



Racker

RIVALS

BIG RED

for

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Presented by
TOMPKINS
BANKING | INSURANCE | WEALTH

SATURDAY, JULY 12TH

4PM Lynah Rink, Cornell
2:30PM - Friends & Family Skate

Meaningful
Days
pg.3

Cornell Hockey Coach
Mike Schafer Retires
pg.5

Community Impact
Breakfast
pg.6

The
After-Schoolers
pg.7

From The Desk Of



CRIS DONOVAN
Executive Director
Racker

Our Vision

We envision a world where all people know they belong.

Our Mission

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

Summer in our region brings a lot of really wonderful things! We make the most of the season by spending time outdoors - sharing meals with friends, listening to outdoor concerts, hiking in the different parks and gorges, and time in or on our regional lakes and rivers. Obviously, the one special reason to be indoors is to attend Racker Rivals Big Red!

Recently, I've been hearing from friends of Racker, staff, and partners who are concerned about the potential impacts of the Federal government's current budget proposals on Racker's services. Like most disability organizations, Racker is primarily funded by Medicaid. While we are fortunate to have diversity in our funding streams, including the generous donations and support of Racker Rivals Big Red - significant Medicaid cuts or restrictions at the federal level will have a real impact on our programs.

Services for people with disabilities are generally funded through a Medicaid program called Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). These services, while not federally mandated, are designed to help people with disabilities access the services they need to live, work, and recreate in their home communities rather than in hospitals or institutions. Because HCBS services are optional, even when there is no specific language about cutting these critical services in the budget documents, the result of a system-wide reduction can result in reductions that reach disability services and harm support systems currently in place.

What does this all mean for Racker? We are working with our state and federal associations to help ensure our representatives understand the ripple effects of these proposals on their constituents. We are also making contingency plans for potential changes. You can help, too. Please visit the ANCOR Amplifier at ancor.org/amplifier to learn more and take action.

Racker's vision is a world where ALL people know they belong. Communities are not complete without all of their members, including people with disabilities, and we will continue our hard work and commitment to that vision.

This issue of the Outlook highlights some of the work that brings that vision to life. You'll read about the friendships, belonging, and togetherness that make life meaningful - from our long-standing friendship with Coach Mike Shafer and always anticipated Racker Rivals Big Red hockey game, to our Community Impact Breakfast honoring the Sciencenter and Sara Hayes. We also spotlight several of our programs - Meaningful Days, Preschool, and Early Intervention - the successes they have in building connections. And lastly - you'll enjoy a story about pickup basketball games that started in 1993 and continues to bring together the TST BOCES and Racker staff today.

With deep gratitude,



Meaningful Days: Works Hard, Plays Hard



Meaningful Days is a day program primarily available to people from Racker’s Residential and Community Support programs. It offers person-centered programs, designed for each participant to pursue their own goals, while promoting active community engagement. Meaningful Days brings together people from all over Cortland, Tioga, and Tompkins counties to volunteer at local organizations, create friendships with each other, and establish lasting relationships within the community. At every opportunity, the Meaningful Days team discusses the importance of giving back and how it positively impacts both the person and their community.

The group maintains an active schedule, with regularly occurring volunteer initiatives, as well as keeping an eye out for on-the-fly opportunities. Whether it’s at local animal shelters, community centers like the YMCA/YWCA, the Salvation Army and other donation centers, and even food drives and so much more - the team is eager to connect with each other and make a difference.

The team is comprised of several coordinators that work together with Direct and Community Support Professionals to create opportunities that make every day meaningful. Joelle Neno, Assistant Director of Day Services, shares that, “Their creativity and energy are boundless. The growth the individuals attending Meaningful Days have experienced with their independence and belonging is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Meaningful Days team. The individuals at Racker experience a better quality of life by attending Meaningful Days. And the DSPs that support the individuals at program, I hope they experience more fun doing their job during Meaningful Days activities.”

Belonging is built on the shared work being done by people from Residential and Community Supports – two groups who in the past may have not traditionally had an opportunity to connect. But it doesn’t stop with

volunteering – Meaningful Days knows how to work hard AND play hard!

In May, Meaningful Days hosted their 2nd annual spring cookout at Stewart Park in Ithaca. For the second year in a row, through amazing group effort and incredible staff support, the cookout had another tremendous turnout! The weather was beautiful, the food was plentiful, and good times were had by all.

Planning the cookout was part of the program. The people who participate in Meaningful Days were involved every step of the way: from choosing what food would be served, to setting up the event, to the activities and games that took place – the Meaningful Days crew did it all! Orryn Mahaley, Senior Direct Support Professional, says that during the planning process and day of the cookout “it was amazing to see how involved and engaged everyone was!” Joelle adds that “I am so proud of the work the Meaningful Days team has done-both programmatically as a whole, and for this specific event.”

