



June 13

2:00 – 3:00 pm

Reasonable Modifications Workshop

A person with a disability sometimes needs to make physical changes in a dwelling. A management company/landlord must allow a tenant to make reasonable modifications to an apartment or common area if the modifications are "reasonable" and necessary for the tenant to use the dwelling unit. Marc Ross Miller, Ph.D., the Director of Housing at Long Island Center for Independent Living, will present an overview of reasonable modifications, the process of requesting a modification, and what to do if your request is ignored or denied. It will also include a quick review of HUD's Fair Housing Accessibility Guidelines. **Email Donna to register at donna@LICILinc.org or call 516.796.0144 ext. 220.**

June 15 and June 29

Beast of the East Beep Baseball Tournaments

Beep Baseball is played by athletes who are blind or have a vision disability. The Long Island Bombers Beep Baseball team is hosting the first Beast of the East tournament on June 15 at Speno Memorial Park in East Meadow from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm. They are also competing in the second tournament, hosted by the New Jersey Titans Beep Baseball team on June 29 from 9:00am – 5:00 pm at the soccer fields across from Dorbrook Recreation Center, located at 353 Route 537, Colts Neck, NJ. **Learn more:** <https://www.libombers.org/>

Starting July 9

All Abilities All-Stars Adaptive Sports Program

Registration is open for this free 7-week program for children with various disabilities experiencing higher barriers to participation in sports and socialization opportunities. The program takes place at The Sports Arena in St. James. **Learn more and register:** <https://bit.ly/3wBsaLe>

September 28-29

The Run to Breakthrough

Through a 100-mile run with 10 stops, this exciting event will raise funds to provide inclusive race experiences, community events, and grants for families in need. You can join a team or form your own. **Learn more and register:** <https://runtobreakthrough.org/the-run-to-breakthrough-september-2024/>

Connect, Learn, and Advocate

Air Travel Accessibility Survey

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) released a proposed rule that aims to improve the air travel experience for people with mobility impairments. Comments on the rule are due June 12 and the DOT needs to hear from the disability community. United Spinal is encouraging wheelchair users to share some examples of discrimination you have experienced in air travel. **Take the survey:** <https://unitedspinal.org/airline-survey/>

National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) Scholarships

Whether you want to continue your education in a post-secondary setting or just want to take one class, pursue your artistic goals, advance your business, or have a fun night with friends, NDSS has a scholarship for you. **Find the scholarship that best suits your needs and apply by June 14:** <https://ndss.org/scholarships>

2024 Art of Recovery Project

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Office of Recovery aims to highlight the transformative impact of art on mental health and substance use recovery. Through June 28, the 2024 Art of Recovery project is accepting submissions from artists with lived or living experience. **Submit your artwork:** <https://www.samhsa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/offices-centers/or/art-of-recovery>

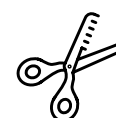
Teighlor McGee Grassroots Mini Grants

Led by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, this program will give out grants of up to \$5000 to people or groups. Recipients can use this money to do local, state, or national advocacy projects to make the world better for people with disabilities. **Learn more and apply:** <https://autisticadvocacy.org/teighlor-mcgee-grassroots-mini-grants/>

ReelAbilities Film Festival

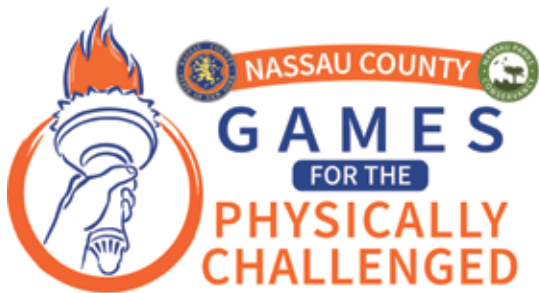
Submissions are now open for the 17th annual ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York, taking place April 3-9, 2025. The deadline for film submissions is October 1, 2024. **Learn more and submit a film:** <https://filmfreeway.com/reelabilities>

CLASSIFIED



Haircutting

Haircutting in your home.
Call 917-363-6834



Meet the Athletes



Gabriel Shannon

Age: 12

School: Baldwin Middle School

Events: soft discus, distance kick, precision throw, 40-meter dash

“My favorite thing about the Nassau County Games is running on the racetrack with my friends. I exercise with my friends. I use my muscles. At the end of the race, I feel like a winner!”



Angela Bordeaux

Age: 12

School: Baldwin Middle School

Events: 40-meter dash, club throw, distance kick

“I like running in the race. I hope I win. My mom cheers for me. I will cheer for my friends.”



Victoria Schaefer

Age: 21

School: Kings Park High School

Events: Field Events

Victoria is a three-time superstar on Kings Park High School's Unified Basketball team where her nickname is “The Pistol.” She is known for her courage to not back down from a challenge on or off the court.



