

OUTLOOK



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Our "Making Room" Project is Underway!



Dan Brown, Associate Executive Director; Rick Darfler, Facilities Manager; Roger Sibley, Executive Director and Daniel White Jr., Construction Superintendent with LeChase Construction smile for a group shot as the "Topper" is installed over the community entrance to the new Learning Center.

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New Board Members

**Resident Reunited
with Family**

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Resident Visits
I-100 Studio

**Starry Night Grand
Opening**

Nicaragua Journey

**Parent Network
Fall Conference**



The "Topper" pictured here is a 5' long piece of steel that will be installed in the skylight over the new community entrance, one of the highest points of the new building. Construction projects often mark the installation of the highest piece of steel with a "Topping-Off" Ceremony. We invited families, staff and Board members to sign the "Topper" beam so they will forever be a part of our "Making Room" building project.

***Here at Franziska Racker Centers'
Wilkins Road site the sweet sounds of
construction are an everyday occurrence.***

Continued on page 5...

ROGER WRITES

Franziska Racker Centers does not have to exist. Families from several counties in this region did not have to create an organization to help them care for their children with disabilities back in 1948. And Franziska Racker Centers certainly did not need to last as long as it has, do as much as it does, be engaged with so many different people and organizations.

Not-for-profits are also called voluntary organizations. Whereas governments are created by law, we are created by people, and governed by people who volunteer to serve on boards and often do a lot of the work. There does not have to be a United Way, and yet each of the counties in our region have one, and they make life better for everyone in their communities.

YOU WILL READ ABOUT THE WONDERFUL PROGRESS AND THE PLANS TO RAISE THE NEEDED MONEY AND COMPLETE THE RENOVATION AND CONSTRUCTION AT OUR WILKINS ROAD SITE.

You know that Franziska Racker Centers has been doing a capital fund raising campaign for the last few years. You will read about the wonderful progress and the plans to raise the needed money and complete the renovation and construction at our Wilkins Road site. This happened because a lot of people and organizations gave money, not because they had to, like taxes, but because they chose to.

I have worked all but 27 months of a long career in the voluntary sector. I do it because of the importance of the work, the differences that can be made, the flexibility and ability to innovate that comes with being private. The other characteristic we have, which I think is a good one, is we continually have to justify our existence. There can be no real argument about whether New York State should continue to have government. But for us, if we do not perform, we can go away.

All of us, board and staff, are thrilled by the generosity of so many people in "Making Room" a reality. And we are honored by the appreciation and support Franziska Racker Centers has received from families and citizens over the decades. You inspire us to do better.



Roger Sibley, Executive Director

A handwritten signature of the name "Roger" in black ink.



IN AN EFFORT TO GO GREEN AND TO KEEP PRINTING COSTS DOWN

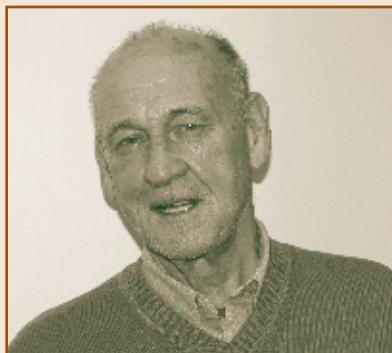
we look forward to sharing more stories and information with you on our website throughout the year. This year we will be printing and mailing two printed Outlook publications in the spring (March) and fall (September). The summer (June) and winter (December) publications will be available as electronic publications online at rackercenters.org. To ensure that you receive notification of the newest publications, visit our website or email us at info@rackercenters.org to subscribe to our email list.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Beverly Baker

Beverly Baker, a native Ithacan and graduate of Ithaca College, is President of Baker Travel, Inc. She currently serves as president of the Ithaca Woman's Club and is active in several other organizations including the Ithaca Rotary Club and the Friends of Ithaca College. Beverly is a member of the Advisory Board of the Community Foundation's Women's Fund and is a member of the STPB (Strategic Tourism Planning Board). Through the STPB she is particularly involved in an effort to help beautify Ithaca!



