

Spirit

NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2024

HONESTY • INTEGRITY • RESPECT • EMPOWERING LIVES, SECURING FUTURES.



Forward Together

Thanks to you, we're:

Making plans pgs 2 & 3

Changing lives..... pgs 4 & 5

Growing stronger pgs 6 & 7



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 Unity House
 217 Genesee Street
 Auburn, NY 13021
 www.unityhouse.org

Editor

Kelly D. Buck
 Director of Marketing & Development
 315.253.6227 x 313
 kelly.buck@unityhouse.org

Writers & Photographers

Nicole Hube
 Chris Iven

To be added to the *Spirit* e-mail list or to opt-out, please call 315.253.6227 x358 or e-mail nicole.hube@unityhouse.org. Learn more about Unity House's services and how you can support Unity House at unityhouse.org.

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Unity House's mission: to empower and enrich the lives of people in recovery, coping with a mental illness, and/or diagnosed with a developmental disability. This is accomplished by offering services and supports in an inclusive, person-centered environment.

Our vision: all individuals are respected and lead lives of personal fulfillment and acceptance within our community.

Our core values:
 Respect, Honesty, Integrity

READY FOR THE FUTURE CEO's PERSPECTIVE

Positive change doesn't happen on its own. It takes thoughtful planning.

That's why I'm so excited to bring people together to build Unity House's next three-year strategic plan.

This summer, with the help of a consultant, we'll evaluate the plan we first built in 2021. We'll gather data and opinions. We'll ask for input from every segment of our community. That includes the people we support, their families, our staff, our board, our donors and our neighbors. **We want to hear from you.**

Our strategic planning committee will analyze the collected information, draft a plan and test it. When finalized, the strategic plan will guide Unity House decision making through the end of 2027 and beyond.

The strategic planning process energizes me:

- It allows us to step back from our urgent work so we can ask important questions.
- It opens up new channels of communication so we can hear a wider variety of voices.
- It sparks creative energy that can lead to solutions none of us could have imagined on our own.

In the coming months, look for an online survey that will make it easy for you to share your thoughts. (Use **this QR code to make sure we have your email address!**)

But please don't think you need to wait for a survey. Reach out to me any time by hitting the red "CONTACT" button on our website.

There's a huge side benefit to the strategic planning process. It helps us strengthen our relationships with you and with all of the people who support our cause.

I can't wait.

Liz Smith



Liz Smith
 Chief Executive Officer



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 OUR MONTHLY
 E-NEWSLETTER**



On the cover: *Ithaca Day Hab participant Robert hugs Program Manager Ryan Wilcox as they enjoy music during the summer talent show*



A CHAMPION FOR OUR CAUSE

Andrew Cuddy steps down as Board President

After serving 14 years on Unity House's Board of Directors, including four years as its president, Andy Cuddy stepped down in May.



"It has been a great joy to work with my fellow board members, the administrative team and the Unity House staff in accomplishing a difficult mission over these many years with, what I believe, has been great success," Andy said in his resignation letter to the board. "I have taken pride in playing a small role in the mission of Unity House."

Andy has been a consistent donor and strong advocate for expanding Unity House's fundraising efforts. He pushed especially for an endowment fund to ensure that the organization can continue delivering on its mission for generations to come. During his tenure, Unity House established an endowment that has grown to more than \$500,000.

Unity House CEO Liz Smith said Andy has been an asset to the organization since he joined the board in 2010, shortly after she became its chief executive. As board president, Andy supported Liz through difficult decisions brought on by the COVID pandemic, she said.

"Andy is an effective leader because he asks a lot of questions and he has a lot of ideas," Liz said. "He has been engaged, and he has been generous to Unity House in so many ways. I'm sad to see him go. I wish him well."

LEADING COMMUNITY

New Board President Ken Knight seeks greater support for mission

New Unity House Board President Ken Knight said he wants more people to know of the important work the organization does.



"We need to continue to broaden our exposure, to share the importance of the services we provide," said Ken, who joined the board in 2012 and served as vice president until he was elected president in June. "Unity House should continue to be a leader in our community."

When more people know about Unity House's work and mission, more people will support it, and that will allow the organization to support more people in need, he said.

