



# The Independent Citizen

Summer 2017

COMMUNITY ACCESS  
UNLIMITED

## The Year of Art at CAU Continues:

## NJ Symphony Orchestra Quintet & CAU Rocks Band Take the Stage

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Rock and roll met classical music this spring as CAU hosted a quintet from the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO), with a performance by the CAU Rocks Band preceding the quintet on stage. Five members of the orchestra performed "Peter and the Wolf," with CAU member Megan Modero providing narration of the story behind the music for the audience of CAU members, family and staff..

"This was special," said Katie Miller, NJSO Community Engagement Coordinator. "Megan has so much energy and it was a treat for us to work with her. It is important for us to engage people in classical music early on so we can keep it going as much as possible."

Added Marguerite Modero, music director at CAU, "We're so happy the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra is here sharing their love of music because music is something you can enjoy when you're young and old, whether you are a person with or without disabilities."

The event is part of a community concert series in Elizabeth featuring NJSO chamber ensembles, sponsored by the PSEG Foundation.

The quintet was preceded by a performance by the CAU Rocks Band, a collaboration between CAU's Academy of Continuing Education and the Kean University music department. The band comprises both CAU members and Kean University music majors, who serve as mentors to the CAU members. The band played "Don't Stop Believing," as well as "By Chance," a song written specifically inspired by a poem authored by three CAU members.

*Continued on page 2*

" Helping you achieve independence in the community... that's

**THEcau**  
ADVANTAGE



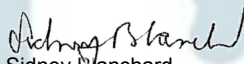
## A Message from our Executive Director

The landscape in which Community Access Unlimited operates continues to change yet our mission of empowering our members with disabilities to live full and rewarding lives within an integrated community continues. This issue of *Independent Citizen* shows that we are succeeding on many levels.

Teamwork is at the heart of our success. Our staff work hand-in-hand with each other and our members to enable the members to achieve their goals and aspirations. Working collaboratively, our staff and members alike show commitment, creativity, and delight.

In this issue you will read about how our members staged a concert, playing side by side with musicians from Kean University in the CAU Rocks Band, preceding a performance by a New Jersey Symphony Orchestra quintet. You will meet Sylvia the therapy dog, introduced to CAU members by her owner who is also one of our behaviorists. You will read about our members enjoying the pleasures and benefits of work in jobs we helped them find and members and staff helping other members learn about their voting rights. And you will discover how five of our members learned CPR and first aid, thanks to the drive of our staff.

This collaboration and commitment enables us to fulfill our mission and allows our members to enjoy life to the fullest. The rewards are endless – for all of us here at Community Access Unlimited, and for those of you who support us in the community.

  
Sidney Blanchard  
Executive Director



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### ***NJ Symphony Orchestra Quintet & CAU Rocks Band Take the Stage***

"It felt great," said Terrell Ross, a CAU member and a vocalist in the band. "I never thought I'd be part of a group performing on stage. I was nervous when we started but then the music took over."

"It was fun up there," said John Drescher, also a CAU member and the band's drummer who had never played an instrument before joining CAU Rocks. "I had a great time, really rocking and playing the drums."

The joint concert is the latest step by CAU to advance integration of its members into the wider community through art.

**(CAU NJSO)** The quintet from the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra performed "Peter and the Wolf." *(Pictured Above)*

**(CAU Rocks)** CAU Rocks Band, a collaboration between CAU members and Kean University music majors, performed prior to the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra quintet.





## "Aladdin Jr." Comes to CAU

This year the CAU Community Players are staging a very special production of "Aladdin Jr." at the Rahway High School Center for Performing Arts on June 29, June 30 and July 1. Saturday's performance will be Family Day, when members of the audience, including children, will be able to have their photos taken with members of cast prior to the show.

Each year the CAU Community Players select a play that is representative of CAU's message of inclusion, acceptance and believing in oneself, as well as everyone's worth, regardless of disability. An homage to the Disney movie, which itself was based on the folk tale of the same name, "Aladdin Jr." is the story of a street urchin, a princess and a genie all overcoming their respective obstacles to escape the traps of their lives and achieve their fullest potential and happiness.

The CAU Community Players is a troupe of performers with developmental disabilities and actors and actresses from the broader community. Formed in 2012, the troupe allows CAU members to engage in the pleasures of acting, singing and dancing with people from the wider community and to be judged for their talents rather than disabilities. "Aladdin Jr." is their seventh production.

