

# CHOICES

Community Options, Inc.

Supporting People with Disabilities Since 1989.

Spring 2006



Irina Menshenina, Fundraising and Marketing Director for Downside Up, an organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for

children with Down syndrome in Russia, made a special trip to the US to visit Community Options. COI hopes to partner with Downside Up in the future to strengthen services in Russia.

[www.communityoptionsonline.org/aboutus/usaidd.htm](http://www.communityoptionsonline.org/aboutus/usaidd.htm)

## Upcoming Events

**Pittsburgh, PA**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Annual Golf Invitational**  
**Youghiogheny Country Club**  
**May 22, 2006**

FORE!!!! COI of Pittsburgh is gearing up for the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Golf Invitational at the Youghiogheny Country Club. Registration and lunch begins at 11:00am, followed by a 12:00pm shotgun start. The cost is \$125 per player or \$450 per foursome.

Please contact Courtney Kazmeraski at (412) 431-7079 for additional information.

**Princeton, NJ**  
**15<sup>th</sup> Annual Razzle Dazzle Auction**  
**Cherry Valley Country Club**  
**May 19, 2006**

Come experience the magic of the roaring 20's and bid on fabulous items from the live and silent auctions. The cocktail hour begins at 6:30 PM followed by dinner and live auction at 7:30 PM. Tickets are \$75 each and are on sale now through May 8, 2006.

For more information contact Christine Larkin at 609.951.9900.

[www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org)

## Community Options 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Man of the Year

Jim McCaffrey, CEO of McCaffrey's Supermarkets, was honored on Saturday, March 4, 2006 at the Princeton Hyatt. McCaffrey was recognized for his dedication to the community and for his continuous support of nonprofit organizations.

For many years, Mr. McCaffrey has shared Community Options' goal of employing individuals with disabilities. He gives these individuals the opportunity to learn new skills and participate in their community by offering them job opportunities.



Community Options is proud to have Jim McCaffrey as its sixth Man of the Year.

## New Programs Develop in Binghamton

Binghamton University and Community Options of Binghamton have teamed up to participate in *Manley's Service Learning and Strategic Leadership Consulting Project*. Made possible by Manley's Mighty Mart, this project will consist of four student interns from BU developing Fortune 500-quality strategic leadership recommendations for Community Options. They will examine COI of Binghamton's programs, point out program strengths and weaknesses, and offer ideas on how to improve them. The interns will also assist Community Options in the upstart and strategic planning for a flower cart business that will provide consumers an opportunity to help run a business.

Community Options of Binghamton was also chosen to participate in *Opportunities for People through Services (OPTS)*, a program offered by the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities that allots money for agencies to develop new and creative programs for their individuals. Proposals for these programs stem from consumers and parents that express a need or desire for what they want and cannot find through the variety of services already offered.

OPTS has enabled COI to work with a horseback riding stable to provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in therapeutic horseback riding. Since this is not a typical offering, the OPTS proposal will help COI develop and fund this service. "This is a great opportunity to have our consumers benefit from participation in a wonderful activity such as horseback riding, an activity many do not participate in currently because families cannot afford the cost," said COI of Binghamton's Executive Director, Renee Spear. The OPTS program will provide funding so more families will be able to become a part of a fun and therapeutic activity like horseback riding.



## GOOD NEWS STORIES

### Pittsburgh, PA

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, Ray Seifert began working for Liberty Tax Service in Pittsburgh, PA. Ray had the desire to work for an organization in which he could dress up as a mascot. As an employee of Liberty Tax Service, Ray has the opportunity to assist with advertising as the company mascot. Ray can be found working Monday through Friday, proudly wearing an Uncle Sam or Statue of Liberty costume while informing area shoppers of the services Liberty Tax provides. When speaking with Ray, he will quickly tell you how much he loves his new position and wants to know when you will come out to see him in his costume. Everyone at the Pittsburgh office is proud of Ray and his newfound success!

### Albuquerque, NM

A client of COI Albuquerque's Traumatic Brain Injury Life Skills Coaching Service came to COI after suffering severe third degree burns and major internal injuries after receiving 7200 volts of electricity in a construction accident. After the accident, his life began to spiral downward. He was no longer capable of doing simple things, such as washing himself, shopping for food, or even counting money. He was eventually connected to Community Options through a case manager who received his case from a state social worker. With the help of a Community Options' Life Skills Coach, he began to get his life into focus. Contacts were made with the Brain Injury Fund and Habitat for Humanity Rehab Department to help with needed repairs to his house. He received reduced telephone rates from the phone company, support from local churches, and food from the Community Options' food bank. With help from COI, this client is well on his way back to a life of dignity.

## Project CARE: Same rewarding program, new and improved name!

Community Options' Department of Community Outreach introduces **Project CARE: Community Assisted Residence Enhancement**.