Attendees and their guests enjoyed flower planting in special customized one-of-a-kind pots, a big game of basketball, yard games, table activities, sensory materials, and some even practiced their grilling skills! Orryn mentions, “It was especially memorable seeing how much pride some of the individuals took in cooking for others or in creating their own culinary masterpiece.” One attendee from residential stated she had “a super fun time and loved all the food options.” Another individual enthusiastically agreed that they enjoyed the fire safety conversations, food preparation process, creative crafting, meeting new people, and enjoying the beautiful views at Stewart Park!

The 2nd Annual Spring Cookout was a wonderful time filled with good food, good friends, and good fun. *What better way to spend a meaningful day?*





Racker Rivals Big Red (RRBR), our annual exhibition style hockey game fundraiser, is happening on Saturday, July 12th at Cornell University’s Lynah Rink. Once again, friends & family are invited this year to skate at the legendary rink from 2:30 to 3:30PM. The puck is set to drop for the main event at 4PM. This is Racker’s largest fundraiser of the year and holds some additional significance in 2025.

Following his well-deserved retirement, Mike Schafer passes the RRBR baton to new Cornell Hockey head coach Casey Jones. We’re deeply grateful for Coach Schafer’s involvement with Racker Rivals Big Red for the last decade – his involvement, vision, and tireless fundraising has made this event a behemoth of opportunity for our Early Childhood programs.

This year, our logo for this event has also evolved. We’re pleased to share that the logo prominently highlights the purpose of the event: Racker Rivals Big Red for Early Childhood. It’s an honor to work with partners like Cornell Hockey and Tompkins Financial towards a shared vision of a world where all people know they belong, and we owe a debt

of gratitude to our partners that make this event a success every year.

Racker’s Early Childhood Services are multi-faceted and support children in infancy throughout their preschool years. Studies repeatedly show that adequate support during these years reduces the financial and emotional strain on families – and public systems – throughout the lifespan of a person with disabilities. The impact of Racker Rivals Big Red is life changing – for children, for their families, and for our entire community.

Early Childhood programs facilitate an atmosphere in which belonging can blossom. Opportunities to learn and be connected are fundamental characteristics of belonging. Without the funds raised by Racker Rivals Big Red, the spaces where development, breakthroughs, and connections happen – with other children and community partners might not exist or would operate under major financial constraints.

**BUY TICKETS
PLEDGE A PLAYER**



racker.org/hockey



BELONGING IN THE CLASSROOM WITH AAC DEVICES

An important relationship celebrated in Racker's Early Childhood programs is with SUNY Cortland's Communication Disorders & Sciences program, which has helped foster belonging and connection between students in the Cortland preschool. SUNY students from Dr. Muttiah's graduate level classes have spent several semesters introducing new Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices to the children and supporting and expanding the use of children's current AAC devices.

Working alongside Racker's Speech Language Pathologists, the graduate students collaborated with the children's classroom teams to teach youngsters to learn the device that works best for them. One SUNY student helped a preschooler, who independently used his AAC device as a primary mode of communication with the adult staff, learn to effectively use it in social interactions with his peers. By modeling the AAC device with a peer in the classroom, and fostering peer to peer interactions, the child began using his AAC device on the playground to communicate with his classmates and comment on activities. This young communicator's willingness and receptiveness to utilize his AAC device in a socially interactive way emerged through belonging, and friendship.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Early Intervention services provide direct support to children and their families ages birth to 3 who are found to have delays or differences in their development. In the birth to 3 time period, children are learning, growing and changing at a rapid rate. There is an incredible opportunity to positively impact development in this age group, supporting participation and belonging with same-age peers, family members, and the larger community.



Funding for early intervention from state and federal sources does not see the same adjustments and increases (if any) that other publicly funded programs do. Gaps in funding for EI services must be closed through alternative means – primarily grants and fundraising. Racker Rivals Big Red is a key component to ensuring funding gaps are narrowed – Kellie Hummel, Racker Early Intervention Team Leader, said it best: The Racker Rivals Big Red fundraiser allows Racker to continue to prioritize providing early intervention services in our community.



