

CAU in the News



October 2012

Community Access Unlimited's mission is to provide community access through effective and comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and at-risk youth, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives in the community.

ACHIEVEMENT AND PROMISE CELEBRATED AT COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED 2012 GALA

Award winners represent the balance that enables progress

Elizabeth, NJ – It was not the best of times – they are yet to come. It was not the worst of times – they are in the past. Rather, it was a celebration of achievement over the past year and the leadership, humanitarianism and community support that has helped improve the lives of countless people and will drive continued improvement in the future.

It was the 32nd Annual Gala Dinner Dance of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), which provides housing, life skills training and support services to people with disabilities and at-risk youth. The gala, held Oct. 24 at L' Affaire in Mountainside, was attended by more than 650 members and staff of CAU, as well as family, friends and community supporters.



Dr. James Conroy (center), president of the Center for Outcome Analysis, receives the Humanitarian of the Year Award from Sid Blanchard (left), executive director of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), and Dan Keating of the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens of Disabilities at the CAU 2012 Annual Gala.

CAU honored three award winners who ideally represent the different faces of its mission – the effort to enable people with disabilities and at-risk youth to live independently in the community, the social service professionals who sustain that effort and the community partners who support the agency and its members.

Dr. James Conroy was honored as Humanitarian of the Year. Conroy is president and chief executive officer of the Center for Outcome Analysis, Inc., which is devoted to the study and implementation of support models that produce the best outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"We've seen a change in my generation that is unparalleled – getting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities out of institutions," said Conroy, who earlier in his career witnesses the mistreatment taking place at the infamous Penhurst State School and Hospital in Pennsylvania. "We've changed faster and further than any other country on this planet."



Walter Kalman (center), executive director of the National Association of Social Workers-New Jersey Chapter, receives the Public Leadership Award from Sid Blanchard, executive director of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), and Dawn Apgar, deputy commissioner of the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities, at the CAU 2012 Annual Gala.

Yet Conroy sees more work to come, particularly in New Jersey, where more than 2,000 people with disabilities live in developmental centers. "With over 2,000 people it will probably take 20 years," he said. "But with the right leadership and effort it could take 10."

Walter Kalman, executive director of the National Association of Social Workers-New Jersey Chapter, was given the Public Leadership Award. "My job is to advocate for social workers, one of the fastest-growing occupations in the country yet one of the most underpaid," Kalman said. "The baby boomer generation now is reaching the age when they'll need more services...Also, there are fewer psychologists and psychiatrists for (people with disabilities) and social workers are filling those needs."

CAU honored Irwin Sablosky with the Ira Geller Award, which is presented to someone with a significant commitment to CAU, including its members, and best reflects the concept of volunteerism. Sablosky is president of Wm. S. Rich & Sons, Inc., and has served on the Springfield board of education for 12 years, frequently assisting CAU in the Springfield school system. He also has directly supported CAU for more than a decade, including assisting with CAU's first theatre production, *Seussical Jr.*, which was held at Jonathon Dayton High School in Springfield.

Through his business Sablosky improves the lives of those who are in need of short-term financing but do not have access to standard credit, each year making more than 50,000 short-term loans based on personal collateral.

"People don't realize there are a lot of people living among us who need help," he said. "It's gratifying to help these people, whether it's



At the 2012 Annual Gala of Community Access Unlimited (CAU) James Conroy (center left), president of the Center for Outcome Analysis, receives the Humanitarian of the Year Award and Irwin Sablosky (center right), president of Wm S. Rich & Sons, Inc., receives the Ira Geller Award from Union County Freeholder Alexander Mirabella (center) and Mercedes Witowsky and Sid Blanchard, associate executive director and executive director of CAU, respectively.

financially or in some other way. Community Access Unlimited's mission also is to allow people to live the most fulfilling lives they can. To be recognized by such a group of people is one of the most gratifying experiences of my life."

Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director, noted that collectively the people of CAU and its supporters achieved much in the past year, including building 86 barrier-free housing units. He said the agency's upcoming housing projects include a 12-unit apartment building in Elizabeth and a combination residential-commercial property in Fanwood at which businesses will employ people with disabilities. Blanchard also talked about the various self-advocacy efforts of the agency's members and how he expects 1,500 members to vote in next month's elections. "We as a community have been working together," he said. "We have a bright future continuing to work together."

Union County Freeholder Alexander Mirabella agreed. "We are very lucky to have such an organization in Union County," he said.