

# OUTLOOK

QUARTERLY | Fall 2015



## ***Focusing on Staff***

Supporting individuals with disabilities and their families since 1948, Racker Centers is a voluntary nonprofit organization committed to upholding the health, wellness, and vitality of each individual we proudly serve. Over the years our organization has continued to expand, and we are now one of the top employers in the region, employing more than 850 people with meaningful careers and opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others.

With more than 30 facilities spanning Tompkins, Cortland, and Tioga Counties in New York, and people working in our residences, others' homes, out in the community, in administrative offices, and in classrooms of our youth, Racker Centers wanted to take the time to hear from some of our staff. And, we wanted to share their thoughts with all of you...



*Tammy Goddard, Cortland Preschool Education Director and Kathy Lind, Team Leader Service Coordination, participate in a leadership training that managers attended in the Fall of 2014.*

Nancy Emerson  
(Speech Language Pathologist)

*The best part of my job is the wonderful colleagues I work with who truly care about the welfare of the families and children who receive our services.*

*Continued on page 5...*

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## FROM DAN'S DESK

September is traditionally the month that we publicly thank all of our hard working staff, whose efforts are vital in creating opportunities for the people we support. Because of Racker Centers' rapid growth, and the recent improvement in the economy, it has been difficult to hire enough staff to fill open positions. We are doing everything that we can think of, and can afford to do, to attract new staff – at the time of writing this, we need more than 100 additional employees. Do you know somebody who would like a fulfilling and rewarding job?

Although challenging, not all careers are as rewarding, and that is why I wanted to share some thoughts from our existing staff on why they love their job:

*"I love my job because I enjoy helping people see their potential and how amazing they are...I also learn so much about myself while working."* -Lisa Petry, Community Support Professional

*"Racker Centers wants people to be the best they can be. It doesn't matter if others are also trained in the same discipline, they still invest. Racker Centers is definitely a great company to work for. I enjoy working hands-on with the kids. It's very challenging, but you experience that one moment after working with a child on something all year, such as them saying your name, and all of a sudden they do, and it makes all of the hard work worth it."* -Kathleen Lower, Teachers Assistant, Beetles Classroom, Tompkins County.

*The support that Franziska Racker Centers offers their staff is unmatched to any agency that I have worked with before. This helps decrease burn out and I can be more effective at helping our families and children.* -Kelly Cornine, Day Treatment Therapist, Counseling for School Success

*"Patience means being flexible. Acceptance doesn't always mean that you understand something. Strength doesn't always apply to physical...more often than not, it refers to perseverance. Times of crisis means staff members band together as a cohesive team. During my six years with Racker Centers as both a parent of a child with special needs and as an employee, I've been fortunate to work with some of the most dedicated people I've ever met. Employees of Racker Centers tend to work tirelessly at tasks as individuals with a variety of challenges and special needs (mental, physical and intellectual) are supported in their day to day lives. I have been able to see firsthand how Racker Centers helps individuals with disabilities to foster connections in their communities. Working here is an opportunity to practice patience, succeed in acceptance, grow in your strengths, and be part of a great team!"* -Catherine McNulty, Direct Support Professional

*"I love my job because it absolutely warms my heart to work with so many unique and genuine individuals!"* -Randy Flynn, Community Support Professional

*"I love my job because I get to help people enjoy life and make healthful decisions."* -Caitlin O'Meehan, Community Support Professional

*"I love my job because I develop relationships with amazing people and get to see them grow, learn, and develop into more able and happy individuals."* -Christina Mente, Community Support Professional

If you want to work in this exciting field or know somebody that does, please direct them to [www.rackercenters.org/employment](http://www.rackercenters.org/employment) and apply for one of our many opportunities.



Executive Director Dan Brown

# RACKER RIVALS BIG RED

Playing Hockey - Supporting People with Disabilities

**THANK YOU!** Racker Centers would like to thank everyone involved in the Racker Rivals Big Red hockey game held on July 11. Together we raised over \$100,000!