John Crosby

John serves as the Special Olympics Area Coordinator for Broome and Tioga counties and is a past NY State Area Coordinator of the Year, as well as the past NY State Coach of the Year. He currently serves as Chairman of the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) subcommittee for Tioga County, is a member of the Broome-Tioga BOCES Board of Education, member of the Owego Apalachin Board of Education and a member of the Apalachin Lions Service Club. In the time that John is not busy with his community involvement, he enjoys tennis, walks with his two dogs and cares for his two cats.



Catherine McNulty

Cathy's background includes experience in a variety of legal matters including financial reorganizations, corporate law, family law and immigration. A devout community volunteer throughout the Southern Tier, she has served as an officer for Binghamton University Women for four years, including one term as President. She has volunteered in a variety of capacities in Girl Scouts and currently serves as Troop Leader and Assistant Leader in her daughters' Brownie Troop and Daisy Troop, respectively. She is an active member of the PTA, and is active with both Alive with Autism! and Southern Tier Alternative Therapies. Cathy is the mother of two and first became familiar with Racker Centers when her youngest daughter was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2.



Eugene Yarussi

Gene served as CEO of Emerson Power Transmission (EPT) between 1996 and 2006 and retired after 41 years of growth with the company where he played a key role in corporate philanthropy. He has recently co-chaired Family and Children's Service of Ithaca's \$2.5 million capital campaign, served on the capital campaign committee for the Hangar Theatre, served on the board of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, Sciencenter, TC3 Foundation and Family and Children's Service of Ithaca. In addition to joining the Racker Centers' Board of Directors, Gene is also a member of the Campaign Cabinet. On April 30, 2012 Gene will receive the Distinguished Citizen Award from the Boy Scouts of America.

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RESIDENT REUNITED WITH FAMILY

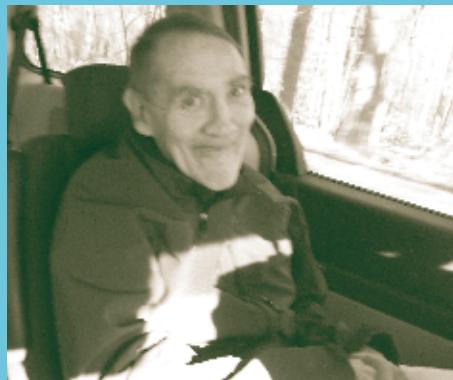
"James has always made coming to work a lot of fun," says Wil Avery, staff member at Franziska Racker Centers. When Wil began working at Franziska Racker Centers' Evergreen residential home two years ago, he had an immediate connection with James. James is 73 years old, and has lived at Evergreen since 2007. "I would walk up and down the hall with James doing exercises and making jokes with him," Wil recalls. "James would also sing songs to the staff to cheer them up." Wil and James also connected over their Irish Catholic background. Wil would often take James to church on Sundays. On the way James would entertain Wil with great stories from his past.

Around Christmastime last year James' health began to decline. James had always taken great pride in his work and his health made this more difficult for him than it was before. He started showing signs of frustration and his normally sunny disposition changed. In talking with James one day, both Wil and Team Director Cheri Williams were moved by the joy that James' childhood memories seemed to give him. Though James would visit his sister Betty periodically in Oneonta, NY, he had fallen out of touch with his extended family many years ago. James' struggles really affected Wil and Cheri; that is when staff decided to try and reach out to some of James' family members.

