Commissioner Michael Piazza Receives Public Service Award from Putnam Community Services Network

That Michael Piazza won the Public Service Award from Putnam Community Services Network comes as no surprise to those of us who work with him. It is probably no surprise, either, to the Putnam County residents who see Mike at the many meetings and community events in which he participates in his role as Commissioner of Putnam County Departments of Mental Health, Social Services and Youth Bureau. Nominees for the Public Service Award are individuals currently holding an elected public office or an appointed public office at any level of government who have provided dynamic service on behalf of the residents of Putnam County in the performance of human or community service.

Commissioner Piazza received the Public Service Award at PCSN’s Annual Awards Breakfast on September 29, 2006. The award was presented by last year’s recipient James Reitz. Previous winners of the award include County Executive Robert Bondi, Frank Del Campo, Alice Brandon, Robert Pozzi, Linda Puoplo, Dr. Joseph Sabatella, Vincent Tamagna, Allan Warnecke, and Christine Woolley.

Mike often talks about the responsibility his department has to serve people in our community who are vulnerable. His nomination for the Public Service Award is “for recognizing the needs of the community and addressing them in a very real and concrete manner with dignity and respect. As Commissioner of the Putnam County Departments of Mental Health, Social Services and Youth Bureau, he consistently champions the needs of the people he serves, and during his career has worked to establish the Student Assistance Program, the Child Advocacy Center, the Putnam County Drug and Alcohol Abuse Task Force and Project Liberty to address mental health needs of those affected by the World Trade Center disaster.” In addition, Mike is past president of the New York Public Welfare Association. He was appointed to the Westchester/Putnam Workforce Investment Board and coordinates the Putnam Workforce Partnership. He sits on the Ryan White Title I Steering Committee, whose purpose is to plan services for people with HIV/AIDS in Putnam, Westchester and Rockland counties. Mike is on the Board of Directors of the Westchester/Putnam United Way. He serves on the Advisory Board of the Mental Health Association in Putnam County.

Mike has been Commissioner since April 1994. He began his career in Putnam County in 1979 as a substance abuse counselor. Over the years, he has taken on successive responsibilities as Director of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services, and as Director of Mental Health services prior to his appointment as Commissioner. Mike lives in Carmel with his wife, Maureen, and their two children, Brian and Marisa.

The Office for People with Disabilities is especially pleased to congratulate Commissioner Piazza. Mike supervises this office and we have the opportunity and pleasure of working with him on a daily basis where we see in action his commitment to the community he serves.
Putnam County has been busy this fall with a campaign to inform residents of the importance of preparing for an emergency or disease outbreak. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the Putnam County Bioterrorism/Disaster Preparedness Task Force was convened in January 2002, and the community rallied to begin discussions about what needs to be done to prepare for a bioterrorist event. Prior to September 11th, the Putnam County Bureau of Emergency Services led preparedness planning efforts; creation of the Bioterrorism Task Force brought together a diverse group of community resources allowing better coordination of effort throughout the county. Members of the task force included the Putnam County Bureau of Emergency Services, the County Executive, the Putnam County Legislature, Putnam County Departments of Health, Mental Health, Planning, Social Services, Putnam Hospital Center, Putnam Chapter of the American Red Cross, NYS Emergency Management Office, local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and service providers in the community service delivery system. Under the leadership of the Putnam County Department of Health, this group has been meeting regularly for the past five years to plan for various emergencies.

Disasters can occur anywhere anytime. A year ago Hurricane Katrina brought home the tragic consequences of not being prepared for weather related disasters. Locally, we experienced massive power outages last winter, tornado damage this summer and destructive flooding throughout New York State last spring.

The global public health community is closely monitoring an avian influenza virus. Although it primarily affects birds, there is concern that the virus could change to a type that spreads easily from person to person, causing a worldwide influenza epidemic, called a pandemic. Pandemics occur when a new influenza virus emerges to which people have little or no immunity. Pandemics have occurred throughout history and we do not know when the next one will strike, or what new influenza virus will cause it. We do know that a pandemic would have a huge effect on every part of society. Essential services in healthcare, government and the private sector would be strained because millions of workers would become ill themselves or be forced to stay at home to care for ill family members or to provide childcare if schools are directed to close.

On October 19, 2006, a conference on Disaster Preparedness Awareness for Special Needs Populations was held at the Putnam County Emergency Services Center in Carmel sponsored by the Special Needs Population Subcommittee of the Putnam County BT/Disaster Preparedness Taskforce. Approximately 60 people from 22 different agencies and 5 county departments attended. The focus of this conference was the importance of having plans in place for people with special needs in the event of an emergency. Every organization that serves the special needs population in Putnam must work to develop their own disaster plan. Every individual in Putnam with special health care needs must prepare an individual/family disaster plan, which, in addition to the basics for survival (food, water, and clean air) should consider the following:

- do you receive medical treatments (for example, dialysis) or need medication on a regular basis,
- do you need assistance with personal care,
- do you rely on electrically dependent equipment or other durable equipment,
- do you use mobility aids such as a walker, cane or wheelchair,
- do you depend on accessible transportation,
- do you have a service animal?

On November 2, 2006, the Putnam County Bioterrorism/Disaster Preparedness Task Force in conjunction with the Putnam Community Services Network sponsored “Planning for Pandemic Influenza” a conference which focused on what businesses can do to prepare and minimize the effects of pandemic flu. How will businesses deal with loss of revenue, loss of employees or loss of customer base? How will businesses protect their employees; are there policies in place to address attendance if workers are ill, flexible work schedules, working from home, or training an ancillary workforce? Approximately 80 people participated with representation from the business community, government and human services agencies and law enforcement.

The American Red Cross in Greater New York (ARC/GNY) recommends that every person have at least three days of supplies available in an easy-to-carry evacuation kit, also known as a “go bag,” in case a fire, flood, building collapse, or storm forces quick relocation.

The Red Cross Disaster Back Pack for one person ($29.99) fits easily in an office cubicle, closet, supply room, or car trunk. It is filled with items to aid an adult for three days during an emergency. Pre-assembled provisions packed in a heavy duty nylon red back pack (11” x 17” x 5”) include:

The Putnam County Bureau of Emergency Services is urging residents to begin preparing now for the upcoming winter season.

