

Voyage of Self-Discovery

Friends and employees of Unity House in Ithaca were treated to a very special performance on April 13.

Earlier this winter, direct care provider Stephen O'Mara conceived of the idea of a "Spring Sing" as a way for consumers to express themselves through music. Steve is a former opera singer who has performed with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City and the Royal Opera in London, among others. Unity House is fortunate to have him bring his talent and expertise to our consumers.

"In my interactions with the consumers, I could see that many of them really loved and were involved with music – singing, playing instruments, listening, etc.," said Steve. "I started thinking about ways to put that into action. I have a mobile recording studio, so I put out a call to all consumers, asking if they'd like to work with me one-on-one with the end result being some sort of spring concert."

Steve got five responses right away, which quickly grew threefold. He set up a temporary music room at Catherwood Road day hab and they got to work. Over the course of three months, 15 Ithaca consumers collaborated with Steve to develop a song or instrumental to present to the public in April.

"I really wanted the concert to be consumer-driven," continued Steve. "What intrigued and excited me the most was the process of putting it all together – their voyage of self-discovery and interaction. They informed what the show would be."

Steve reports that the participants were very enthusiastic and that their confidence grew significantly over the three months of practice and preparation. As April 13 approached, Steve says "They were more than ready to sing in public!"

Performing to a full house, consumers were given the spotlight on a beautiful stage, complete with microphone, red velvet curtains and musical accompaniment. Talent ranged from singing to guitar and keyboard playing to joke telling. One by one, they showed off their skills and brought down the house!

"I've done concert promotion in the past," said Steve, "but never with this population. It is always gratifying to me how life-affirming music is and how it reveals to us, as counselors, the inner states of our consumers, helping us to know them better."

Selected video clips from Spring Sing may be seen on our website: www.unityhouse.com/agency-activities.html



Open Arms Award

The agency's new Open Arms Award, presented for the first time during Spring Sing, was created by Steve O'Mara to recognize a community member or organization that truly welcomes our consumers with disabilities in public and/or at their place of business. This person gives our consumers a real welcome, helping them to gain a sense of place within the community.

"A sense of rootedness is so important for our consumers, and those without strong family ties are particularly affected by friendships forged in the town in which they live," explains Steve. "Through this award, I want individuals in our community to know how mutually rewarding it can be when they and our consumers get to know each other."

This year's inaugural award was presented to Harry Seichopin of Ithaca Wegmans' cheese department. Upon making the award, Steve said: "Harry was chosen as a perfect example of someone going above and beyond. Harry's joy at seeing our consumers is obvious and contagious. He is just as eager to see two of the men we serve as they are to see him. Harry, with Wegmans' blessing, can stop what he is doing at work and spend some time with our folks. It's much more than just a 20-second greeting."

Harry received a certificate of appreciation for his openness and sincere caring for Unity House consumers. Because there are many more like Harry in our communities, Executive Director Liz Werner is planning to make this an agency-wide award next year.



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Executive Director's Perspective

*A*s we move into summer, Unity House has so much to look forward to! I am really excited about the renovations underway at our new Grant Avenue facility in Auburn.

We anticipate moving our consumers from the Case Mansion on South Street into nine upgraded supportive apartments by the end of August, and we have already implemented the staffing changes that will go along with that transition. At the same time, we have received approvals from OPWDD to relocate eight Ithaca residents into our West Green Street property. Our State Street IRA sold in record time, making the turnover quick but possible.

Phase one of renovations to West Green Street are almost completed, and I believe the residents will be in by the end of July. We hope to get approval from the state for a crisis respite bed in that facility as well.



Liz Werner, Executive Director

Even though we are so focused on the state deficit and economy right now, it is important to pay attention to what's going on at the federal level as well. I have been keeping my eye on federal developments, and believe that the Affordable Health Care Act will place further restrictions on Medicaid funding – our revenue sources are still very much up in the air. I don't wish to impart doom and gloom, but we must be realistic regarding our industry. Recent exposés in the *New York Times* have revealed abuses in state-run homes for the disabled and shaken administrators at the very top. The fallout remains to be seen, but we cannot ignore the fact that New York State is under a microscope as we try to get our Medicaid system back under control. Outside forces are making it increasingly difficult to provide services; it's becoming more about systems and politics than it is about the people we serve.