Funding has been made possible in part by the NJ State Council on the Arts, Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, through a grant administered by the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs



Rehearsals are in full swing as the troupe prepares for Opening Night! (Top) Sara Law (left) and Melanie Lucas (right) rehearse lines. (Middle) Giovanni Mancini practices his dance number. (Bottom) Kim Barry and James McArthur run lines together for the opening scene.

### Upcoming Events:

#### - JUNE -

**June 21, 5:30 PM—9:00 PM**  
Family Connections Meeting  
at the Suburban Golf Club

**June 29 at 7:30 PM**

**June 30 at 7:30 PM**

**& July 1 at 2:00 PM**

Aladdin Jr. At the Rahway High  
School Center for Performing Arts

#### - JULY -

**July 19, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM**  
Performance Recognition  
Night  
at the CAU Main Office

**July 28, 6:00 PM—9:00 PM**  
CAU Prom  
at the CAU Main Office

**July 29, 10:00 AM—2:00 PM**  
Independent City  
at the CAU Main Office

#### - AUGUST -

**August 1, 6:00 PM—7:30 PM**  
Helping Hands Self Advocacy  
at the CAU Main Office

**August 16, 5:30 PM—8:00 PM**  
Celebration of Life  
at the CAU Main Office

**August 23, 5:30 PM—8:00 PM**  
Annual Youth Conference  
at the CAU Main Office

#### - SEPTEMBER -

**Sept. 5 6:00 PM—7:30 PM**  
Helping Hands Self Advocacy  
at the CAU Main Office

**Sept. 16 11:00 AM—3:30 PM**  
Ira Geller Walk-a-thon  
at Oak Ridge Park, Clark NJ

**Sept. 28 8:00 AM—10:00 AM**  
CAU Community  
Networking Breakfast  
at the Suburban Golf Club

**For More Information on Upcoming Events**  
Visit our website at [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org)



CAU member Edem Benson (second from left) surrounded by members of Tau Delta Phi at their recent pinning event.

## Support Coordination Member Named Fraternity Brother – Twice!

Most college students who join a fraternity or sorority are thrilled by the the experience and remember it all their lives. CAU member Edem Benson has been named a honorary member of two fraternities at Monmouth University, Tau Delta Phi and Phi Kappa Psi.

Members from both fraternities recently visited the Children's Center of Monmouth County, where Edem attends his day program, and named Edem and others as honorary members of their fraternities, giving them pledge pins and fraternity t-shirts.

"He was so excited," said Edem's mother, Charlotte Duncan. "The principal of the school said he had never seen him so animated. A lot of families came and it was all very nice"

It is particularly fitting to see Tau Delta Phi embrace people with disabilities, as it traditionally has been a very progressive fraternity, one of the first in the nation to eliminate enrolment based on race, religion, nationality or sexual orientation. Their motto is, "He shall not want, for as long as I breathe, for he is my brother."

## Need Help? Call One Of our Newly First Aid/CPR Certified CAU Members!

When CAU member Lyman Thompson worked for Roselle Park, he saw a lot of people needing help. Then one day, he was one of those people.

"I had a heart attack five years ago," Lyman said. "I flatlined and one of my coworkers brought me back with CPR. That inspired me to take the training myself."

Lyman got the opportunity recently when CAU's Jonathan Jones, Director of Community Integration and Respite Services, and Jonathan Bradley, Director of Quality Assurance and Training, put together a First Aid and CPR training class, certified by the American Red Cross. The training entailed a five-hour course, including working with dummies to learn proper techniques for CPR and to become first aid-certified. Lyman and four other CAU members graduated and now are certified in CPR.

When Aiden Bolan was young his brother collapsed and was saved by his mother performing CPR. That inspired him to take the class now. "My mom followed all the steps we learned," he said. "I want to be able to help people out there."

Lee and Christine Bongiovi, who are married, took the class because they have a 15-year-old son. "I thought it would be a long course but we picked it up quickly," said Lee, who was previously CPR-certified but felt he needed a refresher.

"Their attitudes were amazing," Jonathan said. "We really haven't seen anything like this before. People have doubts that people with disabilities are able to learn CPR and first aid. But they're very capable and our members passed the test and can perform it. I'm 100 percent sure these members can perform the tasks."

Added Joshua, "They asked a lot of inquisitive questions I normally wouldn't get in a regular class. "I knew in 10 minutes they would all pass."



(Top) Lee Bongiovi poses with Jonathan Jones and his certificate – and the dummy. (Bottom) Lee learns CPR as Jonathan looks on.





