



NEWS

Date 11/01/2007

Unity Employment Services (UES)-Syracuse Plays Key Role in Annual Disability Mentoring Day (DMD)



SYRACUSE – Five Unity House Unity Employment Services (UES)-Syracuse employees (UES-Syracuse site manager Jennifer Damon, employment services coordinator Rich Chapman, placement coordinator Renee Van Duser, and job coaches Mike Bradley and Tom Lazzara) joined forces with four UES-Syracuse consumers (Stephen Lubak, Rebecca Retchless, Scott Hayes, Marc Caselle – **see photo at left**) October 17, 2007 at the seventh annual Greater Syracuse Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) in an effort to place them with Onondaga County employers that have

either already hired individuals with disabilities and are reaping the many benefits of supportive employment or that have expressed an interest in doing so.

This year's event, attended by 270 employers, individuals with disabilities and their host agencies, and community leaders, was held at Drumlins Country Club in the Syracuse suburb of Dewitt, NY, and featured an 8 a.m. kick-off breakfast, an awards and recognition ceremony, and consumer company visits and job shadowing activities. DMD is celebrated nationwide the third Wednesday of each October, which Congress in 1988 officially declared National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

“Disability Mentoring Day is a huge employment opportunity for our area's businesses and our consumers,” said Jennifer Damon, UES-Syracuse site manager and an active member of the Greater Syracuse DMD local organizing committee. “Besides our and other consumers being recognized for their on-the-job performance and job development work to date, and area employers being feted for employing individuals with disabilities, DMD also commits employers engaged in or thinking about supportive employment to act as mentors to our consumer mentees and help them expand their horizons, solidify their career goals, and learn from practical perspective what life is like on the job. It's a win-win for the employers, who are further educated about supportive employment, and for consumers, several of whose job shadowing during the day has resulted in subsequent interviews and actual hirings.”

Damon said she and the UES-Syracuse staff enlisted five employers – Avalon Copy Centers, Pet Smart, Monroe Muffler, PetCo, and United Radio – to participate in the 2007 DMD. Three – Monroe Muffler, PetCo, and United Radio, respectively – provided UES-Syracuse

consumers Scott Hayes, Rebecca Retchless, and Marc Caselle with company introductions, tours, and job shadowing activities during the day.

This year's DMD attracted 65 employer mentors and 74 consumer mentees, according to Jeffrey Tamburo, administrator of the NY State Institute for Health Transition Training at SUNY Upstate Medical University and NY State Coordinator for DMD 2007. He added that local employers indicated to him and the DMD organizing committee that they had opportunities for 103 mentees this year, demonstrating employers' increased understanding of supportive employment, its many benefits, and the value of hiring qualified individuals with disabilities.

"Employers are understanding more and more that employing individuals with disabilities is just good business," he told the DMD attendees.

The 2007 DMD kick-off breakfast and ceremony included recognition of six Syracuse-area employers – Niland's/Matrix Cleaning Services, American Food & Vending, Cardinal Health, The Hampton Inn-Cortland, Old Country Buffet-Erie Boulevard, and Regal Cinema Carousel Center – for going 'above and beyond' in the employment and retention of individuals with disabilities. NDEAM representative and NY State VESID (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) Syracuse District Office Supervisor Rick Long handed out awards to Pat Niland and Joanna Berkery of Niland/Matrix, which was nominated for recognition by Damon and the UES-Syracuse staff and which also currently employs UES-Syracuse consumer Stephen Lubak.