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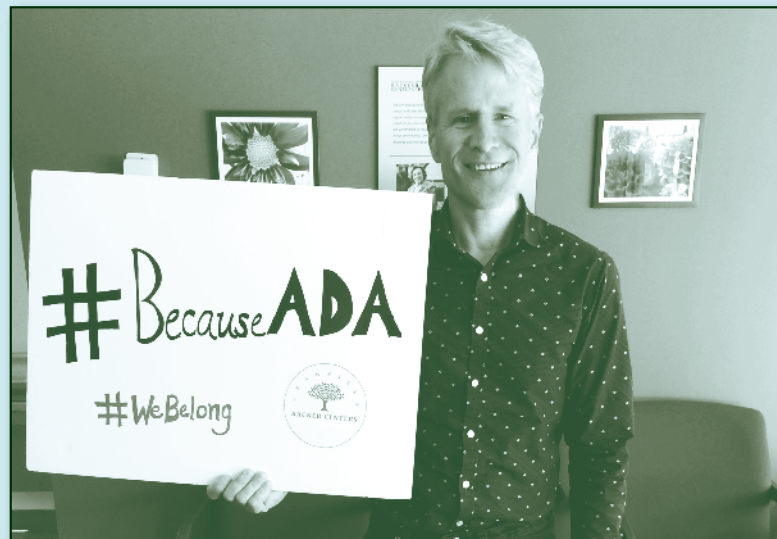
# Celebrating 25 Years of the ADA by Ashley & Patrick Bohn

On July 26<sup>th</sup> 1990, the lives of millions of americans with disabilities and their families changed forever. For it was that day when former president George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law. What so many individuals and advocates had fought for tirelessly for so long was finally becoming a reality. Protection from discrimination in the workplace, in their community, public works, and education was finally legally enforced. We began seeing curb cuts, designated handicapped parking spaces, anti-discrimination verbiage on job descriptions and postings, ramps and automatic doors leading into buildings, and so much more. More importantly, the signing of the ADA represented a shift in our thought process revolving around those with disabilities. We realized that it was critical to create an inclusive and accepting environment that cultivated success and engagement. While we have progressed leaps and bounds, we are still a long way from equality and total inclusion.

[Patrick] The passage of this law was especially important to me, because as a child born with Spastic Quadriplegia Cerebral Palsy in 1982, I lived the first 7 years of my life without the protections afforded by the ADA. As a result of this, my parents and physical therapists were constantly fighting battles on my behalf to ensure that I would be given every opportunity to succeed. It would be easy to think that with the passage of this law, that the battle stopped. However, as I grew up and began experiencing more, I learned that I am still living in a world built for able bodied people and not for someone with a disability like me. As I continue to grow and reach new and important milestones in my life like driving a car, living independently, getting married, and hopefully someday starting a family of my own, my wife and I are still fighting some of the same battles that my parents fought so many decades ago.

[Ashley] I always just assumed that people with disabilities had the same resources to meet their needs and wants, and the opportunities to succeed and grow like I did; after all, I couldn't imagine why anyone in our day and age would not be treated equally. Three years ago, I started dating Patrick and it was as if overnight, my perspective completely changed. So many shops, restaurants, vacation spots, and community activities that I frequented before were all of a sudden so inaccessible. It was as if someone went around with a highlighter and pointed out all of the limitations that Patrick has to face throughout his life; I felt awful. This incredibly large group of people is faced with so many obstacles each day while just trying to live their lives. When we began looking for apartments for the first time, I was overwhelmed by each place that we visited and its many inaccessible features. It didn't stop there; when we began planning our wedding we were up against what seemed like a mountain of hurdles. I realized then that Patrick spends a great deal of time "making it work" and adapting to a world that is still not designed for him.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the ADA and is a good time to reflect on how far we've come and how important it is to continue this progress. At Racker, where our vision is a world where all people know they belong, we are off to a good start, but in order to feel inclusion, we need more. So this year we've asked Racker staff and community members to think about what the ADA means to them, and we loved their answers!



