

**Nothing More,  
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For All People  
With Disabilities**

**Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.**

# ACCESS NEWS

**Fall 2008 NUMBER XVIII**

## **ATI Board of Directors Elects New Leaders / Members**

The ATI Board of Directors elected a new slate of officers during its October 21 Board Meeting. The Board unanimously elected Dr. Polly Cator as Board Chair, Peter Morse-Ackley as Board Vice Chair, Angela Burchfield as Secretary and Tom Hartnett as Acting Treasurer.

In other action, the Board appointed Patricia Conklin and Nancy Hazel as new members to serve two-year terms. The Board re-elected Angela Burchfield and Peter Morse-Ackley to serve a second two-year term. Joseph Abdulla, last year's ATI Board Chair, left the Board due to term limits. Other returning Board Members include: Lori Allen, Polly Cator, Debbie Geibel, Paul Hamilton, Tom Hartnett, Helene Maxwell, Daniel Mullins and Donna West.



**Above:** Mary Ewing & Chad Underwood speak with Governor Paterson about ATI's services during his August 21 visit to Cortland.

## **ATI Launches Stardust Challenge Campaign to Support Youth Transition Services**

Just last week, ATI launched its annual *Friends of the Center* campaign to the community with a goal of raising \$10,000. "As we embark on our 2009 goals, the need for community support is greater than ever before," said Mary E. Ewing, the ATI Executive Director. According to Ms. Ewing, on October 24, ATI learned that it had received a \$20,000, 50/50 matching grant from the Stardust Foundation of Central New York, to support its developing Youth Transition program. The 50/50 matching grant requires that ATI raise \$20,000 from other sources prior to receiving matching Stardust funds.

"ATI is gearing up to launch its Youth Transition Program to the community in 2009." That program will aim to help youth become more independent, self-determined, and confident in themselves and their abilities. "The unique aspect of the program is the peer mentoring component," said Ms. Ewing. "ATI's Peer Mentoring Program has already helped a number of individuals gain community employment. Now we want to offer Cortland's youth those same opportunities."

ATI is currently a collaborative partner with the Cortland High School in its *Model Transition Program*. In that capacity, ATI has facilitated more than 30 workshops over the past 12 months for CHS

students. ATI is currently working with the Homer school district and Cortland elementary schools to do more of those workshops. ATI also co-sponsored the 2008 CACTC Youth Conference in May.

ATI staff members are active with local, regional, state and national organizations that address youth transition matters. Staff also serve on the Cortland Youth Advisory Board, as well as the Board of the National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN).

For more information on how you can contribute to the ATI *Stardust Challenge*, contact Mary Ewing by phone at: (607) 753-7363, or by email at: [mewing@aticortland.org](mailto:mewing@aticortland.org).

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## Election Day Launched Local Use of Ballot Marking Devices

When you went to the polls earlier this month, in addition to the traditional lever machines, you probably had an option to use the new Sequoia/Dominion ImageCast machine, a ballot marking device (BMD) that allows voters with disabilities to privately and independently vote on a paper ballot.

Prior to Election Day, Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) teamed up with the Cortland County Board of Elections to offer all Cortland County residents an opportunity to preview and learn how to use the new machine. Throughout the day, on October 28, staff guided interested individuals through the new process of voting and answered any related questions.

“Right now, it’s something new and it’s kind of difficult to get all the aspects of it. Maybe by the time we use them in our polling places a few times, we’ll get used to it,” said Kenneth Coleman, a Cortland County resident who stopped by ATI to get a preview.

### Disability Law Lowdown

The Disability Law Lowdown Project is a set of podcasts that provide up-to-date information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and related disability laws. You can listen to the podcasts, or read the transcripts, right on the website: [www.disabilitylawlowdown.com](http://www.disabilitylawlowdown.com).

Disability Law Lowdown is brought to you by the Disability Business Technical Assistance Center (DBTAC), which is a national network of ten ADA Centers, offering technical assistance and training in the Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability-related laws.

## Disability Advocates Storm the Capitol

“Don’t be a zero; Restore the cuts; Be our hero!” These words reverberated throughout the Capitol building on August 19, as more than 200 disability advocates from across the state took over the *War Room*, a large rotunda that sits down the hall from Governor Paterson’s Administrative offices at the Capitol Building. The group, which represented New York’s 40 Independent Living Centers (ILCs), rallied to support services for people with disabilities that are facing severe cuts due to the impending budget deficit.

That week, the governor proposed immediate cuts to ILCs by 6% on “remaining disbursements” this year. His proposed cut would then carry over into Fiscal Year 2009 and beyond. The cut would be in addition to the 2% cut ILCs were already dealt.