### Uncle Same Wants You... To Vote

So does the New American Movement for People with Disabilities (NAM), which recently hosted a Voter Registration and Education event. At the event, members were educated – or refreshed – about: registering to vote; how to find a polling station and use a voting machine; voting by mail; how to learn about candidates and their positions on issues, and how they match with members' values; and voting rights. The Union County Board of Elections brought a sample polling station for CAU members to practice voting on and board representatives were there to register any member not already registered.

"We're trying to encourage more people to vote and to have a voice for themselves," said Gary Rubin of NAM. "We want them to be active in the community. When people vote they have influence over their community and the type of leaders they want."

Linda Marchand has been voting since she turned 18. "I vote because there are a lot of people I know who need jobs and homes," she said. "People are out on the street. I want to vote for candidates who will help these people."

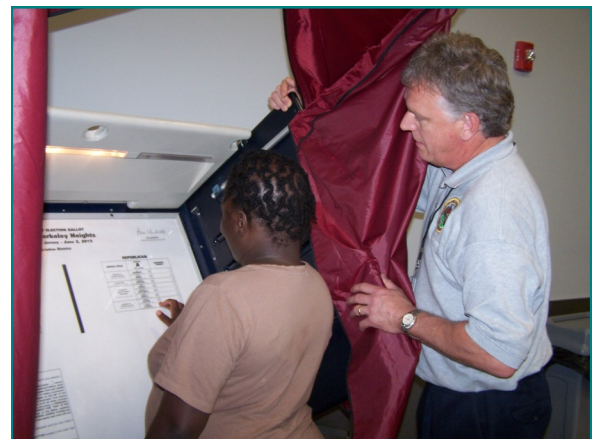
Juana Quinn has been voting since she was 20. "I want to get my opinion out there," she said. "I know there was a time when women couldn't vote. Now that we can, I take full advantage of it."

In 2012, 56.8 percent of people with disabilities voted, compared to 62.5 percent of people without disabilities. That year 30 percent of people with disabilities reported difficulty in voting, compared with just 8 percent of people without disabilities.

"Our goal is for our members to be educated about voting, exercise their rights and have no difficulty doing so," said Michael Williams, CAU Community Organizer/Behaviorist.



Members of the New American Movement for People With Disabilities welcomed members to the event.



Richard Barry of the Union County Board of Elections helps Danielle Senior learn about the sample polling station.



Juana Quinn (left) and Linda Marchand practice voting in a sample polling station.





## A Dog's Purpose

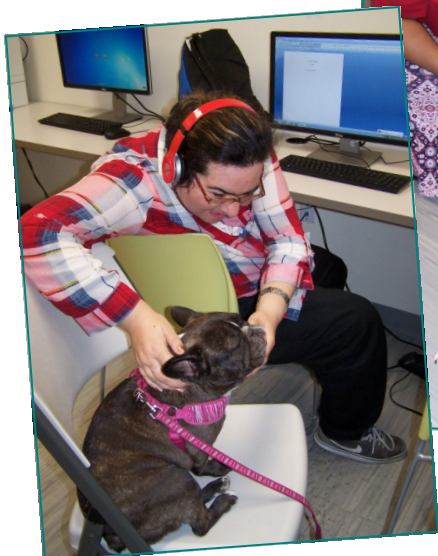
CAU's Cranford facility has a new member – but this one has four legs. Sylvia the French bulldog visits once or twice a week, brought in by her owner and CAU Behaviorist Jennifer Lebowitz.

"Since graduate school I always wanted to do dog therapy but it's been hard to find an employer who will let you bring your dog to work," Jennifer said. Then she came to CAU, suggested the idea of Sylvia visiting to her supervisor and got the green light.

Sylvia is a Certified Therapy Dog, having gone through the training that verifies she has the right temperament to make others feel better. According to Therapy Dog International, a therapy dog must have an outstanding temperament and be outgoing and friendly to all people. Sylvia is just that.

"She's pretty much a natural," Jennifer said. "She definitely has a fan club. She works wonders with the members, especially those who are more behaviorally challenged. When she's here, their behavior is wonderful."

Members help take care of Sylvia when she visits, giving her water, feeding her treats and walking her. "They're not allowed to have pets in their residences so this is a treat for them," Jennifer said.



**(TOP)** Yassin Reddick gets a kiss from Sylvia. **(Bottom Left)** Marisol gets a thank you after giving Sylvia a treat. **(Bottom Right)** Sylvia receives a warm welcome from one of her biggest fans, Sunnah.

