



THE *Neighborhood Depot*

Four Tioga County nonprofits will soon have a new place to call home. Tioga County Rural Ministries, Catholic Charities of Tompkins-Tioga, Tioga County United Way, and Racker are heading for higher ground with a new, shared office and conference space. Designed with our community in mind, The Neighborhood Depot is a nonprofit hub that will not only save overhead costs for these not-for-profit organizations, but will also offer a variety of resources conveniently located in one location for community members. The 15,000 square foot facility is scheduled for construction at the current site of the Tioga County Rural Ministry on North Ave in the Village of Owego. Located next to the railroad tracks, the building structure will resemble a railroad depot and will blend in with the aesthetics of the neighborhood.

This project is planned around building capacity and collaboration while simultaneously addressing the needs of Tioga County residents. All too often overhead costs prohibit nonprofit organizations from putting revenue into programs and staff. This method of sharing services and nonprofit collaboration will create cost savings of over \$1.2 million dollars over just the first ten years. These savings will lead to an increase in the number of people supported and the variety of supports that are available to the community.

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ad•vo•ca•cy—the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating

We hear a lot about advocacy, especially this time of year. Advocacy happens at a lot of levels and in a lot of different ways. Sometimes, I think about *BIG* advocacy. The kind of advocacy that requires marches, huge volumes of people, lots of money, and lots of reach. Other times, I think about our daily advocacy. Advocacy for a posted sale price at the store. Advocacy at a medical appointment for ourselves or our family. The kind of advocacy for a colleague or friend who may not be feeling valued.

For parents of children with disabilities, advocacy comes with the territory. From day one, families become advocates. They are champions for accessibility, inclusion, and supports. Advocating every step of the way can be demanding, laborious and exhausting. And yet, we know that the current services for people with disabilities were born from family advocacy. Racker and many other organizations like ours would not exist without the tireless work of families pushing us to do what is right for their children - and all of our children.

Advocates are brave. Advocates are powerful. And just like those countless families whose work created an organization like Racker, advocates get results.

I want to share a brief story about an advocate we know. Gayle Pado is a mother, representative on the local and Statewide Family Support Services Councils for the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), and also Racker's Director of Family Resource Programs. The Family Support Council is a group of families charged with funding programs to support families who have

children with disabilities. As statewide representatives for families across New York State, they serve as advisors and the voice of families in the disability service system as well as stewards of public funding for disability services.

Recently, Gayle identified an issue that would greatly impact her and her family and she knew she had to speak up. At a recent statewide meeting with the Family Support Council and the OPWDD commissioner, she shared not only her own story, but the story of many families across New York who need in home behavior support assistance for themselves and their children. Gayle embraced an opportunity to make a difference by gathering her facts, seeking clarification, developing a concise presentation of the issues, and boy did she deliver. She was brave. She was powerful. She got results.

There is a lot happening right now in the larger systems and in how we support people with all types of disabilities. There has been the change of Medicaid Service Coordination to Care Coordination Organizations, discussions about moving to managed care, changes in processes of accessing services, changes to assessment tools, as well as other varied and rapid changes. Change is happening fast and the cliché about how *we are building a plane while it's flying* is heard, a lot. At Racker, one of our strategic goals is that the people we support will thrive in new and changing systems. This starts with advocacy – from us and from you. The most effective advocacy comes from those directly impacted. Racker's Direct Support Professionals have been instrumental each year in advocating for increases in the state budget. People with disabilities and their families can and have made a difference in the supports available at Racker, in our community, statewide, and nationally.

There is a lot to advocate for these days and how fortunate we are to have a voice for the things we care about. As Arlo Guthrie once said, "I'd rather have friends who care than friends who agree with me."

There are lots of opportunities out there to have your voice heard. Here are a few ways to get involved:

For more information and resources available please visit our website at www.racker.org or by contacting us by email at info@racker.org or by phone at 607.272.5891

The advocacy section of the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities website opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_services_supports/beyourownadvocate

healthy minds healthy kids.org Mental Health Resources eifamilies.com
nyalliance.org/advocacy

