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# CHOICES

Community Options, Inc.

Supporting People with Disabilities Since 1989.

Summer 2006

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Classic August 14, 2006

Olde York Country Club  
Columbus, NJ

Join us for a day of golf at one of New Jersey's elite country clubs, rated "Best in New Jersey" by *Golf Digest*. The outing will include lunch, dinner, awards, auction and prizes. Please contact Morgan Castagna at 609-514-9494.

### 84 Lumber Classic – PGA Golf Tour September 14 – 17, 2006

Nemacolin Woodlands Resort,  
Pittsburgh, PA

COI has exclusive rights to sell tickets for this annual PGA Golf Tour. Come out and see world famous golfers while helping COI receive 100% of the proceeds from the tickets we sell! Tickets are on sale now through July 30th. One general admission ticket is good for any one day, Thursday, September 14 through Sunday, September 17. Tickets are \$15 per ticket and \$50 for four (4) tickets. Please contact Courtney Kazmeraski at 412-431-7079.

### 1st Annual Chattanooga Golf Classic August 25, 2006

Eagle Bluff Golf Club  
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Sponsored by First Tennessee Bank  
Please contact Garth Platt at  
423-892-0022.



Community Options is proposing to acquire an operational riding stable to provide Hippotherapy to individuals with disabilities. See article on page 4.

## Community Options' What Works? Conference Goes Deep in the Heart of Texas

The eyes of Texas opened wide on May 1<sup>st</sup> as people from all over the country descended upon Austin, Texas for Community Options' 1<sup>st</sup> Annual *What Works?* Conference. *What Works?*, a two-day conference, examined best practices for employment for people with disabilities. The conference, funded in part through a grant from the US Department of Education, took place on May 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Austin Omni Hotel Downtown. Focusing on three central themes, transition from school to work, supported employment, and entrepreneurial business efforts, the conference hosted some of the best and brightest speakers in the industry.

Terry Smith, Assistant Commissioner of the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, kicked off the conference speaking about the issues in Texas, highlighting transitions from school to work as one of the departments target areas for increased services in the next few years. John Hager, Assistant Secretary U.S. Department of Education, Special Education and Rehabilitative Services division, delivered the keynote address. Secretary Hager discussed current projects of the department, as well as the Projects with Industry program, highlighting the statistics from COI Austin's Go For It program. Breakout sessions completed the first day's activities, and covered a wide



John Hager, Assistant Secretary U.S. Department of Education, Special Education and Rehabilitative Services is greeted by Dr. York and Robert Stack.

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## "Connections Program" in Albuquerque

Community Options- Albuquerque in partnership with Transitional Living Services, a community mental health center, was recently awarded a grant from the United Way of Central New Mexico in the amount of \$27,500 as seed money for the establishment of the "Connections Program." "The Connections Program" is an innovative model of treatment to increase successful employment and entrepreneurial outcomes for persons with psychiatric disabilities and/or substance abuse problems. By focusing on people who have identified employment as a life goal, this intensive, goal-oriented, 12 week

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## GOOD NEWS STORIES

COI Dallas would like to take this opportunity to applaud Deidre H. a 29 year old female that has been on her own for a full year now. Deidre started out at home with her mother while receiving Foster Care Companion services from COI Dallas. During this time Deidre began working at Foley's department store in 1998. This past February, Deidre celebrated her eight year anniversary at Foley's. She has also been in her own apartment for a year and receives Supported Home Living services to assist her with her residential needs. She utilizes the public transit system to get back and forth to work. COI Dallas is proud of Deidre and her outstanding accomplishments.

Jorge Hurtado has been with Community Options, Inc. since November 2005. Jorge recently graduated from Jefferson High School in May 2005, and his goal was to obtain employment after graduation. In High School, Jorge did well in vocational training for food preparation and restaurant work, and his goal was to work in a restaurant environment, since he possessed the skills and knowledge to do well. With assistance from Community Options' Supported Employment program, Jorge's job abilities and skills were assessed and matched to several job possibilities near his home. In effect, Jorge was successfully placed at McDonald's in March 2006. He has shown great effort and excellent improvement at work, and is liked by all his co-workers. Congratulations Jorge!

Continued from page 1

### What Works?

variety of topics including: transition from school to work, supported employment, self-advocacy, training, leadership, and income.