“It’s never too early to think safety. The calendar may say winter begins on December 21, but any New Yorker will tell you it comes much earlier. That’s why it makes sense to prepare for it now,” said Adam B. Stiebeling, Deputy Commissioner of Emergency Services. “I urge residents to prepare their families and their property for the winter months ahead by taking some simple, common-sense steps today.”

Stiebeling said the first step residents can take is to be aware of local weather conditions by listening to broadcasts of NOAA Weather Radio, the National Weather Service, and local television and radio stations. “Before going out on the road, residents should listen to the local media reports or call law enforcement agencies for the latest road conditions,” he said.

Noting that safety begins at home, the Bureau urges residents to give their homes a safety check. “Have a professional check out your furnace, woodstove and chimney. Make certain they are in good working condition. And don’t forget to replace the batteries in your smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors,” he said. “To save yourself a little exertion, it’s also a good idea to make certain your snow blower is ready to go to work.”

Emergency Services Commissioner McMahon also reminded residents to make sure their vehicles are ready for the season as well. “Have a mechanic check your battery, anti-freeze, wipers and thermostat,” he said. “Make sure your tires will deliver the traction which you’ll need in the ice and snow. And make sure you have emergency supplies aboard such as a shovel, flashlight and extra batteries, tire chains and booster cables.

“Most importantly, motorists should drive with extreme care during the winter,” McMahon said. “When severe weather is forecast, stay at home unless you absolutely have to drive. If you must go out, plan your stops, clean the vehicle completely of snow and ice, and always match your speed to road conditions.”

Commissioner McMahon said a primary concern during the winter months is the potential loss of heat, power, telephone service and a resulting shortage of supplies if storm conditions continue for more than a day.

He has released the following list of items all residents and businesses should have available:

- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- Battery-powered portable radio or television or a NOAA Weather Radio to receive emergency information. Have extra batteries. The radio will allow you to listen to weather forecasts, information, and other emergency broadcasts by local authorities.
- Three days’ supply of food. High-energy food, such as dried fruit or candy, and food requiring no cooking or refrigeration is best. Also stock an emergency supply of bottled water, one gallon per person per day.
- A one-week supply of essential medicines and baby items.
- First aid kit and supplies.
- Extra blankets and sleeping bags.
- Fire extinguisher and smoke detector. Test units regularly to ensure they are working properly.
- Heating fuel. Fuel carriers may not reach you for days after a severe winter storm. Since most furnaces are controlled by electric thermostats, if the power goes out, residents should have some kind of emergency heating equipment and fuel available to keep at least one room of the house warm enough to be livable. Never operate a generator indoors. Common examples of emergency heating equipment are kerosene heaters or a supply of wood if you have a fireplace or woodstove. Learn to use equipment properly to prevent a fire. Have proper ventilation. If necessary, conserve fuel by keeping the house cooler than usual, or by “closing off” some rooms temporarily.

Deputy Commissioner Stiebeling also said that “winter is especially challenging for the elderly and physically disabled. Take the time to check in on your neighbor and lend them a helping hand.” Additional information can be obtained by calling your local police department or the Bureau at (845) 808-4000.

The Red Cross Disaster Back Pack for two people ($49.99). It is filled with items to aid two adults for three days during an emergency. The contents for both back packs should be supplemented with personal items such as prescriptions, hygiene/grooming products and copies of personal papers (identification, insurance documentation and important phone numbers). Each member of the family, including children and pets, should have a personalized “go bag”, as should seniors at assisted living residences and students away at college.

The Red Cross Safety Tube ($4.95) contains a dust mask, light stick, water pouch and whistle that can be used to signal rescue workers. It is perfect for workstations and commuter briefcases.

All items can be purchased at the New York Red Cross Store at 520 West 49th Street (between 10th and 11th Avenues), Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 6 p.m. Also available online at http://www.nyredcross.org/.
To apply for a Project SHARE grant:
- Identify other community-based programs and services you may be eligible for.

How can Power Partner help me?
• If you are eligible, it can help you:
  • Save at least $114/year on your NYSEG electricity bill by lowering your monthly basic service charge.
  • Save an additional $30 to $70 per year on your monthly basic service charge if you are also a NYSEG natural gas customer.
  • Even out your energy costs by enrolling you in our monthly Budget Billing Plan.
  • Develop a plan to reduce any back balance on your NYSEG account by:
    • Billing Plan.
    • Service charge if you are also a NYSEG natural gas customer.
    • Your monthly basic service charge.

Power Partner services include a reduction in NYSEG's basic service charge, ideas to reduce home energy use, home weatherization assistance, reducing overdue balances on NYSEG accounts, and referrals to other community-based programs and services.

How do I get more information about the program?
Call Power Partner toll-free at 1.800.284.7988, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Am I eligible to participate in Power Partner?
You are, if:
- You have a NYSEG electricity account, or electricity and natural gas account in your name for your primary residence, and your yearly household gross income falls within our income limits
- You or someone you know may need financial help this heating season. New York State is a national leader in assisting lower-income families with their winter heating bills. Consumers are encouraged to apply for this financial assistance early in the heating season.
- Matching, dollar for dollar, payments you make above your regular monthly bill. This match is limited to $100 in a 12-month period.
- Placing your unpaid balance on hold. However, you'll need to pay a minimum of $60 every 12 months toward the amount placed on hold. We suggest a monthly payment of $5 or more over and above your regular bill.
- Develop a plan to reduce any back balance on your NYSEG account by:
  • Billing Plan.
  • Service charge if you are also a NYSEG natural gas customer.
  • Your monthly basic service charge.

For further information, contact 1-866-275-3427.

Project SHARE helps eligible customers pay for energy emergencies such as fuel bills, repairs to heating equipment, home weatherization and water heater replacements.

To receive Project SHARE financial assistance, a member of a household must be 60 years of age or older, or have a disability or a serious medical condition, and have an energy emergency.