For all these reasons, I am so grateful for our loyal friends and donors who made gifts in response to our first-ever annual fund solicitation mailing. Thank you. For years, Unity House has not needed to fully explore all fundraising avenues because the state was reliable in providing most of the revenue needed to make ends meet and to allow us to excellently serve our population. No more. The Fund for Unity House is a necessary fundraising vehicle that will provide outside monies to meet the needs of our consumers. We deeply appreciate your annual support.

"I am so grateful for our loyal friends and donors who made gifts in response to our first-ever annual fund solicitation mailing...We deeply appreciate your support."

We also are appreciative of those who attended our annual dinner in late April. It's important to take time each year to acknowledge and thank our board of directors, who are fully engaged and keep me challenged. We recognized volunteerism in Cayuga County by presenting the first Fred Atkins Community Service Award to Al Drennen. It was truly as if all the stars aligned – this wonderful chance to honor our late, long-time board member Fred Atkins by recognizing Mr. Drennen, who knew Fred most of his life. On all levels, Al truly characterizes what was important to Fred. The award couldn't have gone to a more appropriate, deserving individual. Even at age 90, Al is out there in our community, helping others and setting an example for us all.

New Director of Human Resources

Sara Glauberman is promoted from within

Unity House has promoted Sara D. Glauberman to director of human resources. Sara now leads Unity House's personnel and staffing resources program, ensuring compliance with labor law and regulations, and agency policy and procedure. She began her new duties on April 4.

"We are delighted to promote Sara to the position of director of human resources at Unity House," said Deputy Director Paul Joslyn. "She brings with her a tremendous amount of knowledge and energy which will greatly benefit the agency in the years to come."

Sara was most recently Unity House's human resources manager for six years. In that position, she was responsible for managing payroll, benefits, online HR systems, and hiring processes and procedures while supervising three employees. She originally joined the agency as mental health relief staff in 1993, working her way up through residence counselor to human resources specialist in 2002.

Sara replaces Cathy Becker, who served as human resources director

from 1997 until her retirement on April 1, 2011.

"I am very excited to work with the current HR team to improve upon already-excellent processes and procedures," said Sara. "So far, it has been wonderful. There were some rather large shoes to fill upon Cathy's retirement, but I'm up to the task and ready to push forward."

Sara earned a B.A. in public justice with a minor in forensic science from SUNY-Oswego, and an M.S. in organizational management with a concentration in human resources from Capella University in Minneapolis. She has been certified since 2000 as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR).

Actively involved in the Auburn community, Sara serves on the advisory council of the Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Cayuga program, and as co-chair of Unity House's Wellness Committee. She is a former board president of the Child Care Council of the Finger Lakes, and is a member of the Leadership Cayuga Class of 2003. She and her husband



Larry own and operate LIG Sound, providing high quality mobile sound and lights to regional bands and musicians.

As director of human resources at Unity House, Sara is responsible for implementing and overseeing all of the agency's human resource functions to include talent management programs with emphasis on staff training, development, and performance management processes and systems, benefits administration and wellness initiatives, and compliance with all regulatory and labor law requirements.

Grants and Gifts

Unity House is the grateful recipient of support from these sources:

Allen Speiser Memorial Fund - \$745

The Speiser Fund offers an annual grant program through the Central New York Community Foundation that promotes the placement and retention of employees with disabilities in the workforce. This award equipped the Syracuse Unity Employment Services training room with a new computer system for consumer use and a wall-mount flat screen monitor/TV for group webinars and trainings. The equipment gives consumers the ability to conduct online research to help identify their personal career goals, navigate the job search process, and develop resumes and cover letters. Improved access allows them to participate in webinars and promote skill development in a cost effective manner. Staff also utilizes the training room to stay abreast of best practices in the employment field, and to videoconference with other sites.

Doug's Fish Fry - \$240

Doug's Fish Fry of Cortland and Skaneateles joined forces with Unity House on April 9 for a fundraiser. Their concession trailer was parked at our location on Catherwood Road in Lansing, and drew a large crowd all day. In the end, Doug's presented Unity House with a check for \$240, 10% of their sales from the day.

Zonta Club of Auburn - \$500

The Zonta Club of Auburn supported a Unity House consumer who exemplifies the Zonta mission of improving the status of women through her determination to improve the quality of her life and that of her children by continuing her education. The funds were put towards the purchase of a laptop computer. This woman is a single mother of three small children and just graduated from Cayuga Community College. She plans to go on for her bachelor's degree in forensic science at Syracuse University, and this laptop is vital to the success of her continued education.

