

## Robert Stack Opinion Editorial

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On February 11, Community Options will hold its largest and most successful fundraiser ever. We are conservatively expecting well over 8,500 runners in 25 cities throughout our ten state service area. Cupid's Chase is a 5k race held during the Valentine's Day weekend. The race is certified and attended by both the serious and the causal runner.

The purpose of this race is to raise awareness about the vast potential of people with significant disabilities such as autism, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury and other developmental disabilities; potentials that in many instances were historically overlooked and marginalized by the general public.

The Cupid's Chase 5K Run National Chair, Geraldo Rivera was nationally recognized for his heroic expose of the horrific neglect televised relative to the now closed Willowbrook State School for the Retarded. Historic black and white footage of naked men and women naked, lying in their own feces unattended is an image I will never forget.

It was one of the principle reasons I decided to devote my life to moving people into more humane settings in which they could receive care and dignity. Settings in which people with disabilities would be taught, like any other American how to find and keep a job; live like any other American in the community and thrive as a human being full of unexplored potentials to be attained throughout the remainder of their lives.

It has been well over 30 years since Mr. Rivera brought this problem into the living room of every American. It has been that long since Bobby Kennedy came out of that institution and described it as a "snake pit."

Government officials were embarrassed and ashamed. Over the last 30 years, they pumped trillions of dollars into these large institutions. This was not the answer.

The solution to solving the problems of the abuse and neglect at the large institutions is to close them. To place the people with disabilities and those who care for them in small homes throughout the country.

I am proud to write that over the course of the last three decades, many institutions were closed. To date there are over 35,000 people warehoused in large institutions. The largest number of people living in these institutions is in New Jersey, New York, Texas and Pennsylvania. There are also people still admitted to these costly places every year.

Parents with adult children with disabilities need small, community-based affordable programs to help them to care for their kids to avoid these costly institutions.

The Community Options' Cupid's Chase race is one real way to make a difference. All races start with the first step. Each race not only has a registration table for the race but a place to make contributions, sign up for volunteering and even job applications for needed staff.

So if you are on Christopher Street in Manhattan, in Lincoln Park in Chicago or on Harrison Street in Princeton, stop by, pick up a brochure. Help us help others. You can make a difference. You don't have to run. You can cheer. You can be part of a race to support people with disabilities to live like every other American.



Governor Susana Martinez of New Mexico with Robert Stack, President and CEO of Community Options