*"ADA is the beginning of a time in our process for people with disabilities to be supported - to be on the same path as people without disabilities; there are no longer segregated paths. Whether it be employment, housing, or transportation, we belong."* - Dan Brown, Executive Director

*"Because of the ADA I get to be a part of a variety of people's journey to join and experience employment. The work environment is filled with a much richer and dynamic group of people as a result of the ADA!"*

*-Bethany Brown, Director of HR*



*Focusing on Staff continued from cover...*

**Marsha Burnham (Residential Team Director)**

I have been at Racker Centers as a team director since October of 2013. I was drawn to FRC as they had the same mission and goals that I believe in, and a great name to all that I speak to in the community. I enjoy coming into work each morning and seeing the individuals I support. We have great conversations and they tell me how their evening was and what they are doing that day. I have enjoyed working at the house that I support as I feel we are a great team. We listen to each other, laugh, and communicate with each other about what we can do for the individuals to increase their sense of independence and growth. Some days it can get more challenging than others, but we help each other through those tough days and look for the positive. Tomorrow is a new day.

**Gayle Pado (Assistant Director of Family Resources)**

I chose to work at Racker Centers because I wanted to represent an agency that helps improve the lives of the people in our community. What also attracted me to Racker Centers is that the organization has a VERY strong reputation for excellence and integrity. The best part about my job is the inspiration I get from the amazing work so many people are doing (staff and individuals both!) The work is important to me because life is too short to do something meaningless, and the group of people we serve have spent too long being misunderstood and under-represented. EVERYONE should have the opportunity to belong and feel valued.

**Susan Raymond (Occupational Therapist)**

Racker Centers has worked with me to have the flexible schedule that I need to allow me to be home with my son more. I enjoy my work because the kids and families we support need love and a stable base. We are able to provide this though preschool special education.

**Laura Skiba (Residential Regional Director)**

I enjoy working at Racker Centers for many reasons. It is a great team environment, and everyone is sooooo helpful. It feels good helping others, and improving lives. Racker Centers has a mentoring mentality which is wonderful, and provides an example of how we live out our mission. Racker is just a very happy, positive place to work, and our residents are delightful!



*"The ADA has opened up a world of opportunities to individuals with disabilities: jobs, community activities, the community accessibility as a whole."*

*-Jody Scriber, Director of Early Childhood Services*

*"ADA means access and opportunity"*

*- Tom Rochon, President of Ithaca College*



## RACKER CENTERS NOW POWERED BY



Racker Centers is proud to announce that we are only one of eight organizations in the northeast to annually receive a software grant from Microsoft. Fair market value of the licenses, Software Assurance, and automatic upgrades we will receive equates to a value of just under \$1.3 million. This is the largest grant ever received by Racker Centers.



*Just another day in the office for Dianna Betts, Director of Information Technology Services*

Dianna Betts, Racker Centers' director of IT services, maintains an affiliation with the New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies' (NYSACRA) technology committee. During a June meeting held in 2014, a colleague of Dianna's at a similar New York State nonprofit agency, Laurie Dale from Ability Beyond, mentioned the grant opportunities available through Microsoft. This thought stuck with Dianna, and after some follow-up with Lori, Dianna was off and running to begin researching Racker Centers' ability to apply. "We needed an 'invitation,' so to speak, in order to submit an application to Microsoft. We were lucky to receive this based on our affiliation with NYSACRA and Ability Beyond. This helped us get our foot in the door," states Dianna.

Over the course of several months, Dianna worked alongside Lauren Schler in the Community Relations and Development Department to compile all of the necessary information for the grant application. Their hard work paid off and Dianna was thrilled to receive the official word in February that Racker Centers was the recipient of \$1,294,971 in software.

Over the course of the last six months, Racker Centers has achieved many of the goals that were outlined when applying for the grant. To date, the agency has updated approximately 400 machines from older versions of Microsoft Office, many of them varying versions, and moved them all to Office 2013. In addition, more than 900 users were migrated to Office 365 throughout the spring. "This alone would have cost us over \$20,000," states Dianna, "and if we weren't experiencing too many problems, we wouldn't have done it, we would have waited

because of the cost associated with it." Though it isn't yet known the amount of hours this has saved Racker Centers' very small IT department made up of just two individuals, Dianna and Computer Support Specialist Josh Ganger, the impact on efficiencies has been significant. "It is now so much easier to support users across the agency," Dianna continues, "even in simply writing instruction manuals. We can now do this for one version of Microsoft, rather than trying to supply multiple versions of manuals. And, it's easier for staff to work together across the agency and help each other learn the new attributes of Office 2013 and how they can use the new features."