Sincerely,

Cris Donovan
Associate Executive Director

THE NEIGHBORHOOD DEPOT

► Continued from cover

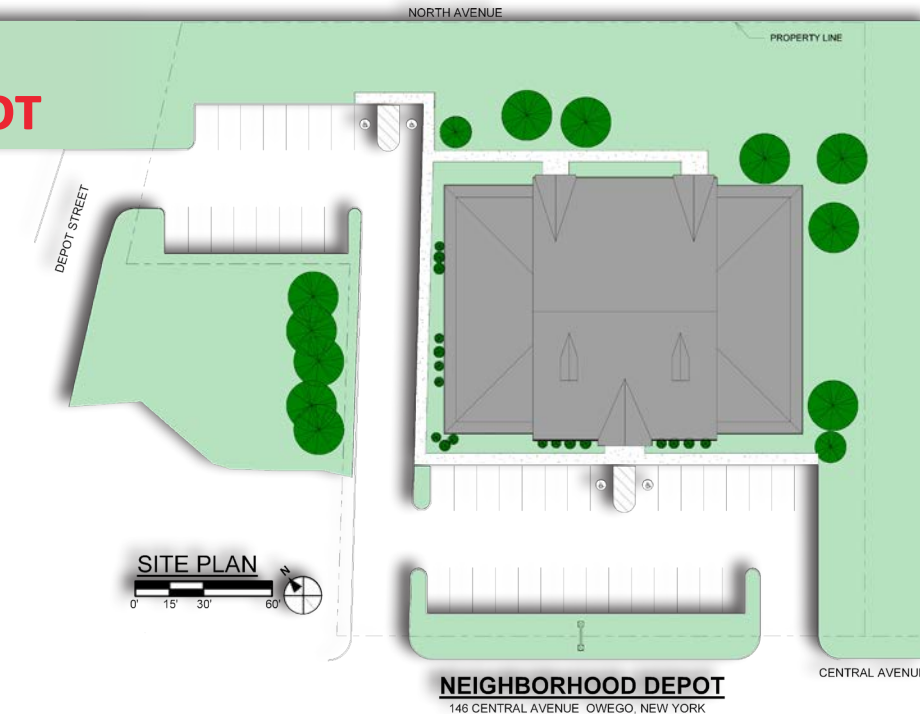
In Tioga County, the average rental cost is between \$13-\$18 per square foot. The Neighborhood Depot will help reduce the overhead costs to approximately \$5 per square foot for each tenant. Conference space will be available to hold 150-200 people for workforce training, board meetings and community events.

Local residents will find multiple services at one location within walking distance of shopping, restaurants and entertainment. Central to downtown Owego, The Neighborhood Depot will provide access to financial assistance, a food pantry, counseling services for individuals with disabilities, and health care-services that are currently spread throughout different locations in Tioga County.

The central location and elevation above the 500-year flood zone presents an opportunity for the Neighborhood Depot to also act as an emergency response center. Included in the plans are an industrial generator, showers, and conference space to house displaced residents in case of an emergency. The location of this project will provide a facility that is walkable for a densely populated area of Owego and an accessible drop off point for supplies. The project has the expressed support of local legislatures and the community.

The total project cost to build The Neighborhood Depot is \$4.8 million. As the lead agency, Racker applied for, and is the recipient of, three substantial grants to start the fundraising process: \$1,000,000 (NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative), \$1,000,000 (Mother Cabrini Health Foundation), \$424,000 (NYS Empire State Development).

Our organization is excited to be a part of a project that will help make our community stronger. The facility's design reflects the unique needs of each participating nonprofit, allowing their programs to grow and run more efficiently. 🌱



"Local residents will find multiple services at one location... services currently spread out at different locations throughout Tioga County."

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CHUCK TOMPKINS RETIRES FROM BOARD

Long-time friend, advocate and volunteer Chuck Tompkins finished his last three-year term and final board service tenure this past December. But the great news is that as an Emeritus Director, Chuck will stay involved and committed to Racker and its vision of a world where all people know they belong!



In 1997 Chuck was introduced to Racker by long-time volunteer Dave Dunlop. The mission and work of the organization resonated with Chuck and he joined the board. Chuck quickly became a great advocate and ambassador for the agency. He served on the board's program committee, the finance committee and was on Racker's Making Room Capital Campaign Counsel. He also served for many years as the chair of the community relations committee. In 2005 Chuck was recognized with Racker's highest honor and was made an Emeritus Director. This is a life-long designation and awarded only to those who have shown exemplary commitment to the agency and the work we do for people with disabilities. We are thrilled that even though Chuck's board service is complete, his support and guidance can continue! 🌟

BEST BUDDIES WORKS WITH RACKER



Racker has recently entered into partnership with Cornell's *Best Buddies* Chapter. Best Buddies International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing one-to-one friendships between students and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The students at Cornell University are hoping to promote friendship and inclusion by bringing together Cornell students and members of the Racker community. The Cornell *Best Buddies* Chapter holds group events twice a month in addition to pairing individuals with a buddy. The buddies then make plans to see each other outside of group events in the hopes of building long lasting friendships. To anyone looking to get involved, please be sure to reach out to them at (610) 235-7815 or cornellbestbuddies@gmail.com 🌟

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EVERO SOFTWARE NEW AT RACKER

This fall and winter, Racker implemented Evero, a paperless software that will allow our staff to be more efficient.