This initial contact resulted in James attending a family gathering in Bedford, NY. There, James was reunited with his niece, Jacklyn, and several nephews as well as many new family members that he met for the first time. "They welcomed James warmly," says Senior Residence

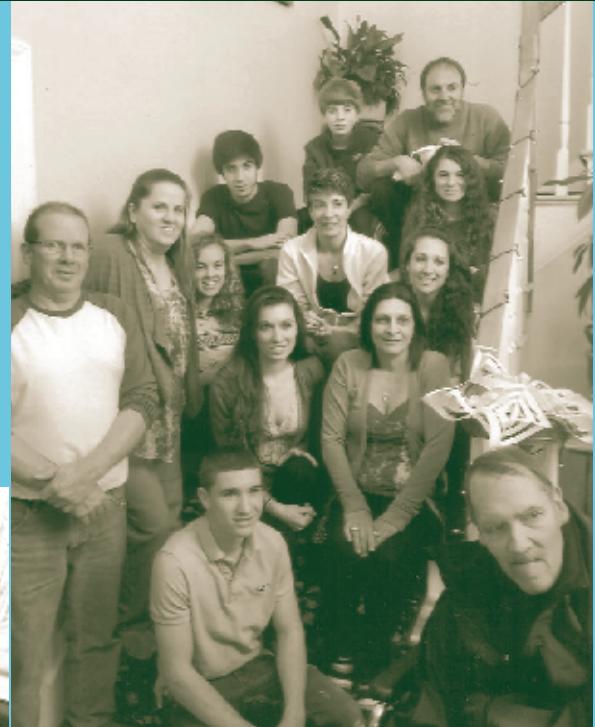
Counselor Emily Whyte, one of the Franziska Racker Centers' staff members who accompanied James on the trip. "They talked a lot about their living arrangements when they were young since James and his family shared a house with his aunt and uncle and their kids."

Since the reunion James seems eager to speak much more about his youth and childhood home. His nephew Bill is devoted to keeping in touch. Prior to the reunion Bill was not aware of the



times that James visited his sister, Bill's mother. Now these visits will be made more special since Bill will be present and can help his mother and uncle reconnect through old photos. "I plan to help wherever I can," Bill confirms.

The staff at Evergreen are thrilled with the positive outcome of James reuniting with his family. "This isn't just a story about James," says Wil. "It's about an entire family getting back in touch and rebuilding relationships after many years of distance." Cheri agrees, "It is a



Above: James (front right) and his family at their reunion in December.

Left: James smiles during the trip to Bedford, NY to see his family.

wonderful reconnection for James and the entire family. This is helping James to reidentify with his past."

When Emily and Senior Residence Counselor, Matt Mills came home from the reunion, they showed Wil a video they took of James on their way to Bedford. "That made all the work worth it," concludes Wil, "I haven't seen James smile that big in years."

FRANZISKA RACKER CENTERS' "WISH LIST"

At times some of our programs have needs that can be fulfilled through a donation of "no longer needed" and "gently used" items. If you are interested in supporting Racker Centers with an in-kind donation of one of the items listed below, please contact our Office of Community Relations at 607-272-5891. Thank you! Our current wish list includes:

- Travel Wheelchairs
- Stationary Bike for an individual with Down Syndrome
- Volunteers to help care for the McEvoy Children's Garden at the Cortland OCM BOCES (help with tilling, planting, weeding) including possibly helping to educate students about gardening. Also looking for donations of annual flowers and vegetables to fill our raised beds, and outdoor sand toys such as trucks and buckets for the play area
- Christmas decorations and an artificial Christmas tree
- Dry erase easel board with flannel board on opposite side (fairly common in Early Education classroom settings)
- Roll up Wheelchair scale for residential
- Clinical therapy supplies: gently used toys, tricycles, roller skates, ping pong paddles, large art paper, children's board games or card games, Etch-a-Sketch, Slinkies, puppets, art paint, glue sticks, yarn, nature magazines and paper plates
- Medium sized Rifton tricycle and small pillows for Physical Therapy
- 3-ring binders, dividers, pocket folders, pencils for students in the Turning Point Program
- Tricycles or Big Wheels for kids in the daycare/preschool programs

Making Room Project continued...