Gabe Ciccone

Age: 21

School: Kings Park High School

Events: Field Events

Gabe is a three-season ringer on Kings Park High School's Unified Basketball team where his nickname is “Game-Time Gabe.” He is known for his speed and accuracy when making baskets and is the team's highest scoring player.



Samantha

Age: 9

School: Henry Viscardi School at The Viscardi Center

Events: Track, swimming, basketball

“I like to go to the Games because it is fun, and I also exercise a lot. Last year I met a girl at the Games named Paige and talked to her about our school. Now she is going to be a student at Viscardi.”



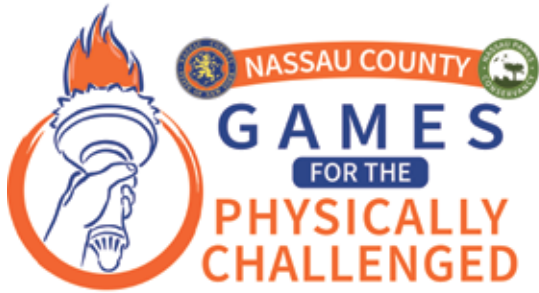
Ajay

Age: 10

School: Henry Viscardi School at The Viscardi Center

Events: Basketball

“I like to shoot for tallest hoop and playing on the Nassau Community College court. It's like going to college.”



May 31 – June 1, 2024

Mitchel Athletic Complex and Nassau Community College



Gia

Age: 11

School: Henry Viscardi School at The Viscardi Center

Events: Basketball

"I'm looking forward to winning and playing with my teammates. When you win, you're proud of yourself and that you've accomplished what you wanted to accomplish."



Tyreese Williams

Age: 20

School: Nassau BOCES-Rosemary Kennedy School

Events: Track and Field Events

"I can't wait to compete at the games. I have been practicing in gym. I can kick and throw far."



Trevor Byfield

Age: 13

School: Nassau BOCES-Rosemary Kennedy School

Events: Track and Field, Swimming

"I enjoy participating in all types of sports and games, especially running and swimming. I am very good at long distance running and the butterfly stroke. I hope we all win a shiny gold medal."



Kimberly Garcia

Age: 14

School: Glen Cove High School

Events: 100-meter dash

"I just started running this year and I am excited for the new experience and opportunity."



Andrew Dompkowski

Age: 22

School: Farmingdale High School

Events: Track and Field

"I really enjoy being with my friends on Team Farmingdale and members of the school's SMILE club who help out. We have great team shirts every year and I feel happy when everyone cheers me on."

Able News wishes all of the athletes

All THE Best

Meet Cultural Changemaker Andraéa LaVant

By Emily Ladau

Congratulations on being a 2024 recipient of the prestigious Henry Viscardi Achievement Award! You're truly changing the game for the disability community. Can you tell us about the work you do?

LaVant Consulting, Inc. (LCI) is a disability-focused strategy and communications firm that I started in 2018. And I did that because I had a lot of experience with different industries and found that there were some consistencies across sectors. It's not so much about people not wanting to address disabilities, but that they didn't want to get it wrong. And my educational background was in public relations, so I've always felt the power of communication and diplomacy are really important — meeting people where they are on their journey. I describe what I do as being a “cultural changemaker”. And when I think about what was missing for me growing up as a Black disabled person, it was just needing to see possibilities for myself. So that led to the work we do at LCI, supporting a culture shift to ensure that intersectional disability is a part of people's work.

What disability rights issue is your biggest advocacy priority right now?

For me, it's all about making disability more mainstream — anything connected to living a full life and creating a holistic experience. For example, income limits when it comes to Social Security benefits and barriers to getting married. Or transportation. How am I getting to work? Or how am I getting on this plane? How can I go enjoy life?

What wisdom can you share with disabled people who want to make an impact with their advocacy?

You have to know yourself before you can outwardly make

an impact. There are a lot of policy people that know sections of laws and statistics, but where I found my power to be was in my story. So, for example, I remember being at a disability roundtable at the White House during the Obama administration and folks were talking about everything from disability in sports, to employment, to health care. And my role was to talk about the intersection between women's rights and disability rights as it relates to health care. I shared that my big concern was going to the doctor's office and needing to get a Pap smear but I can't get on the table, and that was shocking for them to hear.

You can share that one in four people have disabilities, but you can make it plain by adding your perspective, how something impacts you directly. So my advice, you know, is just to tell your story to share your perspectives because it adds value. I can tell people I've achieved “the American dream” but there have been times when I couldn't get out of bed in the morning because I didn't have a personal care attendant to come and get me out of bed. That's my real life experience.

You continue to accomplish so much! How do you take time to relax and restore?