Metro Mattress - two twin bed sets

Once again, Metro Mattress of Syracuse has awarded Unity House two twin bed sets for its consumers. The sleep sets, part of the "50 Beds in 50 Days" promotion sponsored by Metro Mattress this spring, were delivered to Unity House apartments in Auburn, benefitting the women and their children who reside in Grace House's supportive apartment units. These much-needed beds each included a mattress, box spring, and steel frame.



The Sky is the Limit for Tracy Horton

Auburn day hab consumer thrives



For 41-year-old Auburn native and Unity House day habilitation program consumer Tracy Horton, offering services aligned with her desires and goals has been key to her outstanding success.

One of the original consumers of the agency's day hab program in

Auburn, Tracy has never let her disability prevent her from participating in structured activities that focus on meeting her many needs and goals.

"Tracy is very intelligent and capable," says Jackie Bragan, assistant program manager at Auburn day hab and Tracy's case manager since 1997, when Tracy transitioned to the program from another local human services agency. "Once that was recognized, we developed a plan for her accordingly. Her service plan is highly individualized, she has maintained her voluntary status, and it's safe to say her personal feelings of fulfillment and well-being are enhanced by our consumer-centered empowerment strategy that lets her make her own choices and decisions. It has allowed her to thrive."

Tracy's individualized program encompasses health and wellness, travel, volunteerism, education, and more. She walks to and from her daily obligations in addition to walking two to three miles a day as part of her exercise regimen at the Auburn YMCA. She also uses the stationary bike for 30 minutes nearly every day, "To keep my heart going and to manage my weight," she says.

While weight management might be a challenge for Tracy, she's learned to make good food choices at day hab. She is a Dunkin' Donuts coffee fan, but carefully selects from the sugar-free, fruit-flavored varieties.

Tracy enjoys the interaction with other day hab consumers and participates in many arts and crafts projects, including ceramics. She has a collection of figurines she's glazed, including Mickey Mouse and holiday pieces.

"I'm glad I came to this place," Tracy says with a smile. "It's like family here – they treat me right."

In addition to three days a week at day hab, Tracy is out and about in the Auburn community, both as a volunteer and as a paid employee. Through Unity Employment Services, she holds down two jobs: cleaning at Balloons Restaurant on Saturdays and delivering about 250 Pennysaver newspapers every Wednesday. Her UES job coach gives her a lift as she works her rounds.

Tracy takes great joy in volunteering. She helps out at Meals on Wheels, delivering about a dozen meals to homebound citizens on Mondays, and shreds papers at the Booker T. Washington Center when they need her. She accomplishes all this while working towards her GED at Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES.

"BOCES changed some of their programs recently, making it more difficult for Tracy to meet the requirements, but she's still working on it," said Jackie.

Tracy enjoys travelling, too, and with day hab, has been to the Buffalo Bills training camp in nearby Pittsford, NY, and camping trips to Letchworth State Park. "I'm planning my next vacation to Washington, D.C.," said Tracy. She wants to visit the White House, the Smithsonian museums, the Washington Monument, and Arlington Cemetery.

Jackie encourages Tracy to see more of the world: "Increasing Tracy's travelling experiences is a priority emphasized in her service plan. She likes it so much because she gets to meet new people and see new places, something we encourage."

"The sky is the limit for Tracy," Jackie continues. "As long as she's with Unity House, we'll keep providing her with a plan that will completely aligned with her desires and goals. There's really no end to what she can do."

Special thanks to former Director of Marketing and Development Paul Marron for writing the original story.



Recycle for Unity House!

Fingerlakes Community Recycling Center, located at 393 Grant Avenue Road in Auburn (across from Pizza Hut on the east end), will collect cans and bottles year-round on behalf of the agency. Drop off your returnables, tell them your load is for Unity House, and the center will send a quarterly check to the agency. It's that simple!

Going Paperless in 2012

To help save both trees and money, Unity House has made the strategic decision to stop printing *Spirit* and start delivering it electronically only in 2012. Please "opt in" by sending your e-mail address to kbuck@unityhouse.com

so you can stay abreast of all that's going on at the agency. Our printed publications are also available for viewing and download online anytime at www.unityhouse.com/news-press.html.