"I look forward to working with Liz and the rest of the board," Ken said. "We have a wonderful relationship and a strong group dynamic. I see that continuing."

Unity House FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

SAVE THE DATE

PROVIDE FOR YOUR FAMILY

PROTECT YOUR ASSETS

SUPPORT YOUR CHARITIES

Mon., Oct. 21, 2024

12:00 - 1:30pm

Hybrid event: In-person at Cayuga Community College AND virtual

This free, casual event will give you an overview of estate planning options and resources available, with time to get your questions answered.

Questions? Email development@unityhouse.org

Unity House

FULFILLING WORK STARTS HERE

Start your career as a Direct Support Professional today!

Positions are available in Tompkins and Cayuga counties



APPLY NOW

unityhouse.org/joinourteam

A NIGHT OF GRATITUDE & HOPE

More than 150 Unity House supporters gathered at the Auburn Hilton Garden Inn on April 29 to celebrate people who bring hope to people with disabilities.

In her opening remarks, Unity House CEO Liz Smith said that in spite of an ongoing staffing shortage, Unity House was able to expand its programming in some areas. One highlight, she said, was a successful effort to expand Unity House's capacity to help mothers who are recovering from addiction.

Keynote speaker Charlie Mills shared his poignant story, how he became addicted to drugs in his teens and went through numerous treatment programs before he came to Unity House's GRACE House a dozen years ago. His construction business, Mr. Mills Enterprises Inc., is now well-established and in high demand in the area.

Another highlight of the evening was the award ceremony. Elaine Meyers of King Ferry received the 13th Open Arms Award. A local author and lifelong lover



Guest speaker Charlie Mills shares his personal story about recovery

PROGRAMS THAT EMPOWER

Parading About Town

Auburn Day Hab friends participated in the annual Memorial Day parade. Taras and Jesus proudly carried the banner. Tompkins County Day Hab participants also represented Unity House in the Ithaca Festival kick-off parade the following week.



Walking for Recovery

More than 50 people met at Exchange Street plaza in downtown Auburn for the 19th annual Tim Durant Recovery Walk in May. Most in attendance were in recovery from addiction. Following remarks by Mayor Jimmy Giannettino, the group walked down South Street and then enjoyed refreshments at GRACE House.



Family Fun Day

Auburn Day Hab participants invited their families to join them for a Family Fun Day at Finger Lakes Mall. Together, they participated in a paint class and a photo booth. Pictured is Lisa, modeling her canvas. We hope to make this a yearly event.



Mental Health Walk

About 30 community members gathered to walk around Seward Park as part of our PROsperity program's first Mental Health Awareness Month walk in May. Special thanks to: PROs participant Brad and GRACE House resident George for sharing their stories; Unity Employment Services for providing yummy baked goods; and to other Auburn community nonprofits for helping to promote this event. Recovery is possible. You are not alone.



Open Arms award winner Elaine Meyers (left) and Atkins Community Service Awardee Joe Goodsell receive proclamations from Dr. Tatiana Parker, representing the office of State Sen. Rachel May

of books and libraries, Elaine teaches creative writing and journaling classes, and facilitates a book club, at Unity House's PROsperity mental health program.

The 14th Fred Atkins Community Service Award was presented to Joe Goodsell of Auburn. Joe was nominated by Matthew House for his positivity, kindness, and outstanding volunteer service since 2013.



CEO Liz Smith and Board Vice President Ken Knight thank outgoing board member Christina Van Ditto (center) as she completes her term

COOKING WITH CONFIDENCE



Jeffrey Schmitz loves the equipment, the heat and the team hustle of working in a professional kitchen.

As a participant in Unity Employment Services, he had tried many jobs. But even though his favorite jobs were in food service, he hadn't worked in a kitchen since he had a bad experience a few years ago.

Then, Jeffrey began a class through UES's new Career-Specific Vocational Training program.

"He was hesitant at first, but I could tell he had an itch for food service," said Vocational Services Coordinator Steven Hurst. "He ended up being just a wonderful fit for the class."

"The best part is when someone says, 'Jeff, you did a good job today,'" Jeffrey said. "I'm glad when I hear that."