I recognize that some of the things I'm going to say are because of access to privilege that I have now that I did not have before. Creating space means outsourcing certain things, like a meal delivery or laundry service, so I can be focusing on the things that I'm called to. I have a self-care coach who has helped me, as a Black disabled queer woman, to value and protect myself and my time.

Looking ahead, what's next in your exciting journey?

When I started LCI, I thought it was just going to be me



Photo courtesy of Andraéa LaVant.

consulting and then things grew. My greatest joy is the opportunity to employ disabled people, and my dream is to continue to create an environment where people love what they do and they love who they do it with. We continue to grow slowly. It's a personal

mantra of my wife and I: we go slow, we move in flow. So as the team continues to build, and they're flying beautifully already, it's about creating more space for me to go and do some other projects I'm passionate about. That's where I'm headed.

NY Connects can help people with disabilities...

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. NY Connects Your Link to Long Term Services and Supports

1-800-342-9871

- Remain independent
- Understand paths to care
- Discover transportation options
- Learn about caregiver supports
- Get answers about Medicaid, Medicare, and health insurance
- Apply for benefits
- Learn housing options

NY Connects can help!

Call 1-844-862-7930

cidny
CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED, NY

Locations and Partners

<p>Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY Manhattan 1010 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 301 New York, NY 10003</p> <p>Queens 80-02 Kew Gardens Rd, Suite 400 Kew Gardens, NY 11415</p> <p>Brooklyn 30 Third Avenue, #800A Brooklyn, NY 11217</p>	<p>Community Health Action of Staten Island (CHASI) 56 Bay St, 4th Floor Staten Island, NY 10301</p> <p><small>COMMUNITY HEALTH ACTION OF STATEN ISLAND A member of Hudson River Health Care</small></p>	<p>Bronx Independent Living Services (BILS) 4419 Third Ave, #2C Bronx, NY 10457</p> <p><small>BRONX Independent Living SERVICES</small></p>
---	---	--

United Spinal Now

Decades of Accessible Transit Experience – What Should Come Next?

By James Weisman, Esq., General Counsel, United Spinal Association

As the 34th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) approaches, it's an appropriate time to consider what the statute and implementation of U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulations have done for transportation options available to people with disabilities in the U.S., and New York, specifically.

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which was sued by United Spinal Association (then called Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, or EPVA) way back in 1979 to make buses and subways accessible, has had a 100% wheelchair accessible bus system for decades. MTA's decades-long reluctance, however, to make subway stations accessible, and its elimination of interborough bus routes have unnecessarily caused disabled people to become dependent on Access-A-Ride paratransit at great cost to taxpayers. The years since 1982, when the first accessible buses began arriving in NYC, could have been spent promoting accessible transit to New Yorkers with disabilities, coordinating intermodal accessible travel, making as many commuter rail and subway stations accessible as possible, and integrating accessible taxis into the paratransit system, which would permit "real time" dispatching and substantial-

ly reduce cost per ride.

Instead, New York's citizens with disabilities complain bitterly about late or "no show" Access-A-Ride vehicles, which by ADA regulation, do not need to be dispatched in "real time" (like rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft) and must be reserved at least 24 hours in advance, making spontaneous travel impossible.

Most of the accessible transportation initiatives in New York have been the result of advocacy by riders with disabilities rather than inclusive transit planning. For example, curb ramps, essential to independent travel and required by ADA, have been the subject of major litigation in New York City. And as you read this, the City is currently attempting to wiggle out of its Settlement Agreement with United Spinal and Taxis for All, among others plaintiffs, instead of working with MTA to bring down the costs of Access-A-Ride and Medicaid to bring down the costs of Medicaid-sponsored ambulette travel.

While advocates and City Hall have gotten rideshare services to provide accessible service in New York City, they do not pick up wheelchair users in Westchester, Suffolk or Nassau Counties, New Jersey, and other suburban locations. Using them to commute is not a possibility.

What should USDOT do to bring its regulation, drafted in 1991, into the 2020s?

I helped draft both the transportation provisions of the ADA (based on our Settlement Agreements with MTA and Philadelphia's SEPTA system) and the USDOT ADA regulations. I know that the drafters, who represented transit and people with disabilities, tried to require "state of the art" improvements.

The ADA required key stations to be made accessible by 2020, 24-hour advance request paratransit for those who can't use accessible transit and accessible buses. It should be revisited by USDOT to require real time paratransit dispatching, and every station to be made accessible. MTA recently announced a commitment to 100% accessible subway stations, the last to be completed in 2055, 76 years after EPVA sued for access. I will be 104 years old at the ribbon cutting.

All available accessible vehicles should be used to facilitate and coordinate transportation for those with mobility impairments. Since the George W. Bush administration, it has been permissible to use Medicaid, social services, Veterans Affairs, school, and vocational rehabilitation agency-funded accessible vehicles to reduce paratransit costs by taking

people to buses and trains (called feeder services in the regulation). A revisited ADA regulation should require this. Obviously, New York's accessible taxis should be used in this manner as well.