For years, the programs used paper service notes that required several layers of signatures, programmatic administrative time to verify services, staff time, mileage, and staff fees, many hours of agency administrative work to translate the paper into an electronic bill to Medicaid, and then the subsequent double and triple checking everything for accuracy. Evero is an electronic system that is both efficient and compliant. It allows staff to document their work and the person's progress - in real time and in partnership with the person they support. Each person's record is in one place: the medical components, behavior supports, skill building, documentation of supports and the entire plan for that person merge into one comprehensive record.

The implementation of Evero allows Racker to address critical needs while also creating more time for staff to focus their energy on the people we serve and the achievement of their personal goals. Ultimately, to help each person lead a fulfilling life. Gayle Pado, Director of Family Resource Programs, summarized it in this way, "We are all so excited to move forward using this new technology. It is helping us in numerous ways to streamline our processes to be able to truly focus on helping people achieve their goals."

The funding for the staff training and implementation of the Evero software was through a generous grant award from the Triad Foundation. 🌟

ADAPTIVE CHAIRS IN THE PRESCHOOL

Racker's Ithaca preschool was the recipient of a grant from the Legacy Foundation to support the purchase of adaptive chairs. These chairs provide children with good posture and positioning to create safe environment for eating and socializing in Racker's integrated classrooms. Teachers and clinicians are already seeing the benefits of the chairs as they offer another tool for our preschoolers to learn in an environment where everyone feels they belong.



Wyatte focuses on table activities

Racker Occupational Therapist Cheryl Herold speaks of a preschool student's successes in his adaptive chair. Wyatte (pictured to the left) now sits longer than he previously did in other chairs and is able to eat for a longer period of time too! His fast eating pace has slowed down some and he seems to be less anxious while sitting at the table. The sides and arm rests on the chair have helped to get his body in a good position and increase his body awareness so he can focus on his meal. He pretends to be a race car driver or an astronaut as he connects the seat belt to his chair, giving him some fine motor practice as he operates the belt for himself. The new chair is a wonderful support for his growth at school and increases his independence. Thank you Legacy Foundation. 🌟

SAVE THE DATE: COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

We are pleased to welcome Dan Habib as the Key Note speaker for our Community Celebrations this year. Dan is a documentary film director, cinematographer, and producer of award winning disability-related films. A notable documentary includes *Intelligent Lives*, which Racker hosted screenings of during our 70th Anniversary Year. Many of Dan's other films have been broadcast nationally and have been nominated for several awards. Including *Samuel* which is about Habib's son who has cerebral palsy, has been translated into 17 languages, is used as a teaching tool worldwide, and was nominated for an Emmy.



CORTLAND: **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13**
Cortland Repertory Theatre
24 Port Watson Street, Cortland, NY 13045

TIOGA: **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14**
Tioga Downs
2384 West River Road, Nichols, NY 13812

TOMPKINS: **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15**
Emerson Suites, Ithaca College
953 Danby Road, Ithaca, NY 14850

For more information on Racker's Celebrations contact Jen Westling at 607.272.5891 x. 285 or by email at JenW@racker.org



RACKER RIVALS BIG RED IS BACK! JULY 18TH 2020

2020 is stacking up to be an exciting year for Racker! One of our most exciting fundraising events, *Racker Rivals Big Red*, is back again this summer. This charity hockey game takes place at Cornell University's Lynah Rink. Many of our favorite local players and celebrity players will be back again to skate the ice and help raise funds for Racker's Early Childhood programs. Save the date for **Saturday July 18th, 2020!**

To learn more, see pictures from 2019, and to stay up to date with everything hockey, bookmark www.racker.org/hockey.

Find out more information about how you can be a part of Racker Rivals Big Red in the future by calling (607.272.5891) or emailing info@racker.org.

For sponsorship inquiries or to request a sponsorship brochure, please contact Bob Brazill, Director of Community Relations & Development at Racker, by calling 607.272.5891 ext. 224 or by email at BobB@racker.org.