Renovations on our special education preschool are proceeding on schedule! The walls to our new Learning Center are up! As you can see, our "Topper" beam is in place.

Fundraising continues as we still have one last hill to climb. We are so grateful for the support we've received from our staff, board, families and our many community friends. We need to hit \$3.5 million in order to reach our goal, and we were thrilled that at the end of 2011 we passed the \$3 million mark. Only \$500,000 to go!

Renovations will continue in the coming months as will our fundraising. **Keep an ear out for a special announcement about a Challenge Match that will help us get to our goal by summer's end.** Starting in April we will announce open houses for those of you that want to don a hard hat and see the progress. Our plan is to move all the staff and children back into the newly renovated and asbestos-free building by July 1st! Stay tuned and watch the website for more details!

Executive Director, Roger Sibley and Associate Executive Director Dan Brown pictured at what will be the new public entrance for the agency.



YOUR GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

When you become a Friend of Racker Centers, you help us provide people with disabilities the services, supports and opportunities they need to do things that are important to all of us: learn, have new experiences, enjoy friends and family, and be contributing members of our communities.

UNRESTRICTED ANNUAL SUPPORT Allows us to respond to areas of immediate need.

BOHN FAMILY FUND Created by Donna and Tom Bohn, provides resources and supports for families with children having special needs.

FRANCES G. BERKO LECTURESHIP FUND Created with a leadership gift from the J.M. McDonald Foundation in memory of Dr. Berko, the Centers' executive director from 1964 to 1974. It supports community education and professional development for those working in the disability field.

FRANCES V. WILSON MEMORIAL FUND Created by Margaret Gibson, provides financial support for needed items not covered by traditional funding sources.

FRANZISKA W. RACKER MEMORIAL FUND Created in memory of our former medical director and the agency's namesake, supports early childhood services, an area that was dear to Dr. Racker's heart.

RICHARD M. LEAVITT, M.D. MEMORIAL FUND Created by Judy Leavitt and her sons, provides support for special experiences for children and young adults with disabilities.

SCRIBER/CASH FAMILY FUND Created by Jody and Kent Scriber and David and Lori Cash, supports community-based experiences for preschool/elementary age children with special needs.

TOMPKINS TRUST COMPANY BRIDGE FUND Supports otherwise unfunded clinical services for children throughout the year.

To donate or for more information call Perri LoPinto at 607.272.5891 Ext. 234 or email perri@rackercenters.org. You can also make a donation online at www.rackercenters.org.

THANK YOU BUSINESS PARTNERS*

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United Way Member Organization

SPOTLIGHT

I-100 INVITES RACKER RESIDENT AND BIGGEST FAN TO STUDIO

Erik, a resident at Franziska Racker Centers' Campbell Ave. home has been a fan of music for many years. It is probably the reason why he and residential staff Kayleigh Deweese get along so well. Their love of music was an instant bond. Kayleigh drives Erik to work four days a week, and every morning at 6 a.m. when Kayleigh arrives to work at Campbell, she runs in the house and the first thing she does is turn on the radio. The morning tradition is to listen to I-100's morning trivia game; *Breakfast for your Brain*, hosted by Kat Walters. As they listen, sometimes Erik answers the questions and Kayleigh tries to call in to share the answers on air. Erik knows every band that Kat plays in those early morning hours.

Seeing the joy that the game brings to Erik every morning, Kayleigh came up with the idea of contacting Kat. She called and Kat immediately invited Erik in to the station to be on the show. Kat thanked Kayleigh saying, "I love knowing that Erik enjoys listening to the show in the morning."

Kayleigh and Erik arrived early on a cold November morning the day they were to be on air with Kat. Both were overwhelmed with excitement over Kat's invitation. As Erik was wheeled into the studio, he said to Kat, "I listen to you every morning!" You could see the pleasure in his face. When Kat asked him who his favorite band is, Erik answered, "Donna the Buffalo." Kayleigh agreed as she explained that Erik has been a devoted attendee at the Annual Grassroots Festival of Dance since its first year.