Day two brought with it focus and development during the action plan discussion groups, which covered the three main themes: transition from school to work, supported employment and entrepreneurial business efforts. The awards and recognition luncheon recognized shining stars Amanda Dermid and Don Weidknecht from the Nashville chapter of the National Association of Catering Executives for their outstanding service to the Nashville COI COBAC. The conference wrapped up with a panel of foundations and nonprofit resource organizations that covered issues from a funder's perspective.



Amanda Dermid, Karen Hensely and Don Weidknecht at the What Works Conference.

The first annual Community Options' *What Works?* Conference was a success, and attendees walked away with an updated knowledge of the issues locally and nationally, new ideas, new contacts, and an excitement for the future. We look forward to continued participation through the conference listserv. For more information on how to participate in the **What Works? listserv**, visit [www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org).

### Continued from page 1 "Connections Program"

training program with linkages to vocational rehabilitation and ongoing mental health support will allow for the following:

- \* Create a training model for obtaining work and/or consumer owned businesses
- \* Employ more individuals with psychiatric disabilities and/or substance abuse problems
- \* Reduce misunderstanding and fear within the disability community regarding loss of benefits and other misconceptions regarding employment
- \* Present an alternative model of success in employment for consumers with psychiatric disabilities and/or substance abuse problems
- \* Present opportunities for consumer run businesses to the targeted population.

Community Options of Albuquerque is extremely excited about the "Connections Program" and knows it will be a great success!

## Mercer County Community Star

On May 8th 2006 at the Westin Princeton Hotel, Lonzy Rodgers accepted a Community Stars Award for the 7th Annual Community Stars Event provided by NJACP. Lonzy has been living in the Robbinsville group home since 1992. When he first moved in to the house, he was very shy, reluctant to talk to people, afraid to go into the community and attend community events. In the past few years, he has turned his life around. Lonzy now works on a cleaning crew and earns more than minimum wage. He has developed a friendship with a local barber and looks forward to his monthly visits to the barbershop. He enjoys professional wrestling and attends local events, socializes with friends and enjoys various community outings. He adopted a dog named Satin several years ago and enjoys feeding and playing with her. He has turned into a very responsible caregiver. He assisted his sister with planning a family trip to Florida last year and is planning a family trip to Disney World for later this year. Community Options Inc. of Mercer is very proud of Lonzy Rodgers!



# Employees of the Quarter

## New Jersey

**Christina Jones**

**Community Support Coordinator**

Community Options of New Jersey is pleased to announce Christina Jones, Community Support Coordinator, as Employee of the Quarter. Christina has been with Community Options since November 2004. She began her career within the agency as the Coordinator of Program Services. She was promoted to Community Support Coordinator in March, and in a very short time, has excelled in her new position. She is dependable, organized, dedicated, and has a huge heart willing to help anyone in need. She is extremely dedicated to the individuals we serve and will go above and beyond her daily duties to ensure they are receiving the highest quality of care. Community Options is fortunate to have such a valuable employee as part of their team.

## New York

**Paul Weckel**

**Assistant Executive Director**

Paul Weckel is the Assistant Executive Director for the Binghamton office. He has worked very hard on successfully getting services for TBI up and running in the Cortland and Thomkins areas and has taken the time to personally meet with everyone (consumers, parents and service coordinators) that is involved with the program. Paul also found and worked out details to open a new office in the Homer area which opened in Nov. 2005. Paul also restructured the set up of TBI bringing on a TBI coordinator to help oversee the services. Paul has completed these duties while still overseeing his previous duties such as incident reporting, training, SRC meetings, risk management meetings and QA. Paul is deserving of this award for his dedication and loyalty to the consumers and the agency.

## Pennsylvania

**Caron Warner**

**Residential Counselor**

Caron Warner, a Residential Counselor in Supported Living, has gone above and beyond the call of duty. Caron has put her personal life on hold many times over the past year to assist in the overall operations of the Bucks County facilities, adjusting her schedule to help in direct care coverage as well as ensuring the proper training of all of the Bucks County staff. Caron is the Medication Administration Trainer, and as the trainer she oversees all of the medication practicums for the residential program. Caron has recently become a certified trainer for First Aid and CPR thus keeping the individuals in a safe environment and keeps our programs in compliance with all of the required regulations.

## Tennessee

**Mashea Johnson**

**Residential Coordinator**

Mashea Johnson is the Residential Coordinator for the Nashville Office. Mashea has been with COI for 4 years and has worn many hats during that time. Nashville recently had a successful QA audit, and much of that success was due to Mashea's hard work and many long hours to make sure things were just right. Mashea is always willing to consider new and more efficient ways to manage the Residential Program. She's truly an asset to the COI team in Nashville.