Raising Addiction Awareness

Nearly 35 Unity House staff, Grace House residents, and members of the public participated in the annual Tim Durant Recovery Walk held on May 23. The event is sponsored each year by the Auburn Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court in collaboration with Unity House in memory of Timothy Durant, a past Grace House employee who died in 2006.

“Tim was a former program manager at Unity House who passed away suddenly,” said Grace House Director Michele Leonello. “He was a very nice person who helped out a lot of people in recovery through his efforts at Grace House. The walk in his honor has been taking place for about five years. It is an event we share with Auburn Drug Treatment Court as an awareness booster for people in recovery from alcohol and substance addiction.”

The walk begins in front of Memorial City Hall, where the mayor presents a proclamation declaring May as National Drug Treatment Court Month and Mental Health Month. The group then processes down South Street to Clymer Street, loops back to City Hall, then finishes with a special memorial service and reception at Grace House on Osborne Street. For the first time, the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) was also involved in the walk this year.

Michele continued: “We open up Grace House to the public for a reception and an open house afterwards so that they can see what this program is all about. We work hard to lessen the stigma surrounding those in our community who are addicted to alcohol and other substances. This event is all about raising awareness.”

Celebrating Volunteerism in Our Community

At its annual dinner on April 25, Unity House recognized Mr. Alan Drennen of Auburn as the agency’s inaugural Fred Atkins Community Service Awardee. Mr. Drennen, an outstanding volunteer at several Cayuga County organizations, received a \$500 cash prize: \$250 for him and \$250 to give to a local charitable organization. Mr. Drennen chose Calvary Food Pantry.

Al Drennen is a life-long Auburnian. He graduated from Auburn Central High, became an apprentice carpenter, then joined the Navy Seabees as a carpenter’s mate during World War II. After the war, he returned to Auburn, married Pat Strong Drennen, raised six children, and worked as a self-employed carpenter until retirement.

Today, at age 90, Al helps unload trucks at the Calvary Food Pantry when food is delivered. He picks up donations from churches, delivers them to the pantry, and greets pantry customers. He has served as a deacon, elder and trustee at First Presbyterian Church; led Boy Scout Troop 1 for many years; and has made numerous free repairs and improvements for the church. Al roller skates weekly for the social and health benefits.

Unity House introduced the community-wide fund and award this year in memory of beloved Cayuga County volunteer and 30-year Unity House board member Frederick Atkins. The Atkins Award recognizes an outstanding individual who volunteers in Cayuga County and who exemplifies Fred’s high moral standards and philanthropic spirit.

Many thanks to Key Bank, corporate sponsors of Unity House’s annual dinner, and for all those who made contributions to the new Atkins Fund, especially Neil and Maggie Atkins. Donations to the fund are gratefully accepted at any time. Please mail gifts to: Unity House Development Office, 34 Wright Avenue, Auburn, NY 13021. Help us reach our \$50,000 goal!



Al Drennen receives the inaugural Fred Atkins Community Service Award from former Unity House Board chair and selection committee member Karen Merritt.

“Green Mindset” has Ecological Impact



Chelsea, a consumer at Sheffield Road IRA in Ithaca, helps manage the home's food waste by transferring scraps from the kitchen to the bin provided by Cayuga Compost.

What is Organic Waste?

- Food waste made up of food and preparation leftovers. Typically this waste will have food as well as some compostable packaging.
- Yard waste made up of plant material including brush, tree wood, lawn clippings, leaves, and other vegetation.
- Compostable food and yard waste are organic because they:
 - are degradable in a compost system resulting in H₂O, carbon dioxide, inorganic compounds, and biomass
 - break down into small pieces indistinguishable from the soil
 - completely decompose, leaving behind no eco-toxicity, resulting in soil that can support plant growth.

In partnership with Cayuga Compost of Ithaca, Unity House's group home on Sheffield Road is now composting its food waste.

Program Manager Elspeth Peterson says she always wanted to explore the option of composting at the site. "It just seemed like a good idea for so many reasons. I contacted the Cornell Cooperative Extension in town and found out that composting is inexpensive but requires some time and oversight to get started."

Elspeth didn't want to cause more work for the staff, but was firm in her desire to reduce waste at her site, so she spoke to Director of Maintenance Gary Fellows and the Strategic Planning Infrastructure Committee. Several members took a field trip to Cayuga Compost last winter to learn more.