Breakfast for your Brain begins promptly at 8:10a.m. every morning. That morning Kat asked Erik to help introduce the show and they both yelled into the microphone, "Breakfaaaast." Erik cheered winners on in the background and enjoyed listening to the music in between callers with Kat and Kayleigh. Erik and Kayleigh both love the band Queen. Luckily, so does Kat, so before they left that day she made sure to play one last song for them. They all played their air guitars and sang along to the lyrics together. Thank you again Kat for giving Erik such a wonderful experience that he will never forget!



Kayleigh, Eric and Kat from I-100 pictured in the I-100 studio.

STARRY NIGHT RESPITE HOUSE OFFICIALLY OPEN



Staff welcome visitors at Starry Night Respite Grand Opening.

An Open House on December 8th kicked-off the long awaited grand opening of the "Starry Night" Respite House on Starr Road in Cortland, NY. "Starry Night" is the 20th house within Racker Centers' residential program and has been hosting guests for weekend stays since the grand opening. The respite house is a five bedroom, free-standing home that was built to serve the need for short-term stays for individuals with disabilities. "Starry Night" is a 24-hour supervised program staffed with trained counselors and nursing personnel who will provide support services and supervision for guests as well as a wide variety of activities. This respite allows their families to use that time for a short break from caregiving to take care of personal business or to enjoy some away time of their own. Service Coordinators from Racker Centers as well as other organizations attended the event to become acquainted with the house and what it can offer to the families they serve. Families that attended were excited about the opportunity and left feeling reassured and confident about having a welcoming home such as "Starry Night" as a resource for short-term care for their family member. For more information, please contact Kim Lansdowne at 607-229-8764 or kml@rackercenters.org.

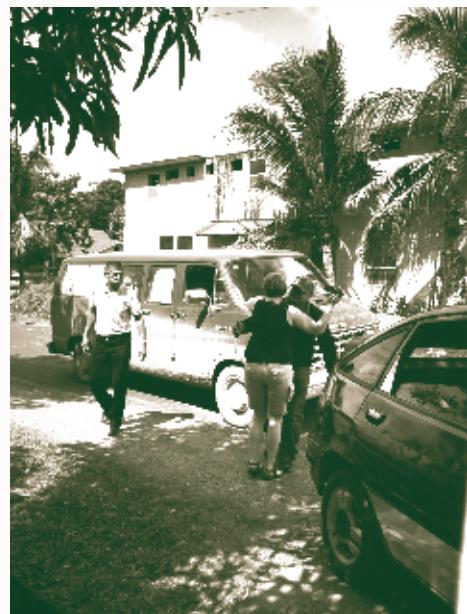
NICARAGUA JOURNEY IS A SUCCESS!

Audrey Terry's first journey to Nicarauga was in 2010 when she was invited to take a Service Learning trip, through Tompkins Cortland Community College, to Biliwi, one of the poorest regions in the country. Since that time, she has returned to Nicarauga twice with the most recent trip occurring in January. This trip was unlike the others, however, as Audrey (and her translator, Abel) drove the nearly 4400 miles to Nicaragua in order to donate a wheelchair accessible van filled with donated equipment to the community of Puerto Cabezas.

The trip was not without challenges including a last minute mechanical issue that rendered her van immobile and required a replacement vehicle to be found. Enroute Audrey and Abel endured several encounters at border crossings during which Audrey had to provide specific paperwork and pay fees to be able to continue the journey. The last 350 miles of the trip was through dangerous terrain and Audrey gladly handed the van over to her associate, Harold. A native of Nicaragua, Harold, is employed by The Healing Arts Foundation, a non-profit organization with which Audrey has

been working closely. Harold successfully delivered the van to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, where it will be used to provide transportation to Los Pepitos, a new school that is being built to serve those with special needs and their families through education and therapies. The van arrived filled with wheelchairs, crutches, a therapy bike, feeding chair and many other supplies for the community and school. Despite the difficulties Audrey experienced, she never got upset saying, "I just figured if it was meant to happen it would."