The area in which the ADA requires transit operators to provide paratransit is a ¾ mile ellipse around bus routes. In NYC, which is saturated with mass transit, this does not exclude people in wheelchairs from paratransit, but in the suburbs, where there are MTA service area dead zones, outside of the ¾ mile ellipse, wheelchair users and others needing paratransit are left without transportation.

As the population ages, New Yorkers will regret the shortsightedness of its transportation planners and appreciate the improvements brought about by disabled advocacy.

USDOT should scour the country for innovative transportation solutions (like gap fillers between platform and train) and make them models for new and different ADA requirements.

The ADA transportation requirements were progressive in the early 1990s when there were no cell phones, accessible taxis, or rideshare vehicles being dispatched in real time. It's time to integrate the past 34 years of experience and innovation into new ADA transportation regulations.

Nassau County to Host 38th Games for the Physically Challenged

Continued from page 1

their most treasured school memories. Our alumni often recall with fondness their participation."

Dr. Rosa reiterated that Able News is now being published by The Viscardi Center and how the paper has a long history of covering the Games and its athletes and volunteers.

Country Executive Blakeman encouraged everyone to attend the 2-day event, saying, "If you have never been, go and watch these great athletes compete as they train for their sport as hard as

anyone else."

The sponsors' passionate support of the Games was evident. A "driving force," Nassau Inter-County Express (NICE) Chief Executive Officer, Jack Khzouz, shared that NICE has been a sponsor for 12 years - providing shuttle bus services for the participants. "This event is the highlight of the year for our 1,000 employees involved."

Dr. Susan Poser, President of long-time Games supporter Hofstra University, recognized the Long

Island tradition as "a community event that is all about equity and inclusion," while Dr. Maria P. Conzatti, Chief Administrative Officer of Nassau Community College, said, "Together, let us champion diversity, empower one another, and strive for a future where everyone is valued and has the opportunity to learn, grow and lead fulfilling lives."

Robert Suarez, CUDE, AVP Community Development at Bethpage Federal Credit Union, said, "Bethpage is motivated by,

and proud to support, these young athletes and future leaders." Energized by the upcoming activities Kim Kaiman, Long Island Manager of External Affairs at PSEG Long Island, invited Games attendees to come by its table to make posters to cheer on their favorite athletes.

"I'm looking forward to shooting hoops," said Madison, who received the MVP award for her play in last year's game as a player on the Viscardi Cubbies team. What is she most excited about this year? "Winning!"

Access Aging

Improving Access to the Outdoors

By Kathryn Carroll, Esq., Disability and Program Coordinator, Association on Aging in New York

You do not have to go very far to find articles, tips, and suggestions about getting outside and experiencing nature to maintain physical and mental health. However, disabled people, caregivers, and older adults have specific considerations and requirements when wanting to get outside and enjoy outdoor recreation sites. Detailed information about transportation options, physical accessibility, and location of public outdoors and recreational spaces are especially important.

AgingNY is proud to support improving access so everyone can enjoy the outdoors. Our advocacy has taken us to outdoor recreation sites across the state in the past few years. A Council on Developmental Disabilities grant led to the Erie County Depart-

ment of Senior Services hosting a Disability Inclusion Day at an especially accessible county park.

People of all ages experience disability and may need accessible features, so it was important to have the Director of the Cayuga County Office for the Aging participate in the ribbon-cutting of an accessible viewing platform at the Carpenter Falls Unique Area. Older people and caregivers served by offices for the aging need to hear about opportunities near them.

As part of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to the Department of Environmental Conservation, I have the opportunity to visit and weigh in on features at various sites. This way, maintenance, updates, and improvements, can be conduct-

ed each year with accessibility in mind.

While not all outdoors spaces are equal when it comes to accessibility and the types of activities they offer, there are a lot of them. The local, county and state governments all operate outdoor spaces. At the state level, you may be surprised to know that not just the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (State Parks) oversees outdoor recreation sites, but also the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and the Thruway Authority.

Several state agencies, including the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, are collaborating again this year to celebrate Get Outdoors and Get Together Day. Check out



A ribbon-cutting at Carpenter Falls Unique Area.

<https://opwdd.ny.gov/gettogether-day> and <https://dec.ny.gov/things-to-do/outdoors-day> to learn about what new and fun outdoors opportunities might attract you on June 8th. And whether you get out on the 8th or any other day this year, know that we are working to improve access so we can all improve our mental and physical wellbeing and enjoyment of the outdoors.

