



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Community Access Unlimited honors those who help the agency serve others**

**Elizabeth, NJ – Nov. 3, 2015** – Community Access Unlimited (CAU) recently honored three community partners at the agency's 2015 Annual Gala Dinner Dance, held at L'Affaire in Mountainside, NJ. Those honored help CAU fulfill its mission of enabling its members to live independent lives within the greater community.

CAU is a statewide Elizabeth-based nonprofit providing support programs and services to adults with disabilities as well as youth served under the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to enable them to live independently in the community, in areas including housing, vocational and life-skills training, education, advocacy and recreation.

Those honored were Union County Sheriff Joseph Cryan with the Public Leadership Award; Pastor Howard Bryant with the Humanitarian of the Year Award; and the Financial Literacy Program at Valley National Bank with the Ira Geller Award.

"Community Access Unlimited cannot achieve our goals of enabling our members to live fulfilling and integrated lives within the community without the support of community partners such as those we are honoring tonight," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director.

Cryan was sworn in as Union County Sheriff on January 1 after serving as administrative undersheriff for 11 years. Cryan also served in the New Jersey Assembly representing the 20th district for 12 years and as Majority Leader for two years. He has been an avid supporter of CAU during his time as an assemblyman and now in his role as county sheriff.

"I am honored and humbled to receive this award," Cryan said. "I don't think there's a greater organization in the state of New Jersey than Community Access. I'm not at all shy to say that Sid Blanchard is a hero of mine for the work this organization does. The people who work at Community Access do things others won't do and I'm privileged to be part of this evening."

Bryant has dedicated his career to helping others, both inside and outside the church. In addition to leading multiple churches in California and New Jersey, he has been the executive director of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus; the Protestant Campus Minister at Kean University; the coordinator and instructor of the Arthur Ashe Safe Passage Foundation Tennis Program; and the organizer and administrator of Achieve to Excel, an after-school program. Most recently, Bryant has taken a leadership position within the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council, which was spearheaded by CAU.

"Being associated with CAU, it reminds me what I'm called to do – be a minister of the gospel," he said. "I'm awed by how this organization reaches out to those who otherwise would not be embraced. I'm honored to be involved with the Interfaith Council, encouraging people to embrace people with disabilities. Everybody is important and needs to have a role in society."

The Ira Geller Award is presented to someone or an organization with a significant commitment to CAU, including its members, and best reflects the concept of volunteerism. Through its Financial Literacy Program, Valley National Bank educates youth and adults in the community about the importance of financial literacy and awareness, including members of CAU at its Academy for Continuing Education.

"We're extremely honored to receive this award," said Bernadette Mueller, senior community reinvestment act officer and executive vice president at Valley. "It's very moving meeting CAU members and seeing the impact our work has on the people of this organization. We're very committed to all the communities we serve and look to enrich the lives of those around us."

The gala was attended by more than 620 members of CAU, their families, agency staff and community partners and supporters, including Union County Freeholder Alexander Mirabella.

"The county freeholders have been long-time supporters of Community Access," Mirabella said. "Community Access helps people who need help and creates an environment where everybody is treated equally. We're honored to be involved in a positive event like this."

Audrey Vasey, president of the CAU board of trustees, said about the evening, "It's a celebration of individuals and organizations that share our values. It's also a way to thank our supporters and partners for their ongoing support of our members and our programs and services."

The evening also featured a performance by Kayla Richardson, who is blind, a sophomore from Hillside High School and student of music at the Institute of Music for Children. She sang "What About the Children" and "Walking."

### Photos and captions below

#### About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 36<sup>th</sup> year of success in 2015, supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have little support and no voice in society. CAU helps people with housing, life skills, employment, money management, socialization and civic activities. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. CAU serves more than 5,000 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org) or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.



Above: Bernadette Mueller, senior community reinvestment act officer and executive vice president at Valley National Bank, accepts the Ira Geller Award on behalf of the bank from Sid Blanchard, executive director of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), and Harold Poltrock of the CAU board of advisors at the agency's annual Gala.



Top right: Blanchard presents Pastor Howard Bryant with the Humanitarian Award.



Bottom right: Blanchard and board member Karen Ensle present Union County Sheriff Joe Cryan with the Public Leadership Award.