Audrey would like to thank everyone for their donations, support and encouragement throughout her journey. She feels fortunate to be a part of something that is impacting so many children and families in Nicaragua and credits her 16 years with Franziska Racker Centers for giving her such a broad range of experiences to draw from while working in Nicaragua. Audrey hopes to return to Puerto Cabezas this year to take part in the opening/set-up of Los Pepitos. She also hopes to arrange for a school bus to be donated and shipped to the school.



Audrey runs to hug Harold who drove the van the last 350 miles to its destination in Puerto Cabezas.

To see and read more about Audrey's journey and stay up to date on Project Los Pepitos visit www.rackercenters.org.



PARENT NETWORK HOSTS ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE

The theme for this year's annual fall conference was *Giving Our Best*. Presenters Henry S. Roane, Ph.D., BCBA-D and Heather J. Kadey, M. S., BCBA, focused on tools to support a child's positive behavior in social settings and at home. The first session of the

evening presented by Dr. Roane began with assessing and addressing challenging behaviors in individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. Dr. Roane, an Associate Professor in the Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Upstate Medical University, is the

Director of the Family Behavior Analysis Clinic, and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. In the second session of the evening, Ms. Kadey, who is a Clinical Supervisor and Research Scientist at the Behavior Analysis Clinic at Upstate University, focused on specific behaviors in her presentation and how to address them. She demonstrated different case studies of children with severe food selectivity, noncompliance and aggression issues. The presentations were followed by a question and answer session for attendees.

The Parent Network is committed to providing people with disabilities and their families an ongoing forum where information can be shared. Topics are suggested by the families the program looks to serve. The Parent Network offers ongoing educational opportunities for families as well as an annual conference.



Heather J. Kadey addresses attendees at Racker Centers' Parent Network Annual Conference.

For more information or to suggest a topic of interest, contact Marianne Odell at 607-753-9376 x 155.

SPRING 2012

OUTLOOK

www.rackercenters.org



Franziska Racker Centers
3226 Wilkins Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

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MISSION

We are dedicated to helping people with special needs and their families have good lives, with opportunities to learn, to be responsible, to feel cared for, to share, to be connected to others. We are committed to creating a culture of inclusion in our community, celebrating the richness that diversity and interdependence bring.

VISION

We are inspired by the vision of our founding families: that all people with disabilities will be valued members of a welcoming and supportive community.

EDITOR Heather Hughes, Director of Public Relations

DESIGN Dawn Bricen LaMorte, **SUNRISE STUDIOS DESIGN** www.SunriseStudiosDesign.com

CONTRIBUTORS Heather Hughes, Dawn Bricen LaMorte, Roger Sibley

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO BUILD OUR NEW PLAYGROUND *Join our Playground Build!*

The construction is in full swing on the Margaret Gibson Special Education Preschool on Wilkins Road. It is almost time to begin preparing for the kids and the classrooms to return. To really welcome them back, we need your help! We are building a brand new playground, rated and inspected for safety (and fun!) specifically for 2-5 year olds. The playground will be equipped with all of the essentials plus a sensory play area for children on the autism spectrum. Volunteers are needed in shifts for both preparation and construction on the following dates for the playground build:

~Friday, May 18th -Time TBD: 15 Volunteers needed for preparation work

~Saturday, May 19th -8:00a.m. -1:00p.m.

35-40 volunteers needed for construction *Lunch will be served at 12:30p.m.

~Saturday, May 19th – 1:00p.m. – 7:00p.m.:

30-35 volunteers needed for construction *Lunch will be served at 12:30p.m.

For more information on how you can become involved contact Connie Goldsmith at 607.882.9520 ext. 326 or via email at Connie@rackercenters.org.