The American Red Cross administers the program by receiving applications, determining eligibility and distributing the funds. Project SHARE is funded by employees, retirees and customers. Each dollar donated helps someone in need. Nearly $5.1 million has been distributed to more than 26,000 customers since the program began in 1982. Contributions are tax deductible.

Three ways you can give:
1. Through Automatic Giving, have NYSEG add a whole dollar amount to your future NYSEG bills.
2. Add exactly $1, $2 or $5 to your next NYSEG bill payment. We will forward the money to the American Red Cross.
3. Send a check payable to "Project SHARE" c/o American Red Cross Southern Tier Chapter 620 E. Main Street, Endicott, NY 13760

To apply for a Project SHARE grant:
- Contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross.

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) assists lower-income individuals and families with heating costs in the winter. HEAP provides grants for heating bills ranging from $40 to $400 depending on a household's income, family size, living arrangement, heating expenses, type of heat, and presence of children under 6, adults aged 60 or over, and disabled individuals. Both renters and homeowners can be eligible for assistance. The program is administered on the state level by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and managed locally by county departments of social services and by the Human Resources Administration in New York City. About 800,000 families in New York receive assistance from the HEAP program each year. Applications for HEAP assistance can be downloaded from www.otda.state.ny.us. Applications and eligibility information can be obtained by calling the HEAP hotline at 1-800-342-3009, county departments of social services or county offices for the aging. Phone numbers for these county agencies are available at www.otda.state.ny.us/otda HEAP heaplocal.htm.

The Weatherization Assistance Program - New York State has the largest low-income residential energy conservation program in the nation. The Weatherization Assistance Program reduces the amount of energy required to heat homes and provide hot water, thereby helping save energy costs and increase comfort. This program provides an energy audit of the home to identify specific needs and provides services to weatherize the home. Services might include weather-stripping, repair or replacement of heating systems, replacement or repair of windows and/or doors, addition of insulation, and minor repairs. Eligibility is based on household income relative to federal low-income guidelines. Renters and homeowners are eligible. For more information including qualifications and applications, contact your local weatherization provider as shown at www.dhcr.state.ny.us/ahd/frames.htm. For further information, contact 1-866-275-3427.
Find support for yourself or a family member with ANY disability. Come to a meeting of the Putnam County Coordinating Council for People with Disabilities for, about and maintained by people who have disabilities in Putnam County. The Council assists in advocating, offers guidance on issues that we face daily and helps to identify the needs and wants of people with disabilities.

Join us for our regular monthly meetings
at the County Office Building 40 Gleneida Avenue in Carmel.

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Meetings begin promptly at 7pm.

Call the Putnam County Office for People with Disabilities at 845-228-5912 for more information.

The Putnam County Coordinating Council for People with Disabilities administers the Handicapped Parking Violation Program. Volunteers from the Council are equipped with an instant camera that produces an immediate photo of the violator’s car, with the license plate in clear view. A completed affidavit along with the dated photograph is submitted to the Putnam County Sheriff’s Department for their action. Should you witness a blatant violation of the Handicapped Parking Laws, please inform your local law enforcement agency, so that they may address the violator.

HOW TO OBTAIN A PARKING PERMIT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

A New York State resident is eligible for a special parking permit if she/he has one or more severe disabilities that impair mobility. Special parking permits are issued by the municipality in which you live. Putnam County residents may obtain parking permits from the Town Clerks in their towns of residence; the only exception is residents of the Village of Brewster who would apply to their Village Clerk.

The Office for People with Disabilities called the seven issuing agents in Putnam County for specific information on how their residents apply for parking permits. The basic requirements are the same; there are a few specifics that varied town to town. We recommend that your first step should be to call the phone number listed below in your town/village of residence to avoid any unnecessary effort. We found the town and village clerks’ offices to be extremely helpful and willing to make the application process as easy and accommodating as possible.

Special parking permits may be issued for TEMPORARY or PERMANENT disabilities. Temporary permits are issued for 3 to 12 months. Permanent permits must be renewed periodically; renewal timeframes vary by town.

All towns require completion of an application form and a doctor’s order before issuing a parking permit. The NYS Department of Motor Vehicles issues an application form, which most towns honor. The form can be obtained from the Town/Village Clerks’ offices, at a DMV office, or online at www.nydmv.state.ny.us/forms/mv6641-mv6643.pdf Some towns have their own application form, which can be obtained at the Town/Village Clerks’ offices. In most cases, the Town Clerks’ offices are willing to mail the form to a resident. Many doctors also have the forms in their offices. Some towns will accept a doctor’s written prescription and simply attach that to the application form. Remember to call your town or village clerk before you begin the process to avoid unnecessary effort.

Permits are issued in the name of the person with a disability. You do not have to be a driver or registered owner of a vehicle. Children are eligible for permits if they have a qualifying disability. If you have a driver’s license or a DMV-issued non-driver ID, your town/village may ask you to provide the number. Again, be sure to check with your local town or village clerk.

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<td>Village of Brewster</td>
<td>845-279-3760</td>
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<td>Town of Carmel</td>
<td>845-628-1500</td>
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<td>Town of Kent</td>
<td>845-225-2067</td>
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<td>Town of Patterson</td>
<td>845-878-6500, ext. 14</td>
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<td>Town of Phillisptown</td>
<td>845-265-3329</td>
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<td>Town of Putnam Valley</td>
<td>845-526-3280</td>
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<td>Town of Southeast</td>
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New Accessibility Awareness Program

Putnam Independent Living Services (PILS) is pleased to announce its Accessibility Awareness Project for businesses located in Putnam County. The program is aimed at increasing awareness among businesses about the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities. Its goal is to gain the cooperation of local merchants to enable disabled individuals to have easier access to their shops, stores, and restaurants.

The project entails visits to local businesses to observe any access barriers, and contacts with owners and managers concerning removal of those barriers. Common examples are: entranceway steps, crowded aisles, or failure to mark accessible parking spaces. The kickoff of the PILS project comes just after the 16th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act – ADA – (July 26th). Under the ADA, all businesses that are open to the public (public accommodations) are required to remove barriers to accessibility.