## Texas

**Carrie Deer**

**Licensed Vocational Nurse**

Carrie Deer is the Licensed Vocational Nurse for the Amarillo Office. Carrie consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty and volunteers her free time to support the needs of the consumers in Amarillo. During holidays she takes treats to the group homes and invites the consumers to share the holiday with her and her family. Carrie truly has the heart and compassion needed for people with disabilities everywhere.

## Wisconsin

**Linda Ridley**

**Community Support Staff**

Linda Ridley currently works as a member of the Community Support Staff at the Amberidge facility in Wisconsin. She has been with COI for 2 1/2 years and is a model employee. Linda is dedicated, loyal, dependable, and cares very much for the people we support. She loves to work in the yard with the individuals planting flowers to make their home feel very inviting. Linda is a definite asset to the COI Wisconsin team.

## New Mexico

**Delores Orazco**

**Administrative Assistant**

Delores Orazco, the Administrative Assistant for the Albuquerque office, has been with the agency for over two years. Delores has shown her dedication to COI in every task she undertakes. She is available to fill in when needed for all departments without compromising her daily responsibilities. She has been instrumental in organizing our program tracking system which has led to more effective and efficient services. Delores is an important part of the Albuquerque team.

## Danielle's Law Goes to Washington

On April 14, 2005 Congressman Rush Holt introduced Danielle's Law in Congress, H.R. 1649. Congressman Holt stated, "there is a need for such a law as New Jersey's Danielle's Law on the federal level. There is a lot of variability in the patchwork of state laws. We are trying to eliminate that variability and create a standard so that all developmentally disabled people are treated equally. The proposal is in fact a modification of the Social Security Act. We need to make the standards for health care a federal concern for the nation's 4.5 million developmentally disabled citizens."



Danielle J. Gruskowski  
Dec 6, 1969 - Nov. 5, 2002

Be a voice for the voiceless and vulnerable. Many families of the developmentally disabled will be forever grateful. One day, Danielle's Law may save the life of someone who is very near and dear to you.

Please sign the petition today by visiting:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/rt123456/petition-sign.html>

### JOIN US

## 2nd Annual Ride for Danielle's Law

sponsored by: The Cycle Tribe Motorcycle Club

### September 23, 2006

Noon to 5 P.M.

(Rain Date September 24, 2006)

\$20.00 Bike / \$10.00 Passenger/Guest

The ride will begin and end with a picnic at the Community Center (next to the firehouse)  
240 Roosevelt Avenue, Carteret, NJ.

### EVERYONE IS INVITED!

All proceeds will benefit the Danielle J. Gruskowski Memorial Scholarship.

For more information contact  
BERT IRIZARRY (732) 921-7358 or  
DIANE GRUSKOWSKI (732) 969-2744.

**Community Options, Inc.**  
**16 Farber Road**  
**Princeton, NJ 08540**

Creative Services, a subsidiary of  
Community Options Enterprises,  
designed & produced this newsletter  
employing persons with & without disabilities.

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



Community Options' Binghamton office is applying for a grant through Opportunities for People through Services (OPTS), a program run by New York's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD). OPTS grants are created in response to the needs and desires of consumers and their families to allow people to receive services they are unable to receive through current programs. Community Options is proposing to acquire an operational riding stable to provide Hippotherapy to individuals with disabilities. Hippotherapy is a riding treatment that uses the movement of the horse to improve balance, posture, and mobility in participants and may also positively affect psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and communication functions. If awarded the OPTS grant, Community Options plans to purchase an existing horse farm and indoor riding facility, add climate control for year-round operation, hire Hippotherapists, and begin providing needed and desired Hippotherapy services to consumers in the Binghamton area. Keep an eye out for more updates on this exciting proposal!

## **Kara Homes Donates Houses to Community Options**

Community Options, Inc. in Ocean County is preparing to open another house in Barnegat, New Jersey. The house was built specifically for COI and was donated by Kara Homes. Four individuals from the New Lisbon Developmental Center will be moving into the home, two men and two women. When the individuals came for a tour of the house last month they were all excited and eager to move in. Kara Homes is also donating three additional homes to COI within the next year and a new home that will be built in Roosevelt, New Jersey, with funding from HUD. COI is looking forward to all the new development in the Ocean/Monmouth area.