## Hard at Work – and Happy!

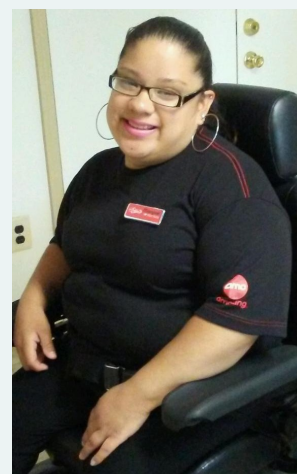
Two of our members recently landed jobs and both are happy to have joined the workforce. Tahira Williams has begun working at Creative Cuts, a hair salon in Newark. According staff, Tahira has made tremendous progress during the last year and starting a job was the next logical step.

A CAU staff member also works part-time at Creative Cuts and was able to arrange for Tahira to work at the salon one day per week cleaning cutting stations and gathering towels. She very much looks forward to her shift each week, according to Shanice Bogues, director at CAU.

"I wanted to work because I wanted to be busy with a new job," Tahira said. "I like it very much."

Maryvel Gutierrez has begun working at AMC Theater in Linden, where she works as a ticket-taker. Maryvel told her Support Counselor, Shadeequa Swiney, she wanted to get a job because she no longer wanted to only attend a day program.

"I like my job," Maryvel said. "I like the hours and meeting new people, and I like to get paid."



Maryvel Gutierrez is now employed at AMC Theatre in Linden!





## Hole-in-One for CAU!

Our friends and community partners helped CAU raise more than \$56,000 at our 2017 CAU Golf Classic, held at Suburban Country Club. More than 150 attendees supported CAU and our members and programs.

The event sponsor was Valley National Bank. "As a community-focused bank, it is our responsibility to help nonprofit organizations that make our communities a better place to live," said Mwaura Muroki, Valley National Bank Commercial Loan Officer. "That is why we are proud to support Community Access Unlimited in their mission to provide support services for youth and adults with disabilities."

Also attending were Assemblyman Jon Bramnick and former U.S. Senator Jeffrey Chiessa. Jon has been supporting CAU since he was a city council member in Plainfield in the 1980s and helped the agency open a youth home in the city despite some local opposition.

*We'd like to thank each and everyone of our sponsors for their support! Visit our website to see our full sponsorship list and stay tuned for next year's outing information!*

Attending the 2017 CAU Golf Classic were (left to right) Lynn Swain and Mwaura Muroki of Valley National Bank, the event sponsor; Assemblyman Jon Bramnick; Robert Leung and MaryAnn Beltz of Valley National, Harold Poltrock Esq. and CAU board president; and former U.S. Senator Jeffrey Chiessa.

## How Can You Help

*Attend A Community Event and network with our members, staff, and supporters*

*Make a financial contribution and help members access food, clothing and shelter*

*Donate new or very gently used household items to someone moving into their first apartment*

*Donate your vehicle to a youth or adult who wants to be more independent*

*Support a leaf on the CAU Tree of Life or make a donation a loved one's honor*

*Volunteer your time!*

**Visit our website to learn more**  
**[www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org)**

## Fanwood is Now Home for Four CAU Members

CAU welcomed its newest property on April 17 when the doors opened at our new Fanwood home. The two-floor, four-bedroom, fully accessible residential property is located in downtown Fanwood, close to stores and restaurants, places of employment, the railroad station and bus lines.

The house is home for four members, three of whom are fairly new to CAU, either coming to us from their parents' home or through our Emergency Capacity System. One member, Kevin Collazo, will soon enroll in the Rutgers Masters program to earn his masters – he already has a bachelor's degree in accounting – and a second, Aiden Bolan, has found a job at the Home Goods in nearby Clark.

"They love it here," said Aisha Arroyo, Assistant Executive Director. "Fanwood is a really nice area. There are summer festivals and they're really looking forward to that." The members are joined by eight staff members in this lovely completely refurbished home.

(Top) Enjoying their new home are (left to right) Aidan Dolan, Kevin Collazo and Anthony Hodge.  
(Bottom) The property was completely refurbished and is a crown jewel in the neighborhood.



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**Community Access Unlimited's Mission:** *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.*

# Join Us in September Annual Ira Geller Walk-a-thon



**September 16th, 2017**

**Oak Ridge Park, Clark NJ**

**11:00 AM Registration; Walk Begins 12 Noon**

**Sponsorships Are Available - Team & Individual Walkers are Welcome!**  
**Help Us Meet Our Fundraising Goal at [www.crowdrise.com/2017-ira-geller-memorial-walk-a-thon](http://www.crowdrise.com/2017-ira-geller-memorial-walk-a-thon)**