CIDNY Says

The Importance of Supporting “Whole-Person Health” in the Workplace

By Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MEd., CRC, LMHC, Director of Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY)

June is recognized as National Employee Wellness Month. According to the American Community Survey (2022), there are approximately 1.5 million people with disabilities living in New York City, and many of them would like to pursue employment opportunities with employers who can provide a “whole-person health” perspective. Whatever their vocational calling may be, employees must have an appropriate work life balance to assist with their vocational success.

Employers who take a whole-person health approach in the workplace should support employees to consider their physical, mental, spiritual, and

emotional wellbeing. It is important for employees to stay as healthy as possible based on their functional ability. For example, following COVID-19, many employers have adopted hybrid work schedules. There are times when employees are working from home, and they have several Zoom meetings over the course of the day resulting a lack of opportunity for movement. It is important to provide opportunities for movement breaks.

Having reliable mental and physical healthcare from the employer is a necessity. It is important for employers to pay for the cost of individual medical, dental, and vision insurance for

all employees. It is also recommended that employees maintain physical wellness by receiving their routine annual exams.

Employers recognize employee wellness by providing paid-time-off (PTO) benefits. Some employers offer four weeks of vacation, 13 holidays including a religious-holiday-floater day, personal days, and some weeks of sick time. Encouraging the use of PTO allows staff to rejuvenate themselves and avoid professional burn out. Staff have a myriad of different demands regarding their time. So, if employees are able to take care of their own personal needs, this will result in a better work environment.

Employees should also have the space to find meaningful recreational activities. Famed psychologist Dr. Sigmund Freud highlighted three aspects of human life that people strive to attain: work, love, and play. People with disabilities are also interested in achieving these as well. It is incredibly challenging to maintain employment. But it is also challenging to fall in love, establish a family, have friends, and find meaningful hobbies/recreational activities. We encourage people with disabilities to participate in life activities regardless of their disability status. For additional information, please contact us at cidny.org or call 212-674-2300.

How Do We Make Change? By Showing Up.

By Rebecca Willford, Esq., President & CEO, Disability Rights Advocates

In the first week of May, Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) was in federal court in New York City, not one but two times, to move forward a couple of our longest standing and most important transportation access cases. I was there, as was *Able News* Editor Emily Ladau, as were dozens of clients and supporters with all types of disabilities. Why did we all show up in court for these hearings? Showing up is a critically important part of change-making. Especially the type of titanic, systemic, change-making that DRA specializes in. Being there with the community – in the courthouse hearing arguments and outside the courthouse talking to the media about the critical importance of transportation access, filled me with gratitude, pride, and hope.

The two cases in court hearings were: *Taxis For All Campaign et al. v. Taxi & Limousine Commission, and CIDNY, et al. v. Metropolitan Transportation Authority*, (or as we call it, the subways elevator maintenance case).

As I discussed in a previous *Able News* Column, the *Taxis For All* case is a long-running case against New York City's Taxi & Limousine Commission (TLC). The parties reached a court-ordered settlement a decade ago to make the City's iconic yellow medallion taxi fleet at least 50% wheelchair accessible, but despite an extension of time to fulfill its obligation, the TLC has not only

failed to reach the 50% accessibility threshold, but is seeking to escape any further accessibility obligations altogether.

In the Taxi case hearing, as people in wheelchairs, scooters, and with crutches (who had taken, or attempted to take taxis to the courthouse) lined the aisles, the judge heard both sides. DRA argued that the TLC must fulfill its obligation. New York City needs at least 50% of its fleet to be accessible, and drivers of accessible vehicles need to readily pick up people with disabilities, so that we have access to taxi transportation. At the end of the hearing, the Judge ordered TLC to submit a letter within two weeks with data that can be used to assess how to achieve a fleet with 50% accessible taxis.

The elevator maintenance case is a case against the MTA from 2017, challenging pervasive elevator outages across the NYC subway system for the few elevators that currently exist at stations. In 2020, the court granted the MTA's motion for summary judgment, which would have ended the case, except DRA appealed to the Second Circuit, which overturned that ruling in 2021 and sent the case back to the court.

During this May hearing, also attended by dozens of people with disabilities who had been stuck on subway platforms, had to plug their noses in horribly soiled elevators, cancel plans, or forego subway transportation entirely,

the MTA argued their motion for summary judgment on the basis that they provide reasonable accommodations to riders with mobility disabilities who encounter elevator outages. DRA vehemently opposed the MTA's motion citing numerous examples of those accommodations being entirely unreasonable and demanding that the MTA do better. After making our arguments, at the time of writing this article, we are waiting for the court to make a ruling in this case and look forward to sharing that result when we have it.