Although it’s been the law for over 16 years, much of the ADA is still not understood completely. This can be costly because not knowing the law puts merchants at risk for non-compliance. A couple of the common mistakes made about ADA are:

**Grandfathering**
The biggest misconception under the law is the belief that older buildings are “grandfathered” or exempt from the accessibility laws. New construction is held to a higher standard of access, but everyone must do something. Older buildings must remove barriers to access unless doing so would impose undue hardship. No building, no matter how old, is completely excused from complying with the ADA.

**Who’s Liable?**
Passing off responsibility to another party (e.g., building owner or architect) can give the business owner a false sense of security. Liability under the Act is very broad; essentially anyone connected to the facility (owner, manager, landlord, even architect) shares the obligation to remove barriers. Thus, a business properly charged with a violation can only remove itself from the ADA action by bringing a separate legal action against the responsible party under a lease or contract.

**Housing**
Another area of confusion is housing. The ADA does not apply to most housing access issues, as they are covered by another federal law – the Fair Housing Act (see below). Two good resources for individuals pursuing problems with housing, such as accessible parking at their residence, are Westchester Residential Opportunities, 914-428-4507; and in Putnam County, Putnam County Housing Corporation at 845-225-8493.

By its new program, PILS hopes to establish itself as a community resource on accessibility issues. Through outreach to businesses and individuals, much of the misunderstanding that exists can be clarified. Michael Hellmann, a longtime advocate and attorney for disability rights contributed this article and will head the Access Project. If you have any questions contact him at PILS, 845-228-7457, ext. 107.

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**Improving Accessibility at The Barns Office Center** - Heritage Management Company reports construction is underway to make the front of The Barns more level. This effort is expected to provide better accessibility.

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**From the JOINT STATEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS UNDER THE FAIR HOUSING ACT**

**Introduction**
The Department of Justice ("DOJ") and the Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") are jointly responsible for enforcing the federal Fair Housing Act (the "Act"), which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, and disability. One type of disability discrimination prohibited by the Act is the refusal to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services when such accommodations may be necessary to afford a person with a disability the equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. HUD and DOJ frequently respond to complaints alleging that housing providers have violated the Act by refusing reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities. This Statement provides technical assistance regarding the rights and obligations of persons with disabilities and housing providers under the Act relating to reasonable accommodations.

You can view the entire text of this document at [http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf)
Accessibility

Need Assistance with paying for Home Modifications?

PUTNAM ACCESS TO HOME

Funded by the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal Local Home Program

Putnam County Housing Corporation (PCHC) has been awarded $200,000 to administer the Putnam Access to Home Program. Many times, due to the lack of accessible features of a home, a loved one is unable to stay in their home and must move to a Nursing Home, or is unable to return to their home after a stay in a Nursing Home. This program can provide financial assistance to eligible renters and/or homeowners, in Putnam County, to make the accessibility modifications necessary to allow the residents to remain in or return to their home.

The Putnam Access to Home Program will make the following types of accessibility modifications for income eligible renters and owner-occupied units for persons with Physical Disabilities and Frail Elderly:
- Stairlifts that offer a straight stairlift covering up to 14/15 stairs. The stairlift is also easily installed on the stair tread, and cost in many cases less than $3,000 for a new, custom curved stairlifts, stairlifts for stairs with landings, wheelchair lifts, and outdoor stairlifts as well. All Steps, Inc. can be reached for further information toll-free at 866-317-1335.

With the simple installation of a stairlift, more and more people will be able to stay in their own homes with more independence!

Stairlifts Can Help with Independence at Home!

contributed by: Pam Blecker

Are you considering a move because you can no longer navigate stairs safely in your home, or have you limited yourself to only one floor of your home because the effort and danger of climbing or descending the stairs has just become too much? You may have a simple, affordable solution available to you to either stay in your home, or regain the freedom of your entire home!

Everyone wants to remain independent in their own, familiar surroundings! One way to stay home is to consider installing a stairlift (indoor or outdoor) to safely get you up and down the stairs: falls become less of a risk, joints have less wear and tear, and, you’re not left breathless from the stair climbing effort. Who compared to the costs and stressors of relocation, including movers, closing costs, etc., a stairlift is a relatively inexpensive solution to the stair problem.

A stairlift can usually be installed in two hours from start to finish, not disrupt your home, no damage to walls (they affix directly to the stair tread), and cost in many cases less than $3,000 for a new, straight stairlift covering up to 14/15 stairs. The stairlift is also easily removable, and for short-term needs can be rented.

All Steps, Inc. in Jefferson Valley, NY is a stairlift company that offers free, no obligation evaluations and measuring services for potential stairlift customers to help them meet their specific needs. We can install custom curved stairlifts, stairlifts for stairs with landings, wheelchair lifts, and outdoor stairlifts as well. All Steps, Inc. can be reached for further information toll-free at 866-317-1335.

With the simple installation of a stairlift, more and more people will be able to stay in their own homes with more independence!

Lindera Loop Trail (formerly known as the Silver Birch trail)

Anna Eisenstein and Krista Gabarro have been hard at work on the handicap accessible trail behind the Putnam County Land Trust’s (PCLT) Cobb Road house in Brewster. So far, they have cleared, marked, and mapped out the lay of the trail. The girls have spent many hours developing informational materials regarding the benefits of the trail. (As previously reported in the Fall 2006 edition of the Abilities Newsletter)

Having done all that they can without funding, they are currently in the process of raising some money. The estimated cost of the project is $15,000. They have approached various politicians, chapters of VFW’s, Rotaries, Knights of Columbus, Chambers of Commerce, and other local organizations. They also plan to approach local businesses.

Anna and Krista have received positive feedback but are still in need of funding. Anyone with an interest in making the beauty and wonder of nature available to those with physical challenges is encouraged to donate. The girls would be happy to send information, regarding the trail, to anyone who is interested. Additionally, they are available to conduct a presentation to anyone who is considering an investment in the project.

While any donation in any amount is gratefully appreciated, a contribution under one of the following Sponsorship Categories will be acknowledged through press media, signage at the trail site and in the PCLT Newsletter.

