

Voices & Visions

SUMMER 2019

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"I believe very strongly in fostering our existing talent within the agency"

- Alex DiMaio



From the Executive Director



Dear Family, Friends and Advocates,

The summer is here and with it, many new and exciting changes here at Special Citizens. I am delighted to announce, that after much careful thought, we have undergone some administrative restructuring. Moving forward, each of our residences will have its own designated manager. This will enable each of them to give the attention and focus needed to support the men and women of their respective residences, as best they can. We were very fortunate to be able to promote from within, something near and dear to my heart. I met personally with each and every manager and have every confidence in them to give their best.

With that, the new roster includes: Michelle Kusi, Fieldston, Julia Fernandez, DeClemente,

Shakethai Silimon at 259th St., and Carl James, along with Denise Clarke who will continue to oversee our supported apartments, Delafield, Faraday and 55th St. We are currently looking to fill the positions at Grace Cavanagh and our Wellesley residences. Many of these folks will already be known to you, having previously functioned as Assistant Managers. If not, please feel free to reach out and engage them. They will likewise be doing so. Additionally, all managers will now report to the Director of Residential Services, David Ryan. Ryan was most recently the QA/QI Specialist. The Director of Residential Services will report to the Senior Director of Programs, a position I hope to fill in the very near future. We also welcome, Fredrica Tetteh as our Director of Nursing Services. Fredrica will lead our clinical department and assist in the implementation of policies and procedures. Please join me in congratulating all these employees on their well-deserved promotions!

I believe very strongly in fostering our existing talent within the agency; talent which you'll read more about in this issue's *Employee Awards* article. I could not have been more proud to hand out these awards at our recent luau and offer my personal congratulations to each of them. As

ever, amidst the change, your loved ones remain our focus. All we do here at Special Citizens is with them in mind. I believe these most recent changes will benefit them exponentially.

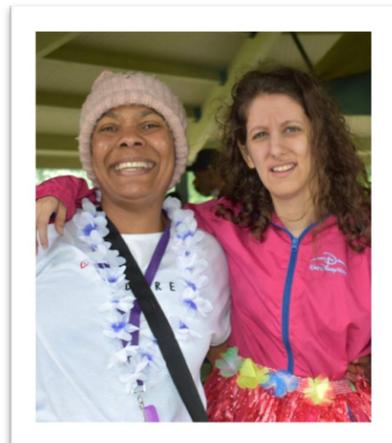
I'm extremely proud of our teamwork. Together we continue to provide a community of respect, equality and dignity for people of all abilities.

Wishing you all a happy, healthy and safe summer.

Sincerely,

Alex DiMaio

Executive Director



EMPLOYEE AWARDS



The Award Winners!

Amidst the revelry of our annual luau, Special Citizens took a moment to acknowledge some very special people. Executive Director, Alex DiMaio announced this year's Employee Recognition Awards. This year there were four winners recognized as the Direct Support Professionals of the Year. These folks work directly and tirelessly with the men and women we support, day in and day out. This year's recipients were as follows: Melvin Hyman (Crosby); Schantel Gay (Wellesley); Nichelle Wheeler (Metro Day Hab) and John Miran-

da, (Declemente.)

Rosalind "Rozi" McAllister was honored for her long-time contribution to the agency as our PreVocational Mentor, with the newly created, Lee Pellegrino Award. Pellegrino retired this year, after 35 years of service. The Emmons Hiller Award went to Metro Day Hab, Assistant Manager and all-around dynamo: Shantee Johnson. The Executive Director Award was awarded to Assistant Manager of the 259th St. residence, Shakethai Silimon - 259th

We are so proud of all of our winners, but one who has a special place in the hearts of many is Claudia Varela, Cleaner at the Metro Day hab. Claudia received the Briscoe Award. Special Citizens is so grateful to Briscoe for endowing this award to recognize Claudia's invaluable contribution to the folks at the Metro Day Hab and Administration, at the Grand Concourse.

Congratulations to all our winners!

"I could not have been more proud to hand out these awards..."
Alex DiMaio



SUMMER CELEBRATION/LUAU

Special Citizens did not let the rain dampen the spirits at this year's annual luau. Once again, our two Day Hab's, Metro and Spectrum Space, came together to put on a party and a show. Lei's, grass skirts and smiles abounded as the Day Hab attendees mixed and mingled under the pavilion at VE Macy Park. It is always a special moment when we can get so many of the men and women we support, from our residences and our Day Habs, together with staff. Many of these folks don't normally have occasion to do so. With that, a genuine spirit of unity prevailed.

A special thank you to HR Manager, Stephen Matrone; Fleet Manager, Tenor Felicien; Technology Support Associate, Andrew Perez and IT Network Service Engineer, Brian Walowitz for manning the grills and keeping those burgers and dogs coming and an additional thank you to Metro's Managing Director, Katrina Potter for keep the tropical drinks, virgin of course, flowing.

A merry band of Metro Day Hab attendees treated the crowd to a display of their fancy footwork, as they showed us their take on the monkey, fire dancing and of course, the hula! The sun

peeked out, just as the party was winding down, but everyone went home with full bellies and warm hearts. Many were heard to have remarked that this was our best luau, yet!



Another Winner...

Our Holiday Door Decorating Competition was such a hit, we brought it back for a summer round. The theme this time was 'superheroes.' Little did we know that our Spectrum Space Day Hab is an unstoppable door decorating machine. For the second time, the creativity of the folks in Elmsford could not be beat. Although we had some heroic efforts from other departments and residences, the winner, by a landslide was Spectrum. Congratulations to Managing Director, Christine Carter and her crew. We look forward to seeing if Spectrum Space can be unseated in the next competition.



