



**Main Story / 11.20.07**

## **Unity House Directors, Managers, Staff Convene for Annual Fall Season Trainings**



Left to Right - Patricia Briest, Michele Leonello, and Pam O'Conner

**AUBURN** – Sixty-two Unity House of Cayuga County Inc. Directors, Program Managers, Assistant Program Managers, Medicaid Service Coordinators, and direct care staff assembled Friday, November 16, 2007 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Applebee's family restaurant on Grant Avenue in Auburn, NY for the agency's annual Fall Training retreat.

Applebee's General Manager John Minnick donated the restaurant's space to Unity House for the morning training and provided a variety of breakfast foods and refreshments served by

Applebee staff.

The two-part, two and a half-hour training featured a smoking cessation presentation by Patricia Briest, MS, FNP-C, of the N.Y. State Tobacco Cessation Center for Cayuga, Onondaga, and Oswego counties and two Employee Assistance Program (EAP) presentations, one by Karen Fritz, LMSW, EAP Contract Manager / Mental Health Consultant for Family and Children's Service of Ithaca and the other by Peter Pontius, LCSW, President of Corporate Care.

"All three of our presenters are highly qualified, experienced professionals whose presentations are timely and applicable to our employees' health and welfare and also to the well-being of the more than 700 consumers and their families that we care for every day," Unity House Executive Director Joyce Williams said, in introducing the presenters and topics to the 62 Unity House employees. "Overcoming tobacco dependence and taking advantage of the many benefits of employee assistance programs can only improve our collective health and welfare."

Briest's presentation was part of the Tobacco Cessation Center's effort to inform health care providers like Unity House about the overwhelming number of health problems tobacco use and dependence cause, and to educate them about the effective and available interventions they can employ to help tobacco users achieve independence from what is literally a life-and-death issue. Unity House G.R.A.C.E. House Director Michele Leonello and Program Manager Pam O'Conner, whose N.Y. State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS)-licensed program and services went smoke-free November 1, 2007 as a result of an OASAS mandate, recruited Briest for the presentation.

"Tobacco is responsible for over 440,000 deaths a year in the U.S. and costs the country over \$150 billion dollars a year," Briest told her attentive audience. "Over 25,000 N.Y. State adults die from tobacco use each year, and about 25,000 N.Y. State kids under the age of 18 become daily smokers each year. This is beyond a problem needing every one's attention."

Briest pointed out how two of every three smokers claim they want to quit and how it takes an average of seven quit attempts to succeed. Still, she said, surveys reveal that at best about three of every five individuals who make health care provider visits and who are asked if they smoke are offered counseling to quit. She emphasized the need for that percentage to rise and also promoted a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services research-based guideline to help providers help those they care for stop using tobacco products.

Briest and the Tobacco Cessation Center, located at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center in Syracuse, can be reached at 315-458-3600, extension 298, e-mail to [patricia.briest@sjhsyr.org](mailto:patricia.briest@sjhsyr.org).

Fritz, whose EAP program serves 67 clients in Tompkins County including Unity House's day habilitation and residential services, and Pontius, whose Corporate Care EAP services are located in Auburn, Geneva, Clifton Springs, Lyons, Canandaigua, and Penn Yan and who counts Unity House's Wayne, Ontario, and Cayuga counties' services and programs among his clients, provided an overview of their EAPs and how they can help employees with a wide range of personal and family problems, from depression and anxiety to separation and divorce, grief and loss, parenting and children's issues, and eldercare concerns. They also promoted their consultation services for supervisors that offer effective strategies to deal with underperforming, unacceptable employee job performance and/or employee behavior. Both presenters stressed the guaranteed confidentiality of their EAPs.

Family and Children's Service EAP in Ithaca has two locations at 204 North Cayuga Street and 521 West State Street and can be contacted at 607-273-7494. Corporate Care's EAP can be contacted at 315-462-0464.