Benefactors: Donations of $2,500 or more; Partners: Donations of $1,000; Sponsors: Donations of $500;

Please contact Anna Eisenstein at (845) 878-9603, or email Krista Gabarro at lucas9@comcast.net for more information about this valuable project, worthy of your donation.

Drivemaster Mobility of New York announces the opening of it’s new dealership at 516 Main Street in Poughkeepsie 845-485-5540

Wheelchair accessible vans are now being rented, serviced and sold through this full service operation. All types of adaptive driving aides are also featured and can be installed to adapt the vehicle of your choice.

Founders, John Barchella and Henry Matheus, bring their experience, energy and compassion to every customer. Finding the best new or used vehicle for clients at a price they can afford is a specialty.

As authorized dealers and service centers for Braun, Vantage Mobility, Eclipse, Viewpoint, Roll-x, Ameritrans, MTS, Bruno and others, they sell and service both personal use as well as commercial use vehicles. These companies are vehicle modifiers of Chrysler, Dodge, Ford, Toyota, Honda, Chevrolet, Buick and Sprinter branded vehicles which are fully warranted.

Drivemaster Mobility is a founding member of MobilityGroup.com. Sales personnel will bring a demonstration to your door or you can visit the dealership. Service personnel can come to you for emergencies or you can come to the service department. The sales and service department can be reached at 845-485-5540.
### LEGISLATION & EDUCATION

**Putnam County Early Intervention Program**  
*Basics for Parents*

- Learn about the mission and philosophy behind Early Intervention services and the **Early Intervention Program in Putnam County**.
- Meet experienced service providers working in the Early Intervention Program.
- Learn how you can become an active participant in the process of helping your child reach her/his potential.

**Wednesday, January 10, 2007 ~ 7:00pm to 9:00pm**  
(Snow Date – January 11, 2007)  
Mahopac Public Library Community Room

**Featuring Presentations by:**
- Norine Durkin, LCSW, EIO Putnam County  
- Danielle Hopkins, MsEd, CCC/SLP, Kinderwise  
- Tina Pipala, MS,CCC/SLP John A. Coleman School

**Registration is required.**  
Putnam County Early Intervention Program at  
(845) 278-6014 ext. 2170,  
by Friday, January 5, 2007.

This workshop is sponsored by the Putnam County LEICC Parent Education subcommittee.

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**Wondering what gifts to give the child with autism?**

“For the Autistic, a Gift of Common Ground” by Julie Bick appeared in the NY Times on November 26th.

“Play is the work of all children because it lets them practice new skills, find new interests and develop mentally and physically. For the child with autism, the right kind of play at the right time is crucial. Play can help deliver some basic communication and life skills that may not come naturally.”

Some toys are designed specifically for children with autism and focus on developing a specific skill. Some mainstream toys can accomplish a similar goal. “Children with auditory processing problems, for example, may have trouble translating a verbal request into a physical action. … Games like the Hullabaloo DVD Game ($24.99), from Cranium, playfully asks children to jump to different floor pads while showing others performing the desired action on screen, combining auditory and visual cues that can help children follow directions.”

Ms. Bick recommends these helpful websites: Stars4kidz.com groups toys by developmental category, like cause and effect, or sensory play; Neurodiversity.com through links to Amazon.com suggests children’s books featuring characters with autism; and toysrus.com/differentlyabled

Everyday items can offer sensory experiences,

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**New Law in Favor of People with an Autism Spectrum Diagnosis**

The October Edition of the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council E-Bulletin, reported that New York Governor George Pataki signed a new law requiring health insurance companies, regulated by the State of New York, to provide the same health care procedures to people with an autism spectrum diagnosis that would be provided to people with other diagnoses. The bill will help correct the long–standing practice by health insurers of denying necessary health care to people with autism.

The bill also defines autism spectrum disorders as "neurobiological disorders." This definition is important because some health insurance companies have claimed that autism is a mental health disorder and therefore not covered. Health insurance companies have used a variety of excuses to deny health care to people with autism.

A coalition of every autism-related membership organization in the state came together to press the bill, as it was the top legislative priority of that community. “This just goes to show what parents of kids with autism can achieve if we pull together as team,” said John Gilmore, a board member of Advocates for Children’s Health Affected by Mercury Poisoning (ACHAMP) and an organizer of the coalition.

Similar legislation is being developed for Congress to stop discrimination by insurance companies regulated under federal law.

Additionally…

**Legislation Provides Nearly $1 Billion in Additional Funding for Autism Research and Education**

On December 6th, The United States House of Representatives passed S. 843, the Combating Autism Act. This legislation authorizes nearly $1 billion through 2011 in federal funding for autism-related research, early detection and intervention.

S. 843, authored by Senators Santorum and Dodd, passed in the Senate in August 2006. The legislation contains many important provisions to strengthen autism research and diagnostics, including a renewed investment to track the incidence and prevalence of autism spectrum disorder; to increase public awareness of early identification; promote the use of evidence-based interventions for those at higher risk for autism; and establish state-level clearinghouses for information on autism. For the first time, this legislation also calls for culturally competent information on autism.

According to Ellen Notbohm, who wrote “Ten Things Every Child With Autism Wishes You Knew” (Future Horizons, $14.95). “Because children with autism often like to play with one type of thing for a long time, large quantities of typical items can delight them, like a bucket of flashlights or a treasure chest of costume jewelry collected from local garage sales.”

Because children on the autism spectrum usually have a concrete view of life, fantasy characters may not be appropriate. One large gift, rather than several small ones, may be better for the child with autism because they have a tendency to become overwhelmed by too many choices.
Anderson School Hosts 5th Annual Gala and Announces a Momentous Change

Anderson School, a center for autism held their 5th Annual Gala on Saturday, October 7, 2006 on the grounds of the Staatsburg campus.

Assemblyman Joel M. Miller was the evening’s honoree and received the V.V. Anderson Award of Excellence. This award is presented to a community member or organization in recognition of their vision and dedication to helping individuals with disabilities and encompasses the recipient’s strong leadership and desire to make this world a better place to live, work, and play. The selection of Assemblyman Miller reflects his overwhelming support of the Anderson School programs and services. Neil Pollack, Executive Director & CEO of Anderson remarked that Joel, “not only has provided financial support through membership grants, but because of his belief in our organization, has been a supporting voice when Anderson School needed to be heard”.