THE BEAT GOES ON...

B.E.A.T. Global, Bridging Education and Art Together, paid a visit to the Bronx Metro Day Hab this month. BEAT produces programs led by professional artists that teach the arts of beatboxing, breakdancing, music production, creative writing, MC'ing, and performing live. Here at Metro, BEAT instructors lead the men and women we support in a lively round of beatboxing and song.



FUNDRAISING EVENTS

On June 2nd, our Young Professionals Board staffed a table to represent Special Citizens at the Westchester Autism Speaks Walk! We connected with hundreds of area supporters while participating as a sponsor to all the great work that Autism Speaks does for our community.

On Sunday, September 15th Special Citizens will be participating as a team of walkers in the NYC Autism Speaks Walk. To join our team, or for more information, please contact Charles Herold: charles.herold@specialcitizens.org

Save the Date! Our annual fundraiser event will be held on **Tuesday, October 8th** (5:00-8:30pm, in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen neighborhood). Keep an eye on your email, details to follow soon. You won't want to miss out!

To make a tax-deductible donation to Special Citizens, please visit: www.specialcitizens.org/donate



**SPECIAL CITIZENS
FUTURES UNLIMITED**

OUT OF SIGHT

But not out of mind. One of the many invaluable services that Special Citizens offers, is our Community Habilitation. Because this happens offsite and in the homes of the men and women we support, it can be easily overlooked. Thankfully, we were recently reminded in the best possible way, when Community Habilitation Coordinator, Dulce Reyes, from our Westchester program, recently received this heartfelt note of thanks from one of the parents:

I just wanted you to be aware, since you have been such an essential part of Jamie's ability to move forward in this. If you had not counseled me to call OPWDD directly..., no one would have noticed the error... We would still be waiting.... I admire your authenticity, your professionalism, your honesty and the fact that you always had Jamie's best interest in your heart. I cannot tell you how appreciative I am. You are helping my son fulfill a destiny and a calling....

In an issue where we're spotlighting our stellar staff, it's a pleasure to acknowledge Dulce and her Bronx counterpart, Crystal DeLeon, and all of our Community Habilitation staff.



On Aging

Aging. What does this word mean to you? Do you walk around at 50+ feeling 35, until you pass a mirror and catch sight of someone decidedly not looking 35? Perhaps you feel a sharp twinge in your back, or knees when you get up from a seated position? They say the majority of advertising dollars are spent on the young but turn on cable or Antenna TV and you'll see plenty of dollars devoted to aging, the negative aspects of aging: adult diapers, memory supplements, supplemental insurance, Just for Men hair dye, Botox, Medical Alert Devices, 'Easy Use' Computers and Cell Phones, Chair Lifts, Mobility Scooters, the list is endless. Alongside these products, urging you to buy, is the parade of older celebrities who've been lifted and tucked into youthful submission. These commercials are reminders that growing older can be scary; aging in America is rarely portrayed as positive, there is now a cell phone app that explores what you will look like as you age and the young are having fun with this, posting photos of them as aged and having a laugh, about looking old.

The worry about aging is apparently not such a concern for the autistic population or at least not here at Special Citizens. When asked about aging, the men and women we support had much to say:

Angel said at 43, he gets tired when walking a great distance, but he feels he is fine and isn't bothered at all by the grey showing in

his hair. His advice for those who worry about age: 'Show love and be more accepting of self.'

At 47, Laura is not yet feeling older, her body is good. Her healthy tips are eat salads, only half a sandwich at meal time, walk, dance and moisturize. For Laura: the future is good.

Adam says, at 49 his body works well even if he takes a long walk. He doesn't mind going grey or a tiny bald spot. Adam suggests using sunscreen and a moisturizer on a regular basis.

CJ is closing in on 54 and thinks, 'Getting older feels good.' CJ tries to diet but loves food. A regular church goer, CJ feels faith and prayer keep him going. CJ's philosophy: 'I never worry about aging, because I like living.'

56-year-old Paul is only concerned about his weight as he doesn't want to have problems later on. Paul doesn't mind getting grey. As far as Paul is concerned 'older age has not affected him and he hasn't any problems regarding getting older'.

Also, at 56, Hiram realizes he is getting older, he has to wear glasses and has grey hair. He doesn't know why, but he feels good about getting older. Another fan of sunscreen (and moisturizer), Hiram believes in God and is basically a happy person.

54-year-old Sheila is our one person who expressed a couple of nervous worries about aging. Sheila has a few aches and pains now and then and needs to take Tylenol or Advil,

but other than this Sheila said she has no other worries about aging. Her advice: Moisturize! Sheila believes there is still much to do in life, like seeing Broadway's Jersey Boys and visiting the Statue of Liberty.

Steven, 62 said I don't want to think about getting older, it's negative, I want to stay in the positive and be young. His motto is 'No looking back!' Steven's tip: put cream (moisturizer) on their body, 'keep it moist, (but) don't do it to look young'

Our younger folks are even less concerned: 32-year-old David said his secret to keeping young is being involved with his work and travel training. His answer to aging is to vacation in Cape Cod. At 35 Jackie doesn't worry, or panic about aging. Jackie says: act as immature as you can. And Daniel, 31, the youngest of our survey, says that 'aging doesn't scare me as I have courage'.

Perhaps we can all take a lesson and not worry quite so much about aging. (PS: Don't forget to moisturize.)

*Rosalind McAllister,
PreVoc Mentor*