“We who believe in freedom will not rest until we stop the cuts, stop the cuts, stop the cuts, we won’t rest until we stop the cuts.” Almost seamlessly, the group’s barks turned into a melodic mantra. ILCs serve as the gateways to disability services across the state. ILCs are community-based, consumer controlled, non-residential organizations that provide a variety of services for individuals with a wide range of disabilities. ILCs provide guidance and advocacy to people with disabilities in all areas that affect their choice to fully participate in society as independent persons.

“Who do we want? Governor Paterson! When do we want him? Now!” In the early afternoon, a new chant raised the Capitol louder than any other before it. In response to an offer to meet with the governor’s senior staff, the advocates recalled the fruits of their

prior discussions with the same staff. Those discussions yielded the very cuts that the group was there to protest.

“Save our programs; Save our wages; Stop the cuts now!” With no response from the Governor, the mounting group stormed the hallway leading to the administrative offices. News crews began to arrive, state troopers and security details grew and leaders from the Senate and Assembly showed up.

The demonstration continued tirelessly until three of the group’s leading advocates finally gained access to the Governor’s offices. Unfortunately, the efforts were to no avail, as later in the evening state leaders had reached consensus; the cuts would remain.

Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are cost-effective, peer-run organizations that provide information, advocacy, training and peer support for people with disabilities who are becoming independent. Even though ILCs offer a more cost-effective, non-medical model approach to meeting the needs of people with disabilities, they faced the possibility of being cut twice in the same year! “*Nothing more, Nothing Less, for all people!*”



**Above:** On August 19, ATI staff, volunteers and consumers rallied at the State Capitol to protest budget cuts to independent living centers.

## ATI's Accessibility Construction Services

ATI is fast becoming the Cortland area's leading provider of accessibility construction, environmental modification and assistive technology services. ATI currently houses two programs, *Access to Home* and *Accessibility Construction Services (ACS)*, which have already managed the successful completion of 44 projects in the area. The person responsible for ATI's success is Mr. Rob Ferri, the agency's Architectural Barrier Specialist. Rob has over 20 years of experience with bidding, estimating and construction management. He has experience as a Senior Supervisor of Construction with the New York State Office of Design & Construction, where he managed construction and coordinated with contractors and vendors to oversee a \$20 million project.

Mr. Ferri has more than 13 years of experience in the accessibility construction field, including three years of experience with developing and implementing assessment processes (determining the need for accessibility modifications). He has experience in evaluating an individual's functional capacity and long-term need for Assistive Technology. His background includes a solid history of collaboration with consumers' physicians and occupational/physical therapists, as needed, to identify adaptive devices or modifications that will best meet the particular needs and circumstances of an individual.

Mr. Ferri has a strong working knowledge of all federal, state and local building codes, based on his more than 35 years of construction experience. These regulations include compliance with all regulations of the ADA, the ADAAG (ADA Accessibility Guidelines),

the ABAAG (Architectural Barrier Act Accessibility Guidelines), and the New York State Uniform Fire and Prevention Codes.

Mr. Ferri is a graduate of Broome College of Engineering, and has participated in a number of ongoing educational opportunities and certifications. He holds a Certificate in Vocational Rehabilitation from the University of Buffalo. He is certified as an accessible trail consultant through the NYS Office of Parks and Trails, and has participated in training through the National Home Builders Association to become a Certified Aging in Place (CAPS) specialist. Mr. Ferri is also in the process of becoming certified through the DHCR/HTFC 2008 Housing Seminar Series in Lead-Based Paint and Project Design.

For more information on ATI's Accessibility Construction Services, contact Rob by phone at: 753-7363, or by email, at [rferri@aticortland.org](mailto:rferri@aticortland.org).

## ATI's Bathroom Accessibility Construction Projects!



*Above: A recently completed bathroom modification included the installation of a roll-in shower, an accessible sink, and grab bars around the toilet.*

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## Cortland Celebrates Disability Employment Awareness

On Wednesday, October 1, the Cortland area kicked-off this year's National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) with a breakfast ceremony at the Ramada Inn. More than 100 local residents, including elected officials, disability advocates, local business leaders, and individuals with disabilities who had secured and maintained competitive employment in the community attended the event. Representatives from more than 30 businesses also attended. This year's event featured Ms. Agnes McCrae of the Self Advocacy Association of CNY. Agnes offered an inspirational address to everyone in attendance by challenging common misconceptions about disability and the stigma that too often surrounds it.

Each year the community gathers to celebrate the abilities and accomplishments of individuals with disabilities, as well as the dedication of employers to provide employment opportunities and accommodations to those individuals. A common goal each year is to bring together local businesses, leaders and individuals with disabilities to work towards eliminating the stigma that has for too long been associated with having a disability.