In addition to upgrading to the latest version of Office 2013, Racker Centers has been able to upgrade server licenses for servers that were no longer being supported because of the age of the software, saving the agency thousands of dollars that would have had to be out-of-pocket expenses.

The greatest part about the grant according to Dianna, "We can now move forward with a more strategic 3-5 year IT plan for the agency. Before, we could plan, but we couldn't always move as quickly as we wanted. At least 50% of the costs of large IT projects is usually software and licensing. Now, because we have the number of licenses we need for all staff across the agency, we can implement without rolling out projects in phases, and get people up to speed much more quickly. It just makes everything more efficient."

Looking forward, the next steps by the Racker Centers IT department will be to roll out the newest windows operating system to users across the agency. This will help offer more features to users, better security across the agency, and a faster operating system. All good things for an agency of over 850 staff and growing across three counties of Central NY. **Thank you Microsoft!!!**

## MAKING IT HAPPEN

### Charity Golf Tournament Benefits Racker Centers



The Chubb Charity Challenge is an annual golf tournament that invites Businesses to play golf, designating a favorite charity as the recipient for any winnings. Haylor, Freyer & Coon named Racker Centers as their charity of choice and won \$3,500 for the agency.

Thank you, Haylor, Fryer & Coon!

*Pictured from left to right: Jim Freyer, CEO of Haylor, Fryer & Coon; Dan Brown, Executive Director, Racker Centers; and Kevin Guinin, Chubb Insurance*

### Grant Awarded for Staff Training

Racker Centers is pleased to announce that we have been awarded a grant of \$1,300 to send a staff member to train in the Bridges Out of Poverty program.

The Howland Foundation, as administered by the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, awards grants to improve the quality of life throughout Tompkins County. As one of the recipients, Racker Centers identified the Bridges Out of Poverty program as a way to answer the need for more specialized services addressing the inequalities in access to resources that are prevalent for the youth and families we serve who are living in poverty. The grant will support Racker sending a long-time Racker Centers staff member to attend and become trained as a trainer, learning key lessons in the area of dealing with individuals from poverty. Topics include increasing awareness of the differences in economic cultures and how those differences affect opportunities for success. This Racker staff member will come out of the training with the ability to then train internal staff as well as lead trainings for the community.



### September 13-19 marks 2015's nationally recognized Direct Support Professional Recognition week

*Join us in celebrating the thousands of professional staff who support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they work to achieve their goals for success and happiness nationwide, as well as our own Direct Support Professionals here at Racker that work in all areas of our community, supporting people of every age where they live, work, and play.*

For a complete list of our Business Partners visit [www.rackercenters.org](http://www.rackercenters.org)



FALL 2015

**OUTLOOK**  
www.rackercenters.org

Franziska Racker Centers  
3226 Wilkins Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850



**RACKER CENTERS**  
Supporting People with Disabilities

**MISSION STATEMENT**

We support people with disabilities and their families to lead fulfilling lives by providing opportunities to learn and be connected with others.

**VISION STATEMENT**

We envision a world where all people know they belong.

Make your reservations today!

Contact Ashley Yates at 607-272-5891 ext.285 or [AshleyY@rackercenters.org](mailto:AshleyY@rackercenters.org)

# Cortland Community Celebration

Join us for a breakfast celebration as we honor staff and community members, and enjoy a presentation on “belonging”  
by our Executive Director, Dan Brown.

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**Date:** Tuesday, September 22, 2015

**Time:** 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

**Cost:** \$15 per person includes breakfast

**Place:** The Ramada Inn

2 River Street, Cortland, NY

## Award Winners

**Inspiration Award:**

Nancy Bruce

*Physical Therapist, Preschool Program*

Joanna Welch

*RN, Residential Program*

**Special Friend Award:**

David McNeil

*McNeil Development*

**Cortland Community Partner:**

Puzzlesolvers

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