

OUTLOOK

Racker 

QUARTERLY | SUMMER 2022

WWW.RACKER.ORG

SATURDAY JULY 16TH

4PM

LYNAH RINK CORNELL UNIVERSITY



Racker
RIVALS
BIG RED
presented by TOMPKINS
BANKING | INSURANCE | WEALTH



WELCOME OUR NEW

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CRIS DONOVAN

Plus: NEW DIRECTOR OF PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS
& A VISIT FROM THE OPWDD COMMISSIONER



FROM THE DESK OF
CRIS DONOVAN
Executive Director, Racker

When I joined Racker (then the Special Children's Center) as a Team Director in Racker's Residential Program in 1998, I never imagined that one day, 24 years later, I would be starting as this amazing organization's Executive Director. I am beyond grateful for this next opportunity to continue to play a role in helping people with disabilities to lead fulfilling lives. While there are plenty of challenges for us to work through together in the months and years to come, I would like to start with gratitude.

I am so grateful for our Racker team. The dedication and effectiveness of the staff working at Racker is awe-inspiring. More often than not, I leave work at the end of the day reflecting on just how talented my colleagues are and how lucky I am to work with all of them. This solid, skilled, and innovative team makes being part of this organization an absolute joy.

I am grateful for Racker's history. Our foundation is strong thanks in large part to the work of our namesake, Dr. Franziska Racker. Her dedication to supporting and valuing the uniqueness of each person continues to shape the work of Racker today. Her commitment to the professional development of all staff is especially impactful, as we continue to work toward her goals for us to innovate and learn.

I am filled with gratitude for mentors. For me, that includes Roger Sibley and Dan Brown. Their leadership and faith have meant the world to me, and I will continue to draw from their wisdom as we take our next steps forward.

I am thankful for you! Our friends, supporters, families, volunteers, and partners make it possible to bring Racker's mission to life. I am looking forward to opportunities to learn more from you about what you see that makes Racker so special. I want to talk about how we can work together to respond to the challenges ahead and to develop creative and meaningful goals that will make a difference for children and adults with disabilities in our region.

This issue of the Outlook will introduce you to a new face in our Preschool, spotlight a special visit, and highlight a wonderful goal that we are hoping to achieve with your help this year at our annual Racker Rivals Big Red hockey fundraiser. There is a lot happening at Racker!

I am so excited to take this journey with you. Thank you for being part of the ride and please reach out at any time.

With big gratitude and my sincere appreciation,

Cris



RACKER RIVALS BIG RED: A MILESTONE TO CELEBRATE



Racker Rivals Big Red heads into its 8th year of raising money for Racker's Early Childhood Services. During that time, we had the privilege of hosting some great NHL players, welcomed back some hard-skating Cornell hockey alumni, some toothless bears and recreational hockey players from around the region. The game brings out the best in our community and has become a summertime staple for families.

This year the event is set to surpass the \$1,000,000 in total amount raised since 2014. This incredible milestone would not be possible without our partnership with Cornell hockey and head coach Mike Schafer. Over the years, Mike has spent countless hours recruiting big name NHL players like Joe Nieuwendyk, Mike Richter, and Dustin Brown to name a few. He has tasked all players and fundraisers to support our player pledging page and raise money to support Racker. Mike works closely with his former captain, Topher Scott, to iron out game day logistics and ensure the players enjoy the game and understand the mission of Racker. Without Coach Schafer, this fundraising game would not be on the precipice of hitting the million dollar milestone. He is the captain of the Big Red side and great friend to Racker.

We are thankful and humbled by the support of our local community. Business leaders step up each year to support the game through high level and player sponsorship. Success of this type needs a catalyst and leadership within the business community. Since the inception of the game, Tompkins Community Bank has stepped up as the presenting sponsor, leading the charge for other local businesses to support the game and the services of Racker. CEO Greg Hartz is a staunch supporter of Racker, and has championed this event through his time, effort and marketing resources. Greg is the captain of the Racker side, and has a strong desire to beat Mike this year.

Lastly, Racker thanks all of those friends who have volunteered, fundraised, pledged a player, or played in the game. This event is an embodiment of a thoughtful and generous community. This game means so much to our organization. Thank you to everyone for helping us move to that million dollar milestone. 🍷

2022 RACKER RIVALS BIG RED

Pledge your favorite player! *Every pledge will support children with disabilities in our community.*

Name _____ This gift is anonymous

Billing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

PAYMENT TYPE credit card (enter information below) check enclosed (make payable to Racker)

Please bill my: (circle one) VISA / MASTERCARD / DISCOVER / AMEX

Card number: _____ 3-digit security code _____

Name on card: (please print) _____

Expiration date: _____ Signature: _____

**Please return completed form (this full page) along with payment to:
Racker, 3226 Wilkins Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.**