Project CARE, originally the Days of Caring program, was started by Morgan Castagna and is now run by Angie Smith. Through this very successful program, three more Mercer County homes, Robbinsville, River Road, and Carlton Avenue, recently received some tender loving care.

Community Options' staff members, family, and friends worked together to give the Robbinsville home a brand new coat of paint with colors chosen by the residents. One resident was so excited about the new look to his room that he couldn't wait to get his posters back up on the walls for that finishing touch!

Home Depot sponsored the day at the River Road home. Team Depot provided the home with new light fixtures, vents, and general maintenance and helped the COI volunteers put a fresh coat of paint on the interior of the house.

At the Carlton Avenue house, COI staff worked with some members of Rutgers' Phi Delta Chi pharmaceutical co-ed fraternity. Two of the individuals that live there were able to help out and were very excited to see the transformation.

Two homes in Mercer and Passaic counties will soon receive improvements from Project CARE. Educational Testing Service is sponsoring the Texas Avenue house and the Wendt Lane house has a team of volunteers from the William Paterson Theta Phi Alpha sorority ready and waiting to CARE!

## El Paso's Day Habilitation Program

It is with great pleasure that COI-Texas extends its gratitude to Dora Felix, Coordinator for the Day Habilitation Program (DHP) along with her dedicated trainers, Mike Martinez, Susana Angel, Maria Elena Avila, Sally Bernice Quintero, and Kenneth Katschke.

The DHP opened in April 2003 with a staff of two and approximately ten consumers. Since then, the Day Habilitation Program has grown to forty consumers and five staff members. Each trainer teaches classes to our consumers on hygiene, computers, art, and math.

Presently, the El Paso Day Habilitation building is being remodeled, and, to avoid the complexity of changing the transportation arrangements for the individuals we serve, we were able to lease a smaller space in the next building. The Day Habilitation staff has shown that they can pull together as a team to overcome any obstacles that come across their path. The team worked countless hours to ensure that the individuals continued to have a program to attend on a daily basis. Staff moved all of the furniture and equipment and coordinated the individual's schedules so everything would function as normally as possible. The DHP team has shown their patience, kindness, and their ability to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Renovation on the new site will be completed no later than June 1, 2006. This location will house DHP as well as the El Paso administrative offices. Reopening of this location will be celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony on behalf of the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

## Community Options comes to San Antonio

Community Options, Inc. of San Antonio, Texas has started 2006 with high hopes and expectations. They opened their first home on January 25, 2006 and anticipate the opening of their second home in the near future.

The San Antonio team is kicking off a small fundraiser by selling discount tickets to Fiesta Texas and will be running a booth at the King William Fair during Fiesta San Antonio April 21<sup>st</sup> through April 30<sup>th</sup>. Fiesta San Antonio is a ten-day, city wide, fun filled celebration with over 100 events and three major parades. It is considered "The Biggest Party in Texas."

San Antonio has much to offer and is very excited about becoming a part of the Community Options Family.

# Employees of the Quarter

## New Jersey

**John Mendenhall**

**Community Support Manager**

John has been the manager of our Robbinsville house since 1999 and has provided consistency and stability to the house through his outstanding leadership. He is a dedicated employee who continuously goes the extra mile for the individuals he supports and his employees. He is much loved by those who live in the house he manages and is a strong advocate for choice and empowerment. Community Options is fortunate to have such an incredible staff member who believes strongly in our mission and who is constantly challenging himself and everyone around him to better serve the individuals we support.

## New York

**Alinda Sisson**

**Community Support Staff**

Alinda Sisson is a part of New York's Community Support Staff who has gone above and beyond the call of duty. Alinda has Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and requires the use of a wheelchair, but she does not let this get in the way of her excellent service. She has worked with individuals of all ages during her almost three years with Community Options.

Currently, she is teaching an individual with Down syndrome to read, assisting a gentleman with housework in his apartment, and spending a lot of time with another independent woman who is seeking custody of her Autistic son. Alinda has helped this young woman with family court, working through complex family relationships, and seeking help from Social Services and Social Security. Together, they have found a new two bedroom apartment, sought out family training about Autism, and worked on self-esteem issues. With Alinda's help, this capable woman has tackled some very difficult life problems and gained a wonderful sense of empowerment and achievement.

Alinda is a very effective communicator, extremely compassionate, and, through her determination, provides a positive example that people with disabilities can overcome the obstacles to living a full and successful life.

## Pennsylvania

**Rasaud Grace**

**Community Support Staff**

COI of Pittsburgh is pleased to announce Rasaud Grace, Community Support Staff member, as Employee of the Quarter. Within almost two years, this remarkable man has tremendously impacted the lives of everyone at COI of Pittsburgh!

Rasaud works with an individual with physical limitations. It is absolutely amazing to see the strong determination he has for making radical changes in this individual's life. Each day, Rasaud ensures that our consumer participates in all daily programs and has the opportunity to go out within the community. For anyone observing this pair, they see how happy our consumer is in the presence of Rasaud and the strong commitment Rasaud has to making a difference in his life.