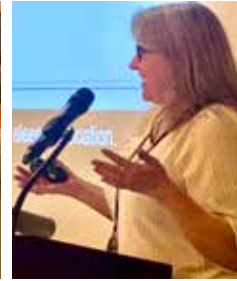
COACH MIKE SCHAFER RETIRES

Cornell Men's Hockey Coach Mike Schafer celebrated his retirement at the conclusion of the 2024-2025 ECAC Ice Hockey season after decades of coaching at Cornell University. Coach Schafer is as renowned in the philanthropic community as he is in the hockey community. On ice, he has coached up and coming legends to not only be successful athletes, but to be successful and compassionate humans. For years, Schafer has led his team to win on and off the ice. Even at the height of ECAC hockey season, Schafer has his team visit Racker's Margaret Gibson Preschool to learn about our mission and vision while spending quality time with the students. That's only where Schafer's commitment begins.



Bob Brazill, Director of Community Relations and Development at Racker reflects that, "Racker Rivals Big Red has raised over \$1.4 million thanks to Mike Schafer's deep commitment to our community. His tremendous influence on this game has helped our early childhood programs thrive, giving thousands of children the tools they need to succeed. Everyone at Racker is profoundly grateful to Mike for his time, generosity, and his understanding of our vision of belonging." The importance of helping children that need it the most is an everyday reality for Coach. He takes the RRBR reins each year and always outdoes himself – fundraising for Racker's Early Childhood Services AND bringing in hockey heroes and legends to compete during Racker Rivals Big Red. Coach Schafer doesn't hesitate in his commitment to community. We're honored by his dedication to Racker and Racker Rivals Big Red.

Community Impact Breakfast



This past May, Racker held its first ever Community Impact Breakfast - a celebration of the power of community partnerships and, most importantly, the positive impact they have on the people we support. It was an opportunity to honor and present awards to the 2025 Community Partner and Special Friend.

Each year, Racker presents awards to the important members of our community who go above and beyond to remove barriers and ensure quality opportunities and connections for people with disabilities.

We're pleased to share that our Community Partner Award recipient this year is The Sciencenter. For over 20 years, Racker and The Sciencenter have enjoyed a partnership that continues to grow and support the mission of both organizations. Belonging, education, and opportunity happens at The Sciencenter! Thanks to the Partnership Pass Program, people at Racker have had decades of free access to hands-on, and interactive exhibits. But that's not all!

In collaboration with Racker, the Sciencenter Sensory Hours were developed for children whose sensitivities were a barrier to visiting the museum during typical hours. The connection continues to grow beyond that, as Racker and the Sciencenter are collaborating on best ways to support neurodivergent thinkers who attend summer camps. Inclusion, and opportunities to learn and be connected to others – the mental and physical spaces in which belonging happens – are at the forefront

of The Sciencenter's mission and vision. Truly, the Sciencenter has cultivated a place where people of all abilities can play, learn, and grow!

We were equally honored to present the Special Friend Award to Sara Hayes of Hayes Strategies. Sara has been invaluable in her work with The Neighborhood Depot building in Owego, NY. From the preplanning stages through to the ribbon cutting and beyond – Sara has been Racker's wise guide!

The Neighborhood Depot serves as a vital resource for Tioga County's most vulnerable residents and stands ready as an emergency response center in times of crisis. Without the work of Sara Hayes, the building would not be standing. Thanks to Sara, the community has a new place for connection, belonging, and safety. Not only is The Neighborhood Depot a convenient location for people receiving services, but it is also strengthening connections between organizations doing integral work in our community. The nonprofit hub that is The Neighborhood Depot exists in part because of our Special Friend, Sara Hayes!

"Racker is very fortunate to have great partnerships with many organizations and people in our community. Our honorees, Sara Hayes and the Sciencenter, represent Racker's commitment to creating spaces where all people know they belong." - Bob Brazill, Racker Director of Community Relations and Development.

Congratulations to our Community Award Winners!



The After-Schoolers



Belonging between coworkers and colleagues is just as important as the opportunities for belonging that we advocate for in the work we do at Racker. Strong connections between colleagues doing shared work establish a strong foundation for success. It's on this bridge of connection between coworkers that someone receiving services is elevated to a new perspective where growth can happen.

This philosophy, known to many as the Circle of Courage, is evident within our Children's Mental Health Programs at BOCES. Belonging comes full circle with a group at TST BOCES known as The After-Schoolers. Racker counselors and BOCES teachers have a tradition of playing an after-school basketball game once a week to share connections, camaraderie, and fun.

In 2025, a Racker therapist had basketball jerseys made to commemorate the connection – and acknowledging the power of belonging shared by Racker and BOCES that makes a difference in the lives of youth.

Dr. Andrew Rice, Racker Psychologist with the Children's Mental Health program at BOCES, reflects that, "We've been playing collaborative pick-up basketball since 1993 - well before many of our current players were even born. This speaks volumes about the enduring relationship between BOCES and Racker."

In this After School basketball game, it's the children and families that win.



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OUTLOOK

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