Or make your pledge online at: www.racker.org/hockey

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Mike Schafer - Team Big Red Captain | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Pat Ouckama |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Greg Hartz - Team Racker Captain | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Ben White |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Anthony Angello - Celebrity | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Sean Schmidt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Alex Green - Celebrity | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Andrew Karolyi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Joe Nieuwendyk - Celebrity | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Chris Howard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Tommy Harley - Celebrity | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Paul Zarach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Topher Scott | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Mitch Stephens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Matt Hedge | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Jeffrey Kirkwood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Brandon French | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ John Schafer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Mike Schafer | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Dusty Paul |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Sean Flanagan | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Brandon Kasel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Scott Pronti | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Jason Weinstein - Honorary Coach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Brian Myers | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Doug Cole - Honorary Coach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Nick Rock | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Ben Malina - Honorary Coach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Chris Collins | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Christian Pado - Honorary Coach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Doug Derraugh | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Arthur Mintz - Announcer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Tom Turck | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ Chris Allinger - Announcer |



July 16th 2022 - ALL PROCEEDS FROM THIS YEAR'S RACKER RIVALS BIG RED exhibition game will be put towards the much needed areas of our various Early Childhood Services. While we offer many support opportunities for people with disabilities through every stage of their life, our Early Childhood programs are the most underfunded.

An investment in Early Childhood programs can reduce the need for additional services later in life and sets the stage for continued success.

Our Preschool Special Education, Early Intervention, Evaluation, and Clinical Services help children of all abilities develop the skills they need to build healthy relationships, achieve future school success, and gain confidence. Racker professionals, working together with individuals' families, help provide the tools and resources needed to best support and encourage children at home and in the community.

These programs are life-changing for children. Unfortunately, our Early Childhood Services program runs at a remarkable deficit. Year after year, state funding for these programs continues to fall short of the need.

Your support for Racker Rivals Big Red helps provide essential funding for the Early Childhood programs and makes a huge difference to the children we serve. Whether it's pledging a player, sharing the message, or even volunteering – **WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

**Thank you to all the Top Tier Sponsors
that have already stepped forward to make this year's
Racker Rivals Big Red one of the best yet!**



NEW DIRECTOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS & EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

I am Brian Rozewski and I am honored and excited to have been named the new Director of Preschool Programs & Early Childhood Centers here at Racker.

I have worked at Racker for two years in residential services. I began my journey as a Team Director at the Etna house where I really began learning about Racker and residential services. I covered as a Team Director at Rivers Edge in Tioga County for a period of time. Then I held the position as a Team Director at the Dryden Road house. Shortly after I started there, I accepted a position as Regional Director for the residential program. I had the chance to oversee 6 houses in Tioga and Cortland County. Throughout my time in residential I met many great residents, families and staff. I formed many long lasting relationships which I will continue even after leaving residential.

My journey at Racker has been a very fulfilling one thus far, and as I look back on all I have been able to experience it seems all roads have led me to this wonderful opportunity of Director of Preschool & Early Childhood Centers. I am excited to dive in! We have experienced some wonderful accomplishments, and we are excited to provide a living wage to all of our employees. This achievement will help us retain our hard-working teachers and staff while attracting new team members. Working in the preschool program can be challenging, but very rewarding as well. We make a big difference in the lives of the children and families we serve.

My interest in Early Childhood Education began in high school. I attended the Childcare Teacher Prep Program through my local BOCES. I then attended Cazenovia College for Early Childhood Education and moved onto SUNY Cortland for Physical Education.



I worked as the Head Start/ Early Head Start Director in Cortland County for 12 years. In that role I had the opportunity to work with many community organizations and families. Throughout my time there, we had the opportunity to bring in many new initiatives to enhance the lives of the children and families we served. I learned a lot about the importance of development at the youngest of ages and how important the home to school connection is.

A child's early years are the foundation for his or her future development, providing a strong base for lifelong learning and learning abilities, including cognitive and social development.

Racker's vision of a 'world where all people know they belong' fits into our preschools by creating inclusive learning environments. Inclusive learning environments helps develop positive self-images, friendship and social skills, problem-solving, and respect for others in children. Most young children have not yet been exposed to stereotypes attached to people with visible and invisible disabilities. I envision our preschools to be a supportive environment for all learners, including those with learning differences and one that can also challenge and engage gifted and talented learners.



VISIT FROM OPWDD COMMISSIONER KERRI NEIFELD



On Monday, June 6th the Commissioner of the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Kerri Neifeld, and Roger Bearden, Executive Deputy Commissioner, visited Racker. Her visit began at our Cortland Preschool and one of our residential homes. Commissioner Neifeld toured the facilities and met some of our staff and the people in our residential program.



Commissioner Neifeld took the time to learn about Racker's ability to provide a living wage to our employees, and some of the employment trends we are seeing because of this achievement. She listened as our directors discussed some obstacles we face as we deliver services to the people in OPWDD (Office for People With Developmental Disabilities) programs. The discussions provided insight from both perspectives and created open lines of communication.

She concluded the day by speaking at an event honoring Dan Brown's retirement. Thank you so much to Kerri for visiting - we loved the opportunity to connect and engage with you! 🌲



Kerri Neifeld

Commissioner
Office for People with Developmental Disabilities

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OUTLOOK

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OUR MISSION:

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

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