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Racker
RIVALS
BIG RED
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BANKING | INSURANCE | WEALTH

JULY 27TH LYNNAH RINK

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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From The Desk Of



CRIS DONOVAN

Executive Director
Racker

Partnerships

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

This African proverb speaks to the importance of partnership, shared vision, and a collective care. This issue of the Outlook dives into some of Racker's partnerships and relationships. Partnerships that help us take our mission to the next level and make our vision come to life.

As we were thinking about this Outlook and what to include, we learned about the passing of a dear friend and partner, Dan McNeil. Dan became involved with Racker in the early 1980s as our landlord for the building we still use for our Cortland County Preschool Program, Autism and Sensory Library, and a variety of spaces for other program areas.

Dan served on Racker's Board of Directors for six years, eventually earning the title of Emeritus Director, an honorary title for longtime friends and volunteers at Racker. Racker was certainly not the only organization to benefit from Dan's friendship. His life was one of service, relationship, and generosity.

Soon after I became Executive Director, I had coffee with Dan and his son, David. I had known Dan for many years, but this was the first time I really had the opportunity to just spend time talking with him outside of an event or a large group. During our time together that day, which of course was after his daily swim, we talked about leadership, our passions for the fields we chose, how to build better work-life balance – followed closely by his advice on why David and I need to be better at delegating and teaching others, and how to be sure we are taking care of those we are fortunate enough to lead. Dan was humble, astute, generous, kind, and insightful and I left feeling incredibly lucky to have had that time with him.

When we want to go far, we must go together. Together, we have opportunities to share expertise and insights, bring different voices to the table, enhance our understandings, bridge resource gaps, and stand arm in arm toward a world where all people know they belong. Dan McNeil was someone we can all look to as an inspiration for "together we can go far." He saw the interconnectedness of communities and was a bridgebuilder and weaver of hope and help. A true partner and a true friend who will be sorely missed.

Cris



OUR MISSION:

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



Advancing Community Accessibility & Inclusion

A world where all people know they belong isn't something that can happen in a vacuum. Many of our programs and services are designed specifically around partnerships including things like our ongoing partnerships with TST and OCM BOCES as well as regular partnerships and collaboration with area school districts. In addition to the ongoing collaborative efforts, some of Racker's program staff take their work on the road to help other organizations in their quest to be welcoming spaces for all.

In an inspiring initiative to make community spaces more accessible and equitable, Racker staff members Sue Raymond, Maureen Mozeleski, and Lyndsey Paulin have joined forces with multiple community partners to assist them on their path toward more welcoming, accessible, and sensory friendly environments.

Racker's Autism and Sensory Library welcomes numerous visitors to explore different materials and supplies that can be helpful for families AND organizations. Recently, the library staff hosted a group from Ithaca College's School of Health Sciences and Human Performance and the Occupational Therapy team from IC. In addition, they worked with Cornell University's The Learning Strategies Center (LSC) to open a Sensory Room for students. The LSC Sensory Room is designed as a place for students, especially those who identify as neurodivergent, to find respite or escape from sensory overload.

Continuing the work, the Racker team has been working with REACH and Cayuga Medical Center (CMC) toward increasing health equity for people with disabilities. Their conversations inspired a visit to the CMC Emergency Department to identify areas of improvement to make the experience as accessible as possible. During the tour, led by Lori Bethke, Director of Critical Care Operations, the Racker team was given an in-depth look at the emergency department's waiting area, registration, and care spaces. This firsthand exploration allowed the team to identify specific sensory and accessibility needs that could improve the experience for patients and their families.

This amazing team has also worked closely with the Southworth Library in Dryden as they crafted a grant proposal to make their space more accessible. The library



From left: Lyndsey Paulin, Julia Ressler, Maureen Mozeleski & Sue Raymond

is already an incredibly welcoming and community focused location and is well used by people Racker supports! Diane Pamel, Library Director said, "Since the pandemic, we have welcomed individuals from the Racker residential facilities and their caregivers for visits to the library as a safe social space. Through our interactions with these folks, we were inspired to see how we could modify our space and programming to better accommodate people living with disabilities and other challenges." Racker's team helped Diane identify potential materials, supplies, and space use to maximize the funding and provide the best possible experience for the library patrons. The Southworth Library will be continuing to hear from the community through a series of meetings and surveys to maximize their accessibility and access. Please keep an eye on their website for details.

The Racker team is enthusiastic about their ongoing collaborations and the potential for future community partnerships, working toward a shared goal of supporting people with disabilities to experience a world where they truly know they belong.



Racker's Partnership with Cornell Hockey

A Decade of Making A Difference



JULY 27TH
Lynah Rink

2:30pm - Family Skate
4:00pm - Game



Courtesy of
Excellus 

Since its inception in 2014, the Racker Rivals Big Red Hockey game has successfully raised \$1.2 million to support early childhood services at Racker. This annual event, led by Cornell Men's Hockey Coach Mike Schafer, along with former Cornell Captain Topher Scott and Tompkins Community Bank Vice President Matt Hedge, has united the community and continues to make a difference in the lives of local children.

Tompkins Community Bank has been the presenting sponsor for all ten years, underscoring the importance of strong community partnerships. Their unwavering support, alongside the efforts of players, donors, Racker staff, and corporate sponsors, has been instrumental in the event's success. These dedicated impact players have ensured that children in the community receive the essential early support they need.

This game is the epitome of partnership. The game's success is a product of the relationship with Big Red hockey, their coaches, former players and friends. It takes a lot of helping hands for this game to run smoothly and Racker works closely with many different departments at Cornell. We are so grateful for the ease of communication and teamwork from our friends at the University.