This year's event took place through the collaborative efforts of the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce, the Cortland Common Council, the Cortland County Legislature, the State Education Department, Cortland Works Career Center, JMMC/Employment Connection and Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

Many thanks to the Ramada Inn for its generosity and support for the event!

## ATI Offers Access to Employment Through Communication Series

In keeping with the spirit of Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM), ATI offered a series of three work readiness workshops during the month of October, themed "Access to Employment Through Communication". The ATI semi-annual Employment Conference provided participants with an opportunity to network with local employers, to meet area service providers, and to learn skills essential to securing and maintaining successful community employment.

Each week, the Employment Conference offered participants an opportunity to network with local employers and to gain insight on the hiring process. Representatives from Intertek, Country Inns & Suites, All Wired & Bead-Dazzled, Pall Trinity Micro Corp, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Marietta Corporation participated in the workshop series.

Each week, the Employment Conference offered participants an opportunity to participate in interactive sessions relating to the importance of communication (body language, verbal and written). Sandra Swierczek of the Cortland High

School, Michelina Gibbons of SUNY Cortland and Cheryl Gregory of the Cortland Regional Medical Center facilitated the workshops.

In the October 24 session, ATI featured representatives from area employment service providers, including Cortland Works Career Center, Employment Connection, OCM BOCES, VESID, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH), the Central New York Area Health Education Center (CNY AHEC), the Cortland County Personnel Department, and Kelly Services.

In the October 31 session, ATI featured Dr. Dan Pukstas of Tompkins Cortland Community College, and Dr. Temple Grandin of the University of Colorado. (See article, *Paths to Employment Success*.)

Additional workshops addressed navigating community resources, SSA work incentives planning, the independent living philosophy and self-advocacy.

Many thanks to all of the event's supporters, including Mark's Pizzeria, A Pizza & More, M&D Deli, P&C, Tops, Price Chopper, K-Mart and Wal-Mart.

**ATI IS ACCEPTING NEW PEER MENTORS FOR ITS  
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**For more information, call Aaron Baier at (607) 753-7363!**



*Above: This year's NDEAM event at the Ramada Inn Cortland.*

## ATI Hosts Speakers: *Personal Paths to Employment Success*

On October 31, ATI hosted two individuals with disabilities that have taken very different paths to achieve their particular employment success.

Dr. Temple Grandin, Professor at Colorado State University, shared stories about her early work experience as a youth. This early experience taught her good work ethic and ways to obtain the accommodations that she required as a person with autism. "Sequencing tasks is difficult," said Dr. Grandin as she spoke to us about her early work history, "had it not been for a laminated list of tasks, I'd have been lost". Today, Dr. Grandin is an award-winning author, published scholar, inventor of globally used livestock handling equipment, and a wonderful motivational speaker.

Dr. Daniel Pukstas, Professor at Tompkins Cortland Community College, shared his experiences after acquiring a disability later in life. After losing his sight to Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), Dr. Pukstas learned new ways of accomplishing his goals; and attributes his success to his optimistic and adventurous personality. "You don't know what you're capable of unless you try!" said Dr. Pukstas during his presentation. Dr. Pukstas is a Professor of English, specializes in writing, is a published author and scholar, and is a fantastic singer.

### 2008 Disability Mentoring Day

On October 15, Access to Independence (ATI) partnered with the Cortland High School (CHS), OCM BOCES and the J.M. Murray Center to recognize 42 youth from Cortland, Madison, and Onondaga Counties as part of the 2008 Disability Mentoring Day (DMD). More than 30 local businesses facilitated job shadowing opportunities for the youth, as well.

"Everyone always enjoys themselves," said Laura Pforter, the area's DMD event coordinator and CHS Youth Specialist, "even the employers have fun showing the kids the ropes." Worksites included: Color Me Red, Crossroads Veterinary Clinic, GraphTex, and Kost Tires, among others.

Youth who participated in the DMD festivities were also invited to a luncheon at the Country Inns & Suites. The luncheon's guest speakers included Geoff Herbert (Deaf Geoff), from HOT 107.9 in Syracuse, and Kyra Pinn, a student at SUNY Cortland. Both are individuals with disabilities who have overcome personal challenges to become successful.

DMD is a part of the annual October National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebration.



### ATI Seeks Youth Power!

"Nothing About Us, Without Us!" New York's leading empowerment group for youth with disabilities and social/emotional challenges will soon have a chapter here in Cortland. ATI is looking to form the group as part of its developing Youth Transition program.

Participants in the Youth Power! group will learn leadership and peer support skills. Youth will put to work the skills they learn to develop and improve the systems that serve them.

As a whole, Youth Power! strives to build and strengthen an authentic youth movement that works toward improving communities to ensure positive development opportunities for all youth.