"Cayuga Compost provides a blue container that looks like a large garbage can with a lid," explained Elspeth. "All we have to do is collect our food scraps – coffee grounds, banana peels, egg shells, even paper towels – at the house after meals and empty them into the container. Cayuga Compost picks up the can weekly, processes the contents and sorts out metal, glass, plastic, and Styrofoam, then sells the compostable material for yard and garden use. They even grade us on how acceptable our waste is! So far, we've been deemed excellent."

Sheffield already recycles plastic, paper, and cardboard, so adding the composting bin wasn't a big change. Some staff members were skeptical at first, but now that the program is underway, it's just part of the daily routine.

"The residents are very excited about it. I found out that many are already accustomed to doing it at Challenge Industries, [where they go for work and rehabilitation] so it wasn't a big stretch for them to apply this green mindset in their home environment, too."

Elspeth would like to expand the compost project to the other nearby Unity House residences. She says: "What we're doing at Sheffield is a pilot project. We now know it works and it's easy, but we don't produce very much waste – we're a small site and there's not a lot of leftover food at the house. I'd like to grow the program to include the other Ithaca IRAs so we can have an even greater ecological impact."

Not only is this composting project helping the environment, it may cut back on Unity House's trash removal costs as well. Cayuga Compost has told Elspeth if more residential sites come onboard, the agency may be able to receive a discount from Ithaca Solid Waste Management based on weight.

This spring, Unity House launched its annual fund, an initiative that will elicit financial contributions from friends and donors on a yearly basis to support, in part, the general operations of the agency. Help Unity House empower and enrich the lives of people in recovery, with a mental health illness, or with developmental disabilities. Your annual unrestricted gift to The Fund for Unity House has a direct impact on their quality of life. Thank you for your support. For tax purposes, Unity House's fund year ends December 31.



Developing New Leaders



For many years, Unity House has supported the personal and professional growth of its employees by enrolling them in the area's leadership development programs. These programs, increasingly popular across the country, stimulate public-minded thinking and increase the base of informed, capable leaders committed to using their talents to add to the vitality of their communities.

Three Unity House employees recently graduated from such programs: Assistant Director Jessica Janssen and UES Site Manager Cyndi Sharp from Leadership Cayuga in Auburn, and Program Manager Thia Harriett from Leadership Tompkins in Ithaca. Both six-month programs are sponsored by their respective Chambers of Commerce. Each introduces a group of about 18 - 27 individuals to all aspects of local life, empowering them with the knowledge, skills and inspiration to successfully achieve leadership roles while developing a problem-solving network to address present and future community needs and challenges.

While this type of leadership immersion requires a large time commitment – classes usually meet for half a day every other week for six months, in addition to out-of-class activities – all three of this year's graduates agree that it was worth the time and effort.

"The best part for me was meeting the people," said Cyndi. "I got to know most of the folks in my class quite well; these are people I wouldn't have otherwise met. I especially enjoyed the final all-day bus tour of the county – I got to see so much of Cayuga County that I didn't know existed!"

Jessica agreed: "I've got a much greater appreciation of Cayuga County now that I'm more aware of all that's available here. Our community invests in itself in so many ways; I wasn't aware of that until Leadership Cayuga. I got to meet business leaders and community members; it was a great networking opportunity that will benefit me and Unity House."

The standard curriculum for these leadership programs usually encompasses such topics as economic development, education, human services, legal and justice systems, agriculture and environmental issues, quality of life

issues, public relations and communications, local government, and personal leadership skills like public speaking, conflict dynamics, teamwork, project management, and board structure.

Each session focuses on one of these areas, and is offered in a different location around the county. Business and community leaders are invited to help facilitate specific sessions, lending their insight and expertise to the day's topic.

On their own time, class members are usually also expected to attend a county legislature meeting, participate in a scavenger hunt that takes them to dozens of county-wide attractions and points of interest, take a bus familiarization tour, and work in small groups on a community project.