A special announcement was made identifying that Anderson School has officially changed their name to better reflect the services they provide and the population they serve. The new official name is Anderson Center for Autism. The foundation also received approval for their name change and will now be known as Anderson Foundation for Autism.

For additional information on the Anderson Center for Autism, please email Rosemary Hoffmann, Vice President of Development at RosemaryHoffmann@AndersonSchool.org or call (845) 889-9201.
What is the Family Support Services Program?
The Family Support Services Program is a NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities program that helps families who are caring for a relative with a developmental disability at home. The Program is a family-directed, statewide system of comprehensive services designed to enhance a family’s ability to provide in-home care to their family members with a developmental disability. Family support services include, respite, recreation, advocacy, information and referral, and family reimbursement/cash subsidy.

The NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities is organized into 14 regional offices called Developmental Disabilities Services Offices (DDSO). Each DDSO is responsible for providing programs in one or more counties. There is a DDSO staff person at each DDSO whose role is Family Support Services Coordinator.

What is the Family Support Services Consumer Council?
Within each regional DDSO, there is at least one Family Support Services Consumer Council that partners with the DDSO to plan, develop and evaluate services on the local level. Council members are volunteer family members. The goal of the Consumer Council is to evaluate current Family Support Services programs to determine whether they meet the needs of families and individuals who are receiving the services. Council members review responses to Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from agencies for new funding, as well as RFPs from agencies seeking to renew previously funded programs. Evaluation may be accomplished by sending surveys to families and conducting site visits to Family Support Services funded programs. Consumer Councils strive to continually improve the quality of services for individuals and families.

The Council is Seeking Additional Members
Putnam County is part of the Taconic DDSO, which also serves Columbia, Dutchess, Greene and Ulster counties. Currently there are approximately 20 agencies in the Taconic DDSO region which receive Family Support funds as part of their operating budgets. In Putnam County, there are four programs which receive Family Support funding on an annual basis. Putnam County’s representatives on the Family Support Council are Ellen Mancini and Raymond Cote. The Council welcomes new members and is seeking additional representatives from Putnam County. Meetings are held every month, usually at the DDSO office in Poughkeepsie. If you would like to join the Taconic DDSO Family Support Services Consumer Council or want more information, please contact the Putnam County Office for People with Disabilities (845-228-5912).

PARENT TO PARENT NYS is a parent-driven, not for profit organization whose mission is to connect and support families of individuals with special needs, who reside in the Hudson Valley.

- SUPPORT: We offer parents/caregivers the opportunity to connect one-to-one with a parent/caregiver of an individual with the same or similar disability or special health care need,
- INFORMATION & REFERRAL: We help families receive the information and services they need. We keep families informed of conferences, meetings, and other events that may be of interest to them.

Laura Carfi, Regional Coordinator ~ 845-877-6821 ext. 3927 ~ P2PCares@aol.com
Jackie Stack, Parent Coordinator ~ 914-493-2635 ~ 800-305-8816 ~ jstack@wihd.org
Or online at www.parenttoparentnys.org
Many attorneys are starting to understand the importance of incorporating special needs planning into their traditional estate planning practices. Most individuals are aware that the failure to engage in estate planning can have significant financial and tax consequences to the families. Those consequences can be magnified for individuals with special needs. It has become increasingly difficult for those with special needs to access government benefits to which they are entitled. Unfortunately, nonexistent or poor estate planning frequently results in the child or grandchild with special needs losing critically-needed public benefits such as Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (“SSI”), or other government-financed healthcare.

Fortunately, through the use of Supplemental Needs Trusts, a parent or grandparent can provide for the needs of a child with disabilities without disqualifying that child for government benefits. A Supplemental Needs Trust is a trust created with the assets of someone other than the person with special needs. It could be a parent, grandparent, or anyone else for that matter. The trust is designed to supplement, rather than replace, the government benefits that are otherwise available to the individual with disabilities. If done properly, the assets held in the Supplemental Needs Trust will be utilized to enhance the government benefits provided to the child with disabilities.

However, it is important for the draftsperson to be careful when drafting these types of trusts. Many courts take a narrow view of trusts which are purportedly drafted to benefit an individual with special needs. If the draftsperson is not careful, the courts may construe such a trust as a support trust. If a trust is viewed by the courts as a support trust, then the assets held in trust must be utilized to pay for the beneficiary’s needs in lieu of government benefits.

Here are some tips as you go through the process of planning for an individual with special needs:
- Do not make outright gifts or bequest to the individual with special needs as these may disqualify the individual from government benefits. Instead, make these gifts in the form of a gift to a Supplemental Needs Trust.
- Coordinate the planning for the child or grandchild with all family members. This will ensure that everyone is on the same page and will provide the maximum benefit for the individual with special needs.
- Use life insurance to fund a Supplemental Needs Trust. In appropriate circumstances, this can be an excellent way to create a pool of wealth for a child with special needs.
- Execute a durable power of attorney authorizing the agent to create or fund a Supplemental Needs Trust on your behalf. This will facilitate sound estate planning even if you become incapacitated.
- Work with a lawyer who is a specialist in planning for those with special needs.
- You don’t have to disinherit a child who is receiving government benefits. Instead, leave that child’s inheritance to a properly drafted Supplemental Needs Trust for the child’s benefit.
- It is generally not a wise idea to give funds to relatives to hold for the benefit of the individual with special needs. The money may be lost due to a divorce or lawsuit against the relative. The relative may die or become incapacitated and not be able to honor the moral obligation to assist the child or grandchild with special needs. Some relatives may fail to fulfill their moral obligations.

Don’t make gifts to a support trust for the benefit of the child or grandchild with special needs if you are concerned about maintaining government benefits for that child.