Why do I share all of this? First, I want to underline how critical DRA's dedicated clients are to our eventual court victories. Seismic change-making through the courts takes a massive amount of time (it's not uncommon for one of DRA's cases to take more than a decade to resolve), and our clients are there for the long haul. Each instance of discrimination becomes an important piece of evidence in the litigation. And the community's passion for needed societal change and grass-roots activism underscore it all. To be at the two court hearings we had earlier this month, our clients and community members took time off work and away from their families. They talked to reporters. They shared their stories and their ambition to bring about equality and make transportation more accessible for the next generation. Showing up like this takes sacrifice and makes

an incredible difference. And it takes immeasurable tenacity when the basic act of showing up requires some degree of luck in playing transportation roulette when unreliable transportation systems are the issue at hand.

Second, I want to highlight the winding, laborious, sometimes glacially paced nature of systemic disability rights litigation. Real, enforceable change can take a very long time to achieve. Our lawyers file numerous notices, briefs, and motions. They show up for hearing after hearing. Even when we win a case, we must remain vigilant to ensure that the court-enforceable remedy occurs over what is often a multi-year period of time, as we are doing in our Taxi case right now. And when it doesn't, we have to be ready to get back in the courtroom and argue, alongside our clients, for change. This is the work. It's a team sport, it's time-consuming, and in many instances the only vehicle for making the massive social change needed to dismantle the biggest barriers and ensure the promise of the disability rights laws that are on the books.

As always, if you want to get into the ring and fight for change alongside DRA, you can sign up for our e-newsletter at <https://dralegal.org/newsletter-subscription/>, or find me on Instagram at [rebecca.williford.dra](https://www.instagram.com/rebecca.williford.dra) or follow DRA at @dralegal.

Empowering Individuals with Disabilities

Are you facing discrimination in the workplace due to your disability? Are public places inaccessible, hindering your mobility and rights? Have you suffered a personal injury and need legal support? Look no further than Bell Law Group, PLLC. With over 20 years of dedicated service, we've been the beacon of justice for individuals with disabilities. Our team of experienced lawyers is committed to fighting for your rights.

We specialize in:

- Workplace discrimination, including failure to accommodate cases.
- Public accessibility cases, ensuring businesses comply with ADA and NY State Human Rights Law.
- Personal injury cases, advocating for your rightful compensation.

At Bell Law Group, PLLC, we understand the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. That's why we're passionate about being your voice in the legal system.

Contact us at 516-280-3008 or find us on the web at www.BellLG.com



Civics League Conversation

Why Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Matters

By Marcus Johnson, Civics League for Disability Rights (CLDR)

One of the most important developments over the past several years has been the expansion of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) movement. As a longtime disability rights advocate and co-leader of the Civics League for Disability Rights (CLDR), an independent, volunteer-led advocacy group of New Yorkers with disabilities, I know all too well that representation not only matters, but is necessary in all areas of life.

As a former Juilliard School dancer who was injured in a car accident at the age of 20, I have lived with a spinal cord injury since June 1991. What I quickly learned as a member of the disability community is that people with physical disabilities are one of the most marginalized and underserved populations in the country. What's more, our respective life experiences and talents are often discarded and unheard, both personally and professionally.

This is why DEI is so crucial. The thing many do not realize is that supporting DEI initiatives leads to the empowerment, education and connection of all who are involved. Through discussion, collaboration and shared experiences, a truly diverse and inclusive workplace culture can be born. It allows for all to be their most authentic selves.

DEI refers to established procedures and policies that encourage the representation and participation of people from all walks of life of different ages, races, genders, ethnicities, religions, sexual ori-

entations, and disabilities. DEI efforts should always be intentional, transparent, and accountable to ensure that intersectionality—the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender, and disability—is valued at the core of the environment. How can organizations embrace and address their employees' multifaceted identities and experiences without intentional DEI efforts?

There is, unfortunately, a harsh reality at present. The flip side is that despite its positives, DEI is under attack. A simple scroll through X (formerly Twitter) will showcase opponents of DEI who refer to the acronym as "Didn't Earn It." Some prominent leaders, including Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, have referred to DEI as "racist."

I was reminded of the opposition to DEI after reading an insightful piece by CNN, entitled "What is DEI and why is it dividing America?" Organizational leaders and lawmakers have openly described DEI efforts as unfair, biased, and discriminatory, and claimed that these efforts put other groups, specifically White Americans, at disadvantages. DEI is also in the midst of an unsettled political climate across the country. Nearly 150 bills have been proposed recently by lawmakers that would restrict DEI efforts, according to an Associated Press analysis.

Businesses are also being accused of "reverse discrimination." In education, for example,

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) announced it will no longer require diversity statements in its faculty-hiring process. It is the first major university to abandon the DEI practice, with the university's president saying statements "impinge on freedom of expression, and they don't work."

While it's no surprise that some would view DEI negatively and twist its intentions for their own gain, in my experience as a DEI consultant, DEI is a movement that is meant to empower, educate, and ensure equality. DEI creates spaces of acceptance, learning, respect and authenticity. A 2023 study by the Pew Research Center noted that 56 percent of U.S. adults say focusing on increasing DEI is "mainly a good thing." Additionally, 61 percent of U.S. adults say their workplace has policies that focus on fairness in hiring, promotions or pay.