As Jeffrey gained new skills in food prep and kitchen management, he also gained confidence, Steven said. Jeffrey even bought his own French chef knife so he could practice his cutting skills outside of class time.

After graduating from the training program, Jeffrey began an internship through the state Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. The state pays Jeffrey's wages for up to 12 hours a week over 12 weeks, with Steven as his on-site job coach. In May, Jeffrey started working as a line cook at the Holiday Inn in Auburn, and he has been flourishing, said UES Director Amanda McManus.

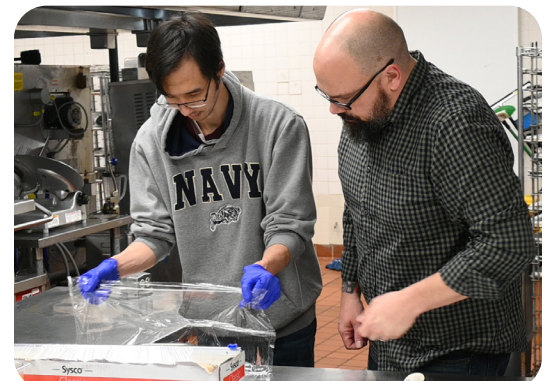
"He's cooking the food, he's prepping, he's plating," she said. "He's rotating stock and keeping the kitchen in order."

Holiday Inn Food and Beverage Manager Mindy Sheftic said she wishes all of her workers were like Jeffrey.

"He's always happy to be here and he takes a lot of pride in what he does," Mindy said. "His presentation of the food is better than my regular line cook, to be honest."

Mindy said she hopes Jeffrey can stay on after the internship concludes. Jeffrey said he'd like that a lot.

"The best part is when someone says, 'Jeff, you did a good job today,'" Jeffrey said. "I'm glad when I hear that."



Jeffrey (left) practices food preparation at the Auburn Holiday Inn with guidance from UES Vocational Services Coordinator Steven Hurst.



Employees OF THE QUARTER

We couldn't deliver on our mission without our amazing employees. Each Employee of the Quarter is nominated by their peers. Each breathes life into Unity House's core values: honesty, integrity, and respect. Congratulations to our most recent honorees!



DSP OF Q1 2024: KATRINA STARKS

Community Integration Specialist, Ithaca Day Habilitation

"Katrina is very kind. She is calm amid what can be a sometimes-chaotic environment and we are grateful for her. Katrina is an integral part of our Day Services Team. Day in and day out, she arrives to work ready to jump in. Katrina always is able to pivot and jump into whatever we have asked of her. She is consistently a role model and support for new staff. Katrina embodies Unity House's mission and vision by providing services that both empower and enrich the lives of the individuals who attend our program." -Nominated by Tara Judkins



SUPPORT STAFF OF Q1 2024: VALERIE LONGLEY

Agency Trainer, Human Resources

"I have witnessed Val on numerous occasions exhibit such passion for what she does. She shows empathy and compassion to staff through the endless trainings she provides throughout the month. She truly is a team player. She continually supports our programs with her flexibility to meet their needs, given the staffing challenges, by working relief shifts or adding training when needed. Val is very creative and crafty, and often shares her good ideas, contributing to our employee Wellness Program. Val's positive attitude is greatly appreciated!" -Nominated by Mary Simpson



DSP OF Q2 2024: SANDRA HUFFMAN-BAEZ

Community Integration Specialist Team Leader, Ithaca Day Habilitation

"Sandie is a day services veteran, with 24 years in. She is a Team Leader and often the first point of contact for staff. Sandie is familiar with nearly all of the people who attend program. She is a calm, ambitious, enthusiastic and humble member of our team. She truly excels at each aspect of our Code of Ethics. Sandie cultivates strong and supportive relationships with the individuals and staff, helping to affirm a strong program. We are so lucky to have her!" -Nominated by Ryan Wilcox



SUPPORT STAFF OF Q2 2024: ALYSSA MILITELLO

Behavioral Integration Specialist, North Street Road IRA

"Alyssa is one of the most positive people I have worked with. Even on a challenging day, she remains upbeat and encourages others around her to do the same. She is person-centered in her actions, while encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own actions and behavior. She is supportive of staff on many teams and tries to provide support to help them feel more prepared to do what is needed throughout their day. Thank you, Alyssa, for your enthusiasm, positivity and overall support." -Nominated by Darlene Podolak

SYRACUSE WORKFORCE RUN

Fourteen Unity House employees joined 2,200 others for the annual Syracuse Workforce Run on June 6. On the rebound following the pandemic, the 5K run/walk along Onondaga Lake is intended to promote fitness, teamwork and fun. Special thanks to sponsors InDeed Wellness and Lynch Furniture.