Where can you get more information about estate planning for parents and grandparents of children or grandchildren with special needs?
- Exceptional Parent Magazine: www.eparent.com
- Littman Krooks LLP: www.specialneedsnewyork.com
- Special Needs Alliance: www.specialneedsalliance.com

Bernard A. Krooks, J.D., CPA, LL.M (in taxation), CELA, is a founding partner of the law firm Littman Krooks LLP with offices in White Plains and New York City. Mr. Krooks is a member of the Special Needs Alliance (www.specialneedsalliance.com), a national group of attorneys focusing on disability and special needs planning. Mr. Krooks is also certified as an Elder Law Attorney by the National Elder Law Foundation. He is past President of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) and is past chair of the Elder Law Section of the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA). Mr. Krooks may be reached at (914) 684-2100 or (212) 490-2020 or visit the firm’s website at www.specialneedsnewyork.com.

Parents, Educators, Agencies Are Invited

PUTNAM/WESTCHESTER TRANSITION PLANNING CONSORTIUM
Meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday 9-11 a.m.

TRANSITION WORKSHOPS
Meets monthly on the 2nd Thursday 6-8 p.m.

At Westchester Independent Living Center 200 Hamilton Avenue, 2nd Floor, White Plains
For more information, please contact Ellen Weinstein At 914-682-3926, ext. 114
Career Longevity Award Winner - Warren Forbes

CAREERS for People with Disabilities, Inc. (CAREERS) is proud to announce one of their clients, Warren Forbes, as the winner of the “Career Longevity Award” issued by the Westchester Employment Network (WEN).

This prestigious award was presented at the annual breakfast celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month, sponsored by the Westchester County Office for the Disabled and WEN. Nearly 200 people representing public agencies, employers and the disabled of Westchester County were in attendance.

Warren Forbes was nominated by CAREERS and chosen as the sole recipient by WEN for the “Career Longevity Award” because, not only has he been employed by the Westchester County Department of Corrections since March of 1989, but he has overcome many difficulties to perform as a model employee and citizen. So well liked at work, Warren has been named a Shop Stewart for the CSEA Union Workers.

Warren is highly regarded by his colleagues and supervisors at work. He has never allowed his disabilities to interfere with his independence. He is a self-sufficient, hard worker with many ties to the community. Among them are his social and recreational memberships with local agencies. He is a Fraternal Member of the Putnam County Police Association, and is in the process of applying for membership to the Buchanan Volunteer Fire Department. Warren and his family are members of the Temple Beth Am Synagogue in Yorktown Heights.

For information about services or hiring a CAREERS’ client, please call CAREERS’ Carmel office (serving Northern Westchester and Putnam) at 845-225-8007 or the Valhalla office (serving Central and Lower Westchester) at 914-741-JOBS (5627).

Holiday Celebration

You are cordially invited to join in some holiday cheer and review our accomplishments, as we re-launch NAMI/PUTNAM, in honor of Mildred Smith.

We want to honor special guests whose leadership in the community have helped our causes; a collaboration of families, consumers and providers working together to erase stigma in the Putnam Community.

Special Guests:
Megan Castellano, Director, Mental Health Association
Michael Piazza, Commissioner of Mental Health
Sheriff Don Smith

Wednesday, December 20, 2006 ~ 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM ~ Mahopac Public Library
Questions and R.S.V.P. - 845-278-7600 ext. 246

The Friends Network. Inc.

“The Mission of The Friends Network as a not-for-profit organization is to maximize opportunities for individual choice, advancing independence, and developing circles of support through a person-centered approach in the areas of social relationships, recreation, life management skills, community integration and vocational services for people of all ages with developmental disabilities.”

Adult Programs
Monthly Dinner Meetings, Book Club
Drama Club, Garden Club,
Knitting Club, Sports Leagues,
Social Outings, Overnight Trips,
Life Skill Classes,
Job Placement Services

Children Programs
PALS After School Program
Meets 5 days a week from 3pm-6pm (after school) providing recreation and respite.
Summer Program
Runs for 2 weeks in August from 9am-3pm
Recreation/Respite Saturday Program
Meets two Saturdays a month during the school year.

Teen Programs
Coming soon BUDDY Teen Club (Better Understanding During Developing Years) Program will follow a similar format to the adult program.
For More Info on any of our programs, Please Call:
845-278-0820
NEW YORK – November 2, 2006 -- The Red Cross office located at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point now is associated with the American Red Cross in Greater New York (ARC/GNY). The chapter, the largest in the U.S., helps nine million people in New York City and Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Sullivan Counties prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Michelle Strom, who has served as the West Point Red Cross office director for the last three years, has been appointed director for ARC/GNY at West Point and nearby Putnam County.

The West Point Red Cross office, which first opened in 1941, will continue to oversee emergency response, safety and preparedness programs, and community initiatives on the military base and in nearby communities. The West Point Red Cross office is operating from a new location (Building 2104, Highland Falls, phone 845-938-4100) that is adjacent to the West Point Visitors Center.

On September 19, 2006, Susan Limongello, Executive Director of PARC, announced the promotion of Louise Rheem to the position of Assistant Executive Director. Louise will be responsible for the Day Habilitation, Vocational, Educational, and Youth and Outreach programs effective September 25, 2006, with immediate transitioning of those programs to her.

Louise first came to PARC in December of 2002 as the Staff Development Coordinator. She was promoted to the Director of the Youth and Outreach Department in May of 2005, where she proved to be an effective and successful leader. With over 20 years in the field, and extensive supervisory experience, PARC is confident that Louise will excel with her new responsibilities.

Susan Limongello also announced that Lou Lindenbaum will be overseeing the Health Services Department and the Clinic, while Nancy Miringoff will have oversight for the Residential Program, Preschool, and Service Coordination. Andy Kaplan will continue to supervise Human Resources and Finance, while all other departmental structures remain the same.