Ten years of Racker Rivals Big Red Hockey is a testament to the incredible generosity and support of the community. Each year, individuals and businesses rally behind the event, attend the game and recognize the importance of investing in early childhood services. Over 70 volunteers lend their

time to ensure the day runs smoothly and everyone has a great time! The funds raised have made a tangible difference, providing resources for education, healthcare, and developmental programs that directly benefit young children and their families.

Moreover, the impact of Racker Rivals Big Red extends far beyond the dollars raised. It serves as a powerful reminder that when our community comes together, we are all game changers in the lives of local families.

The dedication and effort from all involved—players, donors, Racker staff, volunteers' corporate sponsors, and the presenting sponsor, Tompkins Community Bank—have been pivotal in the event's continued success. Thank you to everyone involved in this important game. The Racker Rivals Big Red Hockey game exemplifies the profound impact that a united community can achieve.

Many of the dollars raised comes from our player pledging. Racker Rivals Big Red Hockey takes a peer-to-peer fundraising approach- asking our community to make donations in support of a individual player. All players are asked to raise funds on an online platform reaching out to their networks, and engaging with friends, family, colleagues, and community members.

Player pledging is underway! Follow the QR code to pledge all your favorite players and help their team start with a one-goal lead! All donations support Racker's Early Childhood programs and help kids in our community!





THANK YOU TO OUR TOP TIER SPONSORS!



THANK YOU TO OUR JERSEY SPONSORS:

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SUNY Cortland & Racker

Partnership in Education and Communication

Throughout our years of service in our community, one thing has made the impact of Racker far-reaching and sustainable: our partnerships. Over the years, Racker has developed strong partnerships with local colleges, businesses, corporations, and individuals that have propelled our mission of belonging to the forefront of our work and furthered our range of services. We have been able to reach more people in need and have a more profound impact because of our partnerships. Our partners have held our hands, supported us fiercely, and made the journey of making the world a more equitable place a little easier. Every year, we develop new relationships that will last through time and help further support individuals with disabilities and their families. This year, we developed a new partnership with the State University of New York Cortland that is targeted toward helping our Early Childhood programs, giving children more access to Augmentative and Alternative Communications (AAC) to assist them in their overall development and communication.

The demonstration was led by Dr. Nimisha Mutiah, Professor of Speech and Language Pathology at SUNY Cortland, and Sue Raymond, Clinical Director at Racker. Dr. Mutiah partnered with Racker's Cortland Early Childhood Center to create a pilot program for first-year graduate students in speech pathology to work with Racker children and their special education teachers and classroom teams, in partnership with and under the supervision of Racker's Speech Language Pathologists, using augmented and alternative communication software (AAC).

This initiative gave SUNY Cortland students more practical experience grounded in their pedagogical knowledge. The AAC technology, which can be used on iPads, allows students with communication disabilities to communicate by clicking images, which are spoken aloud by the software, allowing the child's teachers and parent to understand their needs. This partnership helps to support the excellent work agency speech pathologists are already doing, while enhancing access to new technology. During the final presentation by the students, it was evident how this partnership had empowered the children and students. The results were tangible - some children spoke for the first time after using the AAC technology, moving closer to their goals. These moments were particularly meaningful for Alison Bryan, MS CCC-SLP and Racker's Speech Department



Team Leader. "It was especially exciting for me to see the thrill on the graduate students' faces when the child they were working with began to spontaneously communicate using the specific app that was being trialed."

This partnership enhances the speech program and solidifies the educational plan for these children, demonstrating its significant impact. Alison further noted "The graduate students seamlessly engaged with our team and provided us with not only a "second set of eyes" on some of our little ones but provided us with the most current software and technology recommendations and with the rationales for their recommendations based on the latest assessment protocols that are being used on our field."



We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our partners for their unwavering support of Racker throughout the years. Your support has been instrumental in our mission to make the world a more equitable place, and we look forward to continuing our successful collaborations in the future. We are hopeful that this new partnership with the SUNY Cortland Communication Disorders and Sciences Department can continue and expand.



Recent Grants Awarded

Racker was the recent recipient of two major grants from New York State; one that will update specific facility infrastructure, and a second that will expand on crisis support for children and youth who have mental health and I/DD diagnoses and their families.

The Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program (NICIP) is a one-time \$141,033 distribution that allows Racker to make a major infrastructure update at the Wilkins Road location in Ithaca, NY. The update being made in Spring/Summer of 2024 is to the HVAC system throughout the building. This update will improve efficiency, reduce annual maintenance, and allow for off-site control and monitoring. Furthermore, this update provides an interface for non-HVAC professionals to better make changes and understand the current state of the system. The work is expected to be completed by the fall.

The second grant Racker procured is from the NYS Office of Mental Health to establish a Home-Based Crisis Intervention (HBCI-DD) team focused on children with developmental disabilities struggling with mental health challenges. This NYS OMH grant highlights the increased need for children and adolescent aged mental health treatment and a unified delivery of services that benefit individuals with mental health and I/DD diagnoses. This grant award of \$2.5 million dollars will be distributed over 5 years. The award will allow us to create several new Racker employment opportunities and will provide immediate support to families at the time of a child's mental health crisis, continuing to collaborate over four to nine weeks. With the establishment of additional skills and supports, children and youth with mental health challenges will be able to stay on course with their goals and reduce psychiatric intake throughout their lives.



Walking with Our Communities

Racker was thrilled to be part of the community festivities at the Owego Strawberry Festival Parade and the Cortland Dairy Parade. Both events featured large crowds, delicious food, and wonderful people, creating a vibrant atmosphere. Our team enjoyed connecting with the community, sharing smiles, and celebrating together. Thank you to everyone who stopped by to say hello and support our mission of belonging.



Participants of Cortland Dairy Parade (below) and Owego Strawberry Festival (right)



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PLEDGE A PLAYER!



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