"Diversity matters even more: The case for holistic impact," a report by McKinsey & Company—a global management consulting firm that serves leading businesses, governments, and not-for-profits—found that leadership diversity is associated with holistic growth ambitions, greater social impact, and more satisfied workforces. Due to DEI practices, diversity-leading US companies have reached 50 percent representation of women on executive teams, with leading US companies now having on average 39 percent of executives from historically underrepresented ethnicities. The report notes strong indicators of impact across workforce and the community, across various job sectors, because of DEI.

Implementing a DEI initiative can take time. To start, initiatives



Photo courtesy of Marcus Johnson.

should focus on an assessment of an organization's culture and be aligned with organizational goals. Teams should also work to implement standards and practices for success to hold themselves accountable and ensure efforts come to fruition.

While there is always room to grow and improve, organizations that strive to make their workplaces more inclusive and equitable will see all the positives: from employee loyalty, to supportive, nurturing connections among leaders and colleagues, innovation, and work environments where those of all backgrounds feel valued for their perspectives, lived experiences, and talents.

Marcus Johnson is co-leader of the Civics League for Disability Rights (CLDR), an independent, volunteer-led group of New Yorkers with disabilities who advocate for themselves, their community and for change in the healthcare system for people with physical disabilities. To learn more, email civicsleague@gmail.com.

Opinions expressed are solely those of the writer(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Able News at The Viscardi Center and/or The Viscardi Center. Submissions should be on topics affecting the disability community, maximum 600 words, and must include the writer's name and phone number for verification. Able News reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and factual accuracy. Able News cannot respond to all submissions and publication of submissions is not guaranteed. To submit an op-ed for consideration, please email a full draft to ablenews@viscardicenter.org.

Awards and Accolades

2024 Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards Bestowed

By the Staff of The Viscardi Center



Recipients of the Henry Viscardi Achievement Award with Dr. Chris Rosa, President & CEO of The Viscardi Center, and Sherwood (Woody) D. Goldberg, Esq., Chair of the Awards Selection Committee.

The Viscardi Center, a visionary organization committed to educating, employing, and empowering people with disabilities, proudly announced the recipients of the international 2024 Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards at its annual Celebrity Night fundraiser on May 16. The Awards recognize individuals with disabilities who have demonstrated significant accomplishments and dedication to enhancing the lives of people with disabilities and the overall disability community. Part of the evening's program, the prestigious Awards were presented to several of this year's recipients by Dr. Chris Rosa, President & CEO of The Viscardi Center, and Sherwood (Woody) D. Goldberg, Esq., Chair of the Awards Selection Committee, Retired U.S. Army Colonel, and Emeritus Civilian Aide to the U.S. Secretary of the Army.

Since inception in 2013, in honor of The Viscardi Center's founder, Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr., the Awards have been bestowed to over 100 leaders, mentors, and advocates with disabilities from around the world. The Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards

are a symbol of achievement celebrating those who go above and beyond to create a more inclusive and accessible world for all.

The Award recipients are:

- **Kirk Adams, PhD, Innovative Impact, LLC, U.S.** Founder of Innovative Impact, Kirk is a master connector and advocate for collaborative solutions whose work continues to accelerate the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce. He was also the President and CEO of The Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, as well as the American Foundation for the Blind.
- **Joyce Bender, Bender Consulting Services, U.S.** Joyce, CEO of Bender Consulting Services, champions competitive employment for all. Having epilepsy and being hard of hearing, she empowers others worldwide through her global advocacy and leadership roles.
- **Brooke Ellison, American Academic and Disability Advocate, U.S.** The first quadriplegic Harvard graduate, Brooke was a trailblazing disability advocate. Despite

adversity, she earned honors in cognitive neuroscience and achieved a master's degree in public policy and a doctorate in sociology from Stony Brook University. Her legacy extends beyond academia, co-founding initiatives like the SBU VENTure Think Tank.

- **Shakeel Khan, Disabled Welfare Association, Pakistan** Contracting polio during his childhood, Shakeel transformed adversity into advocacy by breaking down barriers and fostering inclusion. Beyond policy work, he is a passionate advocate for sports, recognizing its transformative power in the lives of individuals with disabilities.
- **Andraea LaVant, LaVant Consulting, Inc., U.S.** Andraea is a sought-after disability inclusion expert. Leading an award-nominated disabled, black-queer woman-led social impact-strategy and communications firm, she is dedicated to shaping the way the world reaches, views, and values disabled people.
- **Barbara (Bobbi) Linn, Bronx Independent Living Services, U.S.** Having Cerebral

Palsy and a significant speech disability, Bobbi fought for her right to a public education and became a fierce advocate for disability rights. From grassroots activism to leadership roles, she has made an indelible mark on the community.