Ms. Limongello stated that, “These changes in the supervision of our departments are to bring us closer to the goal of community inclusion and increased development of programs to serve our consumers in the best way possible. As always, please continue supporting all the departments through this time, and offer well deserved congratulations to Louise Rheem on her promotion.
Recreation

2006 – 2007 Friday Dance Party
7:00-9:00pm
Yorktown Community Center, Veteran’s Rd & Commerce St
$8 per guest (guardians free), RSVP Requested

Dec. 15 Winter Wonderland Festival
Jan 19 Super Bowl Kickoff Pizza Party
Feb. 16 Valentine Friendship Gala
March 16 Leprechaun Shindig
April 20 Caribbean Pirate Night
May 18 Wedding Bell Bliss
June 15 Pomp & Circumstance

Dance & warm up with friends over hot chocolate & your favorite music!
Wear your favorite team’s colors.
Bring a friend or choose a partner to share a special dance.
Wear’n of the green for a dance of good luck.
Ahoy mates & ship hands. Scour fer fane & treasure.
Dress your best for this special occasion & volunteer to be bride/groom of honor.
Celebrate accomplishments & cross the stage to get your SPARC Certificate

(914) 243-0583 Fax 243-3039
www.sparcinc.org

DO YOU KNOW ……….

PARC has on OPTS Hourly Respite / Recreation Program?

We are currently looking for participants living at home in the Putnam County community who are on the Medicaid waiver program with service coordination.

We participate in the Special Olympics sports program and have a variety of recreational events such as; going to a Renegades game, Theatre, movies, apple picking, shopping and social events.

If you are interested or have any questions please contact Doreen Taylor, Recreation Coordinator
At (845) 278-7272 ext. 241.

PARC
Partner, Achieve, Reach, Connect
Exceptional Opportunities for People with Disabilities

The Lakeside at Osceola is located in Jefferson Valley, many of you may have been here in the past when it was called "Osceola Beach". We would like to welcome you and your family and friends to come visit us this holiday season. We have many fun events planned for all ages. The Lakeside also has banquet facilities for functions such as Birthday and Sweet 16 parties, reunions, showers, holiday dinners and dances.

"Family Night Out" Sat Dec 16th 5p-10p adults $15., kids $7. Enjoy dinner and cocktails while kids play in supervised Fundome!

Kid’s Day Sat Dec 30th 3 PM. FREE Children's movie with $4 purchase of popcorn and lemonade. Fun for all ages. Watch a new movie in our party room on the 7 foot screen!

New Years Eve Disco Dinner Dance Dec 31st 8PM-1AM Luscious Buffet Dinner, open Bar, incredible desserts, and dancing under the disco ball! $75pp Children’s sitter available in Fundome...$25 per child includes snacks & drinks.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED
RECREATION

Hidden Treasures
“An Arts Education Program for People with Special Needs”

Sponsored by
CLC Foundation, Inc
600 Bedford Road
Mount Kisco, NY 10549
(914) 241-2076

Winter Semester 2007
The Richard G. Rosenthal JCC
600 Bear Ridge Road
Pleasantville, NY 10570
(914) 741-0333

COME JOIN THE FUN

Registration Form/Photo Release (a MUST for Song and Dance)
Fee: $165.00 per class
Tuition Assistance available

Monday classes-January 8th thru April 2nd
Tuesday classes-January 9th thru March 27

Closed Monday January 15

Monday-6:30-8:00pm
Studio Art
Arts & Crafts
Creative Writing
Danskinetics

Tuesday-6:30-8:30pm
Tap/Modern Dance I
Drama/Song
Modern Dance II
Tai-Chi

Ask about our special offer for yearly savings
10% Discount for payment upfront

For Questions Call: Lucille McCarthy
At Hidden Treasures 914-242-0064

CALL OR EMAIL FOR PROGRAM DETAILS OR TO BE PLACED ON OUR MAILING LIST.
914-243-0583 or www.sparcinc.org

SPARC inc.
Special Program and Resource Connection
Improving the Lives of People with Special Needs
2006-2007

SOCIAL, THERAPEUTIC & RECREATIONAL SERVICES

YOUTH PROGRAMS GRADES K-6
Kids Express, Magic of Music, Making Strides,
“My Time” with WFA (for children on autism spectrum), Taekwondo

TEEN PROGRAMS AGE 11-20
Active & Fit at Solaris, After-school SPIRIT Program, Cooking Fun 101, Making Strides
“My Time” with WFA (for children on autism spectrum), “Rec” Club (sports and Saturday lunch out)
Stage Crew & Videography, Taekwondo, Teen Time, Teen Special Events: Fall & Spring Flings, Family BBQ

ADULT PROGRAMS AGE 20 +
Active & Fit at Solaris, Athletics, Ceramics, Cooking Fun 101,
Creative Crafting, Music Lovers Society, Pet Connection,
“Rec” Club (young adults) (sports and Saturday lunch out)
Social Club (young adults), Stage Crew & Videography (young adults), Taekwondo,
Terrific Times (art, music and games for individuals with lower abilities), Tinkering Workshop
Young Adult Special Events: Fall & Spring Flings, Family BBQ
Adult Special Events: Coffee House, Music Festivals, Dance Party

CALL OR EMAIL FOR PROGRAM DETAILS OR TO BE PLACED ON OUR MAILING LIST.
914-243-0583 or www.sparcinc.org
Welcome to the Winter 2006 Edition of the Abilities Newsletter

In this issue you will find:

• Michael Piazza receives Public Service Award  p. 1
• Emergency Preparedness and Planning Information  pp. 2 & 3
• Consumer Assistance Programs for Heating and Utilities  p. 4
• Coordinating Council for People with Disabilities  p. 5
• Accessibility  pp. 6 & 7
• Legislation & Education  pp. 8 & 9
• Family Support & Parent To Parent  p. 10
• Transition Planning  pp. 11
• Agency News and Views  pp. 12 & 13
• Recreational Opportunities  pp. 14 & 15

The Abilities Newsletter is a quarterly publication from Putnam County’s Office for People with Disabilities. We wish to thank all those who submitted materials for this publication. We encourage your comments on this Newsletter and welcome your contributions for our future publications. Deadline for submissions for the Spring 2007 edition is January 26, 2007.

Putnam County Office for People with Disabilities
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Michael J. Piazza, Jr. Commissioner
Medley J. Broege, Coordinator
Donna Marie Santoro, M.S. Assistant Coordinator
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