WHAT ARE PLANNED GIFTS AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

We hear the words "planned giving" a lot, but what does it really mean? Maybe you make a gift every year to Racker. Supporting Racker is important to you, so you plan for it. Those yearly gifts are greatly appreciated and important, but the term "planned gift" means something different.



As we live our lives, we accumulate assets. It can be property, real estate, investments, or money in the bank. It might be an insurance policy or a retirement fund. When we sit down to make a plan on how to distribute those assets once we are gone, we think about our loved ones. But often we also think about the organizations that have been meaningful to us – that represent our values, and have made our community a better place. By making arrangements in our estate plans to give a final gift – a "planned gift" to Racker, you are making the ultimate expression of commitment to the work we do for people with disabilities in our community. This planned gift can be as simple as listing Racker to receive a bequest in your will, or be one of the beneficiaries on your retirement fund. And of course, if your situation changes, the plan you put in place can be changed as well.



Planned gifts throughout Racker's history have had a profound effect on our ability to be innovative, creative, and responsive to the needs of people with disabilities. We have received planned gifts of all sizes – each and every one helping us to do better and work smarter for the people we serve.

They have helped to fill funding gaps for critical services, create new programs, and develop the infrastructure so that we are as efficient and as effective as possible. If you make a planned gift to Racker know that it will truly make a difference.

We would be so honored to have you remember Racker in your estate planning with a gift that will help ensure that the services our community needs to support people with disabilities are there for them now, and in the future. We would be happy to send you a packet that can help you think about Racker and how to make a planned gift. Or give us a call. We'd love to get together.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: PERRI LOPINTO
607.272.5891 x.234 OR PERRI@RACKER.ORG**



FOOD DAY

A holiday tradition at the Racker Wilkins Road site is Food Day. Staff and their various departments put together their best themes and dishes. Everyone is invited to visit with their coworkers and enjoy good food, good snacks, and good conversation. This year included very creative themes, a wide variety of food options, decorations, and lots of holiday cheer! 🌿



Community Support dressed as **Music Stars**



Quality Standards dressed in **Decades**



Danny Wonka and The Racker Chocolate Factory



Community Relations and Development dressed as **Parks and Recreation**



The Finance Department dressed as **Elves from North Pole Catering**



Residential Leadership dressed as **Full House**

CORTLAND HOLIDAY BALL

Every year for the past eight years, the Residential Activity Committee in Cortland puts together a Holiday Ball that brings together friends and family from across all Racker's residential homes. Through extensive planning and networking, the Activity Committee was able to bring Santa and Mrs. Claus to join in the holiday festivities once again! 🌿



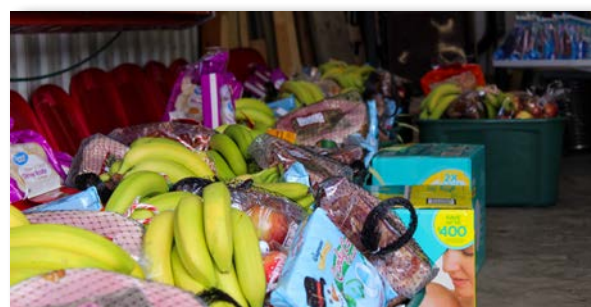
HOLIDAY GIFT BASKETS

Once again the Lipinski family, Steve, Kathy, and their niece Spencer, donated very special gift baskets to families facing hardships during the holiday season. These gift baskets traveled to the far ends of Tioga County, Cortland County, and Tompkins County.

Thank you to the Lipinski family for your wonderful support during the holidays! 🌿



Seen here is Stephen Lipinski with Kathy Lind, Racker's Health Home Care Manager Team Leader



Holiday Gift Baskets lined up and ready to be delivered to families



CORNELL BIG RED MEN'S HOCKEY TEAM VISITS RACKER PRESCHOOL

Not only is the Cornell Men's Hockey Team high ranking in the nation, but they ranked number one during their annual visit to the Margaret Gibson Preschool at Racker! Straight off the bus from a successful weekend of games, twenty eight of the nation's best college hockey players put their jerseys back on to play a different set of games.

Within just a few minutes, the children were playing with the Cornell team as if they were best friends. One preschooler dressed as a police officer and made an effort to 'arrest' as many Cornell players as possible!