While Rasaud focuses all of his energy on making a difference in the life of this consumer, he is also making a difference in the lives of our staff. Rasaud is the type of employee who is never late, always polite, and extremely accommodating. These unique characteristics ensure that the residential site runs smoothly for all consumers, CSS staff, and office staff, resulting in a pleasant working environment. Therefore, on behalf of everyone at the Pittsburgh office, we would like to thank you, Rasaud, for empowering us all!

## Tennessee

**Evelyn Brassell**

**Community Support Staff**

Community Options of Nashville is delighted to have Evelyn Brassell, Community Support Staff, as Employee of the Quarter. Evelyn has been a part of our team for seven months. She spends her day taking individuals out into the community and seeing to their every need. Taking consumers to medical appointments, therapy sessions, and recreational activities, she works to guarantee that the individual's lives are fulfilled. The changes that Evelyn has made in these individual's lives are extraordinary.

Evelyn is a dynamic and energetic lady who is always smiling. She is flexible, hard working, always on time, and never complains. Her work ethic and determination to help improve the lives of the individuals that she works with really shows her character. She is a role model and motivator for all staff in the home as well as everyone she is around. Evelyn is a delight to have as part of our team!

## Texas

**Willie Harris**

**Community Support Coordinator**

Willie has been with Community Options Dallas for over two years. He started as Community Support Staff and is now a Community Support Coordinator. Willie displays the qualities you want all your staff members to possess. He has compassion, discipline, and integrity. He is very reliable and always goes above the call of duty for his consumers and staff. Willie secures free tickets from the Dallas Mavericks and Cowboys on a regular basis for our consumers. He also gets them into area high school and college athletic events for free. He encourages his staff to involve our consumers in the community by attending movies and church plays, visiting the zoo, going out to eat, and shopping in area malls. Willie is also a certified referee and volunteers for the Special Olympics and the area Boys/Girls Club. The Dallas office is proud to have Willie Harris for the Texas Employee of the Quarter.

## Wisconsin

**Gale Dodds-North**

**Community Support Staff**

Gale works out of the Franklin Sherwood location as a Community Support Staff member. She has been with COI for over four years and is just as enthusiastic today as she was four years ago. Gale will do anything for "her guys" at Sherwood House. Sometimes, she will even accompany them on the transit bus to their day program to ensure that they arrive safely, especially when there's a new driver on the route. Gale is loyal, dependable, and honest, and she goes above and beyond for the clients and for Community Options. She is without a doubt, "one of a kind."

## New Mexico

**Judi Lafleur**

**Business Manager**

Judi Lafleur, Business Manager in Albuquerque, has been with COI for over four years. Along with her responsibilities of submitting, tracking, and recording our billings, Judi is also our local HR person. Her job description, however, cannot do justice to all the things Judi actually does for the agency. She is invaluable with fundraising efforts, serves on various committees, and makes everyone who is a client or guest at COI feel at home. She is respected by all for her straightforward, yet compassionate, management style. Judi has become part of the glue that keeps our team together, and she deserves to be recognized as the Employee of the Quarter!

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[www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org)

## Executive Director Spotlight

Garth Platt, Executive Director for Chattanooga, relocated from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in November 2003 to open Community Options, Inc. in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Mr. Platt served previously as the Director of Employment Services and as Director of Residential Services with Community Options, Inc. during his five year tenure in Pennsylvania. He started the program in Chattanooga from scratch and has orchestrated a healthy expansion. Garth and his team currently support ten individuals in eight homes with 78 employees. Mr. Platt has a positive relationship with the State of Tennessee's Division of Mental Retardation Services and is continuously working with them in regard to referrals for additional expansion.

Mr. Platt, his team, and the program were recently audited by the State of Tennessee's Division of Mental Retardation Services for their Annual Quality Assurance Survey and received excellent scores. Garth has developed an extraordinary team in Chattanooga, and they all continue to strive for setting examples of best practices in supporting people with disabilities in the community. CONGRATULATIONS to Mr. Platt and the entire Chattanooga team!

## Amarillo Opens New Group Home

Amarillo is proud to announce the opening of their new home in January of 2006. The locally named Rushmore home will meet the residential needs of three gentlemen in Amarillo. One of the gentlemen now being housed in the Rushmore home came from a nursing home after another local provider decided that they could no longer meet his needs. If not for Community Options, he would have lost his HCS slot and the independence of choosing his residence. He is now happy to have his own bedroom and bathroom. He feels that he now has the independence to move about his home with pride instead of the sadness that surrounds a nursing home. His goal is to finish his GED and begin looking for employment. Amarillo is proud to meet his needs as well as those of the other two gentlemen residing in the Rushmore home.

### John Mendenhall Community Support Manager

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*Employees of the Quarter  
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