Our top four finishers were:
Chris Iven – Chief Advancement Officer

James Beaumont – Assistant Director of Day Services

Meghan Eddy – Broker, Self Direction

Tiffany Tarry – Residence Counselor, North St. Rd.



Spirit

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER



Margaret "Margie" Shaw of Ithaca joined the Unity House board of directors in June. A Master Educator of Inclusion at the Ithaca City School District, Margie has devoted herself both personally and professionally to supporting people with disabilities. She will sit on the board's program committee.

"My younger sibling has Down Syndrome, thereby exposing me at an early age to the strategies necessary to live and work with people with special needs in an inclusive setting," said Margie. "I believe that everyone has the right to be an active member of their community."

Margie holds a B.S. in Special Education and Elementary Education, and earned a master's in Special Education from SUNY Binghamton. She also holds an Educational Leadership certificate, and is a Work-Based Learning Coordinator. She has numerous professional certifications, and has worked for decades in leadership roles and as a special education educator in New York, Florida and Maryland.

GRANTS & GIFTS

Unity House is deeply grateful to receive grant funding from:

Tompkins Charitable Gift Fund - \$3,230

To purchase a smart whiteboard and a Bluetooth projector for use in learning classrooms for people with developmental disabilities. This technology has now been installed at our day habilitation location in Ithaca.

New York State funding through Sen. Rachel May's office - \$120,000

To improve accessibility in Cayuga County. The grant will allow us to renovate the front entrance of our North Street Road IRA, remodel a restroom at our GRACE House, and install a ceiling track lift system at our Auburn Day Hab.

New York State funding through the Dormitory Authority - \$499,870

To improve safety, accessibility, and structural integrity at our West Green Street IRA in Ithaca. Its 12 residents will gain more autonomy with a new entrance ramp, accessible bathrooms, expanded and upgraded living space, and more accessible kitchens.

Unity House has reached out to a number of regional funders for help in offsetting the costs associated with purchasing and installing a **new networked organization-wide phone system** across seven counties. The total project cost is \$78,000 for 150+ smart telephones. To date, the following community partners have supported this important need:

J.M. McDonald Foundation - \$3,000

D.E. French Foundation - \$5,000

Triad Foundation - \$7,500

Community Foundation of Tompkins County - \$7,500

Stanley W. Metcalf Foundation - \$15,000

CALLING ALL GOLFERS!

Looking for a fun way to support people with disabilities?

Join us on August 19 for a round of 18 holes and meet others who care about our cause. Gather your friends, family or coworkers and put together a foursome. We'd love to see you on the course!

Lunch and dinner will be provided. It'll be a great day of golf, food, and fun!

Please register your foursome, sign up for a sponsorship, and learn more by scanning the QR code below.

Questions? Want to donate a door prize? Email kelly.buck@unityhouse.org.

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architects + engineers

SCAN ME! >>>

GOLF FOR UNITY HOUSE

BECOME A SPONSOR

19 AUGUST 2024

REGISTER YOUR FOURSOME TODAY

UNITYHOUSE.ORG/GOLF

HIGHLAND PARK GOLF COURSE, AUBURN

Unity House We've Got Talent

Ithaca Day Hab hosted their Beach Party summer talent show at Stewart Park on June 7. The event was a huge success, with about 100 folks in attendance for this annual tradition. Well done to our many participants who bravely took the stage. Amanda Maestro-Scherer of Maestro Music Therapy led a group in their own rendition of "My Favorite Things" to close out the afternoon. Thank you to Meg-A-Moo's of Freeville for the delicious ice cream treats.