For more information about Youth Power! go to [www.ftnys.org/youthpwr.html](http://www.ftnys.org/youthpwr.html), or contact Aaron Baier by phone at: (607) 753-7363, or by email: [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

**Top Left:** Dr. Temple Grandin, Colorado State University

**Left:** Dr. Daniel Pukstas, TC3

**Below:** Youth participants in Disability Mentoring Day.



## Home Heating Season is Here - Do You Qualify for HEAP?

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is a federally funded program that offers heating assistance to qualified households to reduce their annual energy costs. HEAP also offers an emergency benefit for households in a heat or heat-related energy emergency. HEAP offers a furnace repair and/or replacement benefit for households with inoperable heating equipment. HEAP may help you pay for: electricity, propane, natural gas, wood, oil, kerosene, coal, or any other heating fuel.

The regular HEAP benefits are based on income, the percentage of the income spent on heating energy costs, the primary fuel source and your housing situation.

You may be eligible for a regular HEAP benefit if: You are a US citizen or qualified alien; **AND** Your income is at or below the current income guidelines for your

household size; **OR** You receive food stamps; **OR** You receive temporary assistance; **OR** You receive SSI and live alone.

### 2008-2009 HEAP Gross Monthly Income Guidelines

Household Size	Income Limit
1	\$1,963
2	\$2,567
3	\$3,172
4	\$3,776
5	\$4,380
6	\$4,984
7	\$5,097

To find out if you may be eligible for HEAP benefits, visit [myBenefits.ny.gov](http://myBenefits.ny.gov) to use the HEAP pre-screening eligibility tool. For more information, call the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance toll-free hotline at 1-800-342-3009.

## ATI to Host New Program: *Eat Smart New York*

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) is teaming up with the Cornell Co-Operative Extension to present an *Eat Smart New York* program. Beginning January 5, 2009, a Nutrition Program Assistant will be available at ATI every Monday from 3:00 to 4:00 pm. The program will run for eight weeks.

Weekly sessions will include interactive presentations on a variety of issues, including: how to plan thrifty menus; how to stretch your food dollars; how to read food labels; what the food pyramid is and how to use it; how to prepare healthy meals in a flash; and much, much more.

For more information, or to sign up for the class, please call Susan Lewis at (607) 753-7363. Class size is limited, so call early to reserve your spot.

## Medicare Part D Drug Plan - 2009 Changes

Medicare Part D plans change every year. The average drug plan premium in New York will increase about 18 percent next year. The increase for people enrolled in the 10 largest Medicare drug plans will exceed 30 percent, according to the Medicare Rights Center.

In addition to price changes, plans also change what prescription drugs they cover. So it's important to review any changes and to compare your plan to others to make sure it still works for you.

You can make changes to your Part D prescription drug plan between November 15 and December 31. Medicare Part D prescription drug plans were supposed to mail letters to enrollees in October describing any changes in benefits and premiums for 2009.

Many people who receive Extra Help paying their Part D premium will be receiving letters from Medicare reassigning them into a different plan for 2009. If you receive Extra Help paying for your Medicare Part D prescription plan, keep an eye out for this letter. The reason for his reassignment is that your current plan may have increased its premium past the benchmark amount allowed for Extra Help plans. Medicare does

not take your prescription needs into consideration when they make this switch!! This may mean that your current prescriptions will not be covered under this new plan. The good news is you do not have to accept this new plan if it will not work for you. You can check out your options and elect to enroll in a plan that better suits your needs.

If you receive one of these letters from Medicare, and if you are 60 or older, please contact the Area Agency on Aging at 607-753-5060 to speak to a Benefits Specialist regarding your choices. If you are under 60, contact Sue Lewis at Access to Independence at 607-753-7363. Sue may assist you in finding a plan that will work for your needs. You can also compare plans for 2009 at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

### ATI Holiday Open House

**December 12, 2008**

**3:00 - 6:00 pm**

**ATI Community Room**

**RSVP: 753-7363**

## Familiar Faces in the Office...

Meet **Scott Roman**! Scott is ATI's new part-time bookkeeper. Scott brings to ATI more than six years of accounting and bookkeeping experience. Scott serves as Treasurer for the Cortlandville Fire District and is the elected Treasurer for the Cortland Fire Dept. Scott is also a Dispatch Shift Supervisor for the Tompkins County 911. Say hello to Scott next time you see him!

Meet **Phyllis Schriefer**! Phyllis is an invaluable, all-around contributor at ATI. Phyllis covers the Reception Desk, provides staff support and is especially active with several programs, including: Work-site Wellness, Arthritis Support Group, and craft classes. Be sure to say hello to Phyllis next time you see her!



*Above: Phyllis Schriefer, ATI volunteer, greets a visitor as they arrive at the office. Phyllis provides outstanding staff and program support. Thank you Phyllis!*



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