Thank you Cornell Coach Schafer and all 28 players. 🌿



#GIVINGTUESDAY RAISES MONEY FOR AUTISM LENDING LIBRARIES

Thank you for your generous support of Racker's Autism Lending Libraries during the 2019 Giving Tuesday campaign! With your support we were able to purchase a variety of Yogibo products including a Hugibo, back supports and body pillows, compression tank tops that provide gentle pressure for sensory needs, tactile blocks to create a sensory walkway, a giant musical piano playmat and so many more fun and exciting products. Families are invited to visit us in one of our three locations and see what we have to offer. To schedule a visit at one of our Autism Lending Libraries, please contact the following staff:

TOMPKINS

Marlene Tagliavento at (607) 272-5891 ext. 226 or marlenet@racker.org

CORTLAND

Amanda Hudson at (607) 753-9375 ext. 119 or amandah@racker.org

TIOGA

Megan Kaminsky at (607) 687-8929 ext. 406 or megank@racker.org

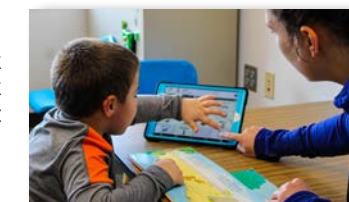


Left: Preschooler plays with Yogibo

ELKS GRANT AWARDS IPADS FOR CLINICAL TRIALS

Racker received a generous contribution from New York Elks Major Projects, Inc. to help purchase *augmentative and alternative communication* (AAC) tools for children in our Early Childhood Education programs. AAC tools provide a means of communication for those that cannot speak. With funding through the Elks' Special Projects Grant, Racker was able to purchase two iPads, protective cases and three communication applications including *LAMP* and *Proloquo2go*.

Speech pathologists will work together with children during 6 week trial periods to determine the most appropriate, efficient, and functional iPad communication app for each child to be successful. Our speech pathologists will then recommend to the school districts the AAC tool that works best for each child. Each Racker speech pathologist supports up to 22 children, many who will need to experiment and try different AAC tools. Thanks to the Elks, the move toward independent communication will happen much more quickly and smoothly for multiple children. We will be able to support the children with their "voice" which is giant step towards lifelong empowerment and independence. 🌿



Speech Pathologist Kayla Weaver works with student during iPad trials

SPRING 2020

OUTLOOK

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WWW.RACKER.ORG

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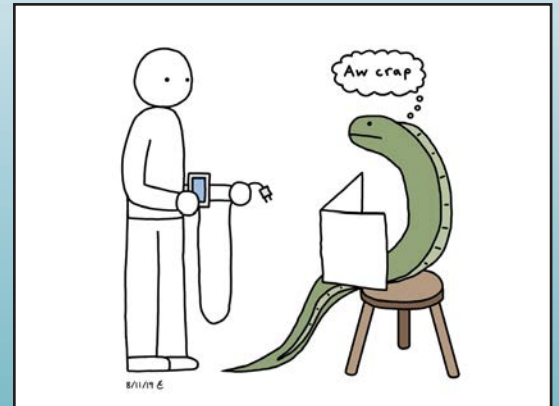
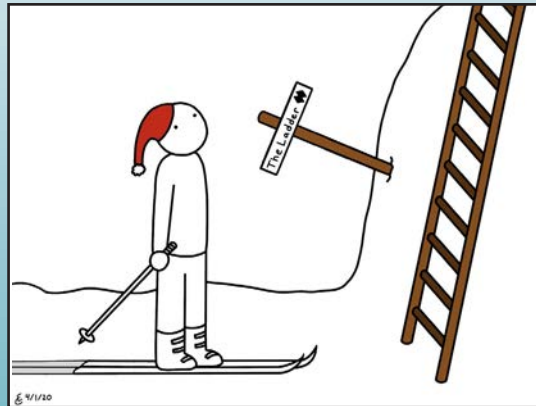
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Ethan Carlson is a student at Ithaca High School. As an individual on the autism spectrum, Ethan sees the world a bit differently than most people. This is especially seen in his cartoons.

Ethan's drawings are purposefully minimalist in order to make readers focus less on the imagery, and more on the humor that is ingrained in it. Many of his cartoons focus on the absurdity of everyday life, while others examine the irony of surreal situations.

In addition to the *Racker Outlook*, Ethan has been publishing comics in his high school's magazine: *IHS Tattler*.

Thank you Ethan for sharing your excellent cartoons with us!

EDITOR Bob Brazill, Director of Community Relations and Development

DESIGN Joshua Skellett, Creative Content Strategist

CONTRIBUTORS Bob Brazill, Ethan Carlson, Cris Donovan, Jennifer Frank, Cheryl Herold, Lucy Merrill, Perri LoPinto, Joshua Skellett

PHOTOGRAPHY Joshua Skellett, Racker Staff, and Friends of Racker