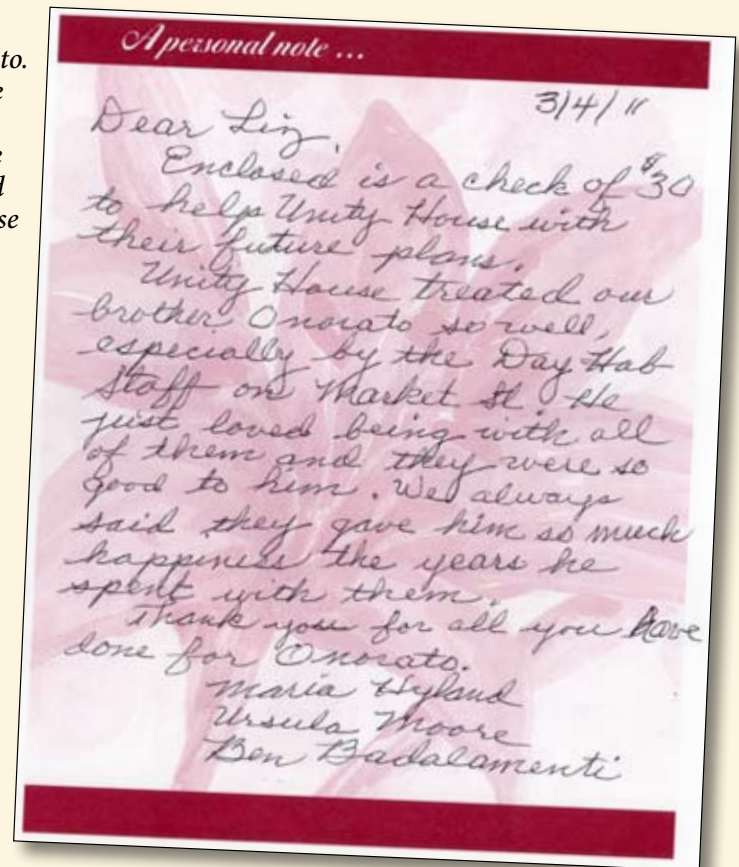
"Leadership Tompkins is a program that I would recommend to anyone

looking to build upon their leadership skills," said Thia. "I met many wonderful and inspirational community members who shared their leadership styles and what helps them to be successful leaders. The diversity of these individuals helped build my self-confidence and equipped me with the skills needed to communicate effectively in individual and group settings. I plan to take full advantage of their insight to better myself both personally and professionally."

Leadership Cayuga/Tompkins alumni leave the experience with a wider knowledge of their respective counties, making them better leaders in the community and on the job. Many are sought out as volunteers and to sit on boards, putting their newly honed skills and knowledge to the test.

Unity House regularly receives thank you notes from the families we serve, like this one from Maria Hyland and her siblings.

The agency cared for their brother Onorato. It's always nice to hear that their needs are being met, and that they choose to support the agency in this way.



Appreciating Our Employees

Peter Cottontail made his way to the Case Mansion in Auburn this spring. The agency's Staff Appreciation Committee took an opportunity to give back to its staff and their families by hosting its first Easter egg hunt on April 30.

Originally planned for April 16, the hunt was rained out but that didn't dampen spirits. More than 70 staff members showed up two weeks later, and about 40 of their children participated in the scramble for nearly 1,500 eggs hidden around the grounds.

"The hunt was a huge success!" said Staff Appreciation Committee Chair Amy Carioggia. "Bikes, scooters, games, and baskets were donated and raffled off, all free to our employees and their families. We had an Easter bunny, Scooby Doo and Sponge Bob for pictures with the kids, and it was a blast."

Because the committee was so successful in getting prizes donated for this event, almost every child left with something other than eggs. Committee members Thia Harriett and Renee Post secured numerous door prizes, and the majority of the plastic eggs were donated

and filled by the committee and other generous staff members.

"Elspeth Peterson was able to get an Easter bunny costume from her husband's place of business, much to the



delight of the kids," said Candi Saxman. "Considering we did not have a budget and this was our first family event, I think it went over very well."

Thia seconded that: "I was very pleased with the outcome of the Easter egg hunt. We anticipate that next year's event will be even better. The amount of gifts we received was exceptional and we are grateful for all donations."

The Staff Appreciation Committee plans to hold similar family-oriented events twice a year, alternating between Cayuga and Tompkins Counties so most Unity House employees can participate.

"It surely is a worthy cause," said Renee. "Our employees do so much for our consumers, it only seems fitting that we would want to let them know just how much we appreciate them and the work they do. We can't wait to do it again next year!"

*Special thanks to the
Staff Appreciation Committee:*

Amy Carioggia, chair
Thia Harriett
Patti Park
Elspeth Peterson
Renee Post
Candi Saxman
Doreen Wagner


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