- **Jose R. Ramos, Wounded Warrior Project, U.S.** Jose is a Navy veteran and Paratriathlon competitor. After overcoming severe combat injuries, Jose has spent nearly two decades advocating for injured veterans and people with disabilities.
- **Irene Villa Gonzalez, Irene Villa Foundation, Spain.** Irene is an accomplished writer, speaker and advocate, promoting freedom, peace, and the rights of people with disabilities. Through her foundation, she focuses on labor integration and adaptive sports for disabled individuals, helping them fulfill their dreams.

Brooke Ellison's Award was posthumously presented to her family at the event, as she passed suddenly on February 4, 2024.

Read more about the recipients at [ViscardiCenter.org](https://www.ViscardiCenter.org)

A Skeptic's Guide to Lifestyle Medicine

Provided by Katz Institute for Women's Health



The Katz Institute for Women's Health (KIWH), the only network of experts devoted to every aspect of women's care, is putting women first. The below content was originally published in its entirety on Northwell Health's blog, The Well and exemplifies KIWH's commitment to raise health for all women.

There's strong science behind the practice of genuine, wellness-based medicine, says Penny Stern, MD, MPH, chief of preventive & lifestyle medicine at Northwell Health's Katz Institute for Women's Health. There's even a whole specialty devoted to the field, known as lifestyle medicine. "The idea is to give patients the tools and skills they need to make permanent lifestyle behavior changes," explains Stern. It's also often more accessible—and affordable—than you might think. Here, Stern addresses five common myths about wellness and lifestyle medicine.

Myth: Lifestyle medicine is different from conventional medicine.

"Lifestyle medicine is the foundation of conventional medicine," says Stern. It's defined as the use of evidence-based lifestyle therapies—including a whole-food, plant-based diet, regular exercise, sleep, stress management, avoidance of risky substances like cigarettes and alcohol, and

positive social connections—as the primary treatment, she explains. Generally, clinical practice guidelines for chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes all support lifestyle changes—such as diet, exercise, and more. "Healthy lifestyle behaviors can help both treat and, in some cases, reverse many of these chronic diseases," she says.

Myth: Lifestyle medicine is a new concept.

In fact, it's been around since the days of Hippocrates, who's widely regarded as the father of Western medicine, says Stern. And indeed, one of Hippocrates' pithiest bits of medical advice was: "If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health." The reason why the topic may have taken on more urgency, stresses Stern, is the fact that we're now living in an epidemic of chronic diseases such as obesity, high blood pressure, and chronic pain. "Over the last century, we've changed the ways we ship and store food, and we've disincentivized physical activity, so that we have an overabundance of calories combined with a much more sedentary lifestyle," she explains. Right now, rates of chronic disease have

never been higher: more than half of U.S. adults have at least one condition, which eats up about 90% of health care spending, according to the American College of Lifestyle Medicine.

Myth: Only certain people benefit from lifestyle medicine.

Everyone can benefit from lifestyle medicine, no matter your age or health needs. "Even if you're young and healthy, you still need to learn about the pillars of a healthy lifestyle," Stern points out, adding that much of that learning can be aided by your doctors. "It's not enough to just give a patient a pamphlet about eating right—it's important to discuss how lifestyle behaviors have contributed to the patient's disease or condition."

That's where consulting with a lifestyle medicine physician comes into play. "In addition to evaluating the patient's medical problems, we are able to dive into the more granular details of a patient's health and lifestyle, such as: What are the stressors in their lives that interfere with them getting enough sleep, what are the barriers that prevent them from purchasing healthy food, and so on," Stern explains.

Myth: Lifestyle medicine isn't covered by insurance

A lifestyle medicine consul-

tation is covered exactly as are visits with physicians and other clinicians, says Stern. (It's coded for insurance purposes just like a regular primary care visit.) But there's one big difference: "if someone comes in as a new patient, they can expect to spend a significant amount of time with me going through areas that are giving them trouble, like diet or exercise," she explains. If the lifestyle medicine doctor thinks you can benefit from more focused care—for example, meetings with a dietician, or therapist, these visits are generally covered as well. "Lifestyle medicine is grounded in the importance of interdisciplinary teamwork with other medical specialists. So we work closely together to ensure optimal results for our patients."

Myth: It's almost impossible to find a lifestyle medicine physician.

Several major medical centers, like Northwell, have centers for wellness where lifestyle medicine physicians may be practicing. The American College of Lifestyle Medicine also lists some of the lifestyle medicine physicians currently in practice.

To learn more about lifestyle medicine visit: <https://www.northwell.edu/katz-institute-for-womens-health/find-care/lifestyle-medicine>