

# Special Insights

The Official Newsletter of the Parent Network of WNY

## Did You Know?

Did you know that the Parent Network is:

- A New York State Education Dept. Parent Center TAC (Technical Assistance Center)
- A member of the Commissioner of the NYS Education Dept.'s Advisory Panel on Special Education
- A member of the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of WNY (DDAWNY)
- A Vocational & Educational Service for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) Statewide Transition Coordination Site

*We are parents helping parents and professionals enable individuals with disabilities to reach their own potential!*

Your support of the Parent Network is an invaluable gift to all parents. Donations are tax-deductible and can be made payable to the **Parent Network of WNY.**

## Summer Fun, Cont.

**Beach Camp.** Additionally, there are summer programs through some of the local colleges and agencies that focus more on academics or specialized areas, such as the Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center's **Summer Language to Literacy Program.**

Without too much effort, you will no doubt be able to find the perfect program for your child. If you would like more information on any of the programs listed above, or for a more comprehensive list of programs, feel free to call Parent Network at **332-4175** or the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of WNY (DDAWNY) at **877-7007.**



## A Message from Max

Recently, the Parent Network had its new 2005-06 Strategic Plan adopted. In the plan, the agency identified five core values that describe it. **The Parent Network is: Collaborative, Accountable, Parent-Centered, Inclusive and Ethical.** These values stood out as the most important during two working sessions with the Board of Directors and staff. At the last meeting of the Board, on March 7, the plan was ratified.



Also identified were seven major outcomes (not in order of priority) that the Board and the staff are seeking to reach by the end of the year. They are:

- PN has a diversified staff.
- PN is a good place to work.
- PN has stable funding.
- PN has a unified, shared vision among its Board and staff, and a commitment to a living strategic plan.

*Continued on page two*

## Preparing for Summer Fun!

The snow has finally stopped falling, the school year is coming to an end, and we are starting to think about what types of activities are available for our children during the summer. There are too many local summer programs for children with special needs to possibly list, so following are a few examples and a place to start your search.

*Written for Special Insights by Jennifer Zolnowski*

When thinking about summer programs for your child you have to ask yourself a few questions. What does my child like to do? What do I want my child to accomplish? What does my child want to accomplish for him/herself? Once you answer these questions, it is much easier to select a program.



*Find the best summer activity for your child and he/she will have a ball!*

If your child likes horses and could benefit from therapeutic riding lessons, you may want to check into programs such as **Lothlorien Therapeutic Riding Center, Equi-Star, Inc., Serenity Stables or High Hurdles.**

Maybe your child prefers sports like baseball or soccer. If so, there are several **Challenger Baseball Leagues** in the area as well as a **TOP Soccer Program.** Perhaps your child is more creative and would prefer an art, music or dance program. If so, then you may want to look into **Dynamic Therapeutic Resources, the Buffalo Philharmonic's Education Outreach Program, Butterfly Dance, Therapeutic Musical Intervention, or Moving Miracles.**

There are also several day camps throughout Western New York that can provide your child with educational experiences as well as lots of fun activities. These include: **Camp Crab Apple, Heritage Center's Summer Fun Club, Camp Good Days & Special Times, Camp Special Place and Cradle**

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## Mark Your Calendars: DDDay is Coming!

The 17th Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day (DD Day) will be held on May 19 at the Buffalo Convention Center. DD Day is the largest one-day conference in the nation geared toward individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. It is a joint effort of more than 40 human service organizations throughout the Western New York region.

Children's author John Tuitel, who has Cerebral Palsy and has co-authored six books in the popular *Gun Lake Adventure Series*, will be the keynote speaker at this year's event. He developed the *Gun Lake Adventure Series* to help elementary and middle school students and their parents better understand disabilities, diversity and overcoming obstacles and challenges.

In addition to the keynote speaker, there will be an agency fair in the main hall, several informative workshops, and a new feature, the Parent Room.

The Parent Room will be co-sponsored by The Early Childhood Direction Center, Parent Network of WNY, Erie I BOCES Transition Coordination Site, and Parent to Parent of NYS, the Parent Room will be staffed all day with experts from all four agencies. Many of these individuals are parents of children with special needs themselves. They will be around to offer topical discussions, advice, and helpful hints for parents of children of all ages.

For more information on DDDay, or to get a registration form, please call **(716) 805-1555**.

— Jennifer Zolnowski

## Q & A: Board Chair Elizabeth Wright, Esq.

*A member of Parent Network's Board of Directors since 1999, Elizabeth Wright, Esq., has seen the agency rise up to new heights. Following is a short Q & A with the Board Chairperson.*

### Q: How did you get involved with Parent Network (PN)?

A: I heard about the organization through Bruce Goldstein, my mentor here at Bouvier Partnership, who had been very active in the disability community for the past 30 years. I learned about PN through him and a few other lawyers there. Having been a Board member since 1999, I was involved when PN lost its federal funding, and I've been happy to watch it bring itself back, like a phoenix. Having seen that makes me so proud of where we, as an agency, are now.

### Q: With so many non-profits out there, why PN?

A: PN's mission, "Parents helping parents" is in line with my own beliefs and values. I now have a daughter with a disability, something that didn't happen until I was already active on the Board, but that has allowed me to come at my work with PN from a parent's perspective. Ever since then, I have gained new respect for PN, its mission and its dedicated staff.

### Q: At your firm, Special Education law is your expertise. How did you get involved with this specific niche?

A: It's funny, but I've been pulled in this direction all of my life. I

was involved early on as a coach at the Special Olympics. The University at Buffalo's Grad School offered a four-year program that granted a master's degree in Social Work and a law degree at the same time. That was a perfect fit for me. While there, the law school offered a Special Education Clinic, allowing me to see had this area of law first hand. I knew right away that that was what I wanted to do. Even when I graduated, I clerked in the office I'm in right now for free, just to have the chance to continue to learn about the field, and to do so with Bruce Goldstein.



### Q: How important is it for parents/guardians of children with special needs to realize that they can lean on a Special Education lawyer?

A: Actually, much more important to a child's future is a parent's role. It is critical for parents to enable themselves and to be informed. Parents need to step up to the plate and be a "professional parent." They are a valued, and necessary, member of the Com-

mittee on Special Education. The teachers and the school districts, they can talk about what kind of student the child is, but only the parents can talk about the type of person the child is. And that's important. If the parents don't come to the table, the committee misses out. Every parent must embrace the role of advocate.

### Q: From the chairperson's seat, what can you tell us about the PN's future?

A: We just completed a five-year strategic plan, which we're extremely happy about. It was a lengthy process done by a special committee. We sat down and collaboratively determined our values as an organization. Then we set goals around those values. As a chair, it was important to me that all decisions we make, from now going forward, must be value driven. We are very pleased with the way our plan came out.

Also, we are making our annual Harvest Honors event a bit more upscale. This year's event will be a cocktail reception, at which we'll honor a high-profile recipient. [Editor's note: she wouldn't even tell me who it was going to be!] We're also excited about teaming with local artist Danny Predmore, who will be offering a number of exclusive artworks at the event, to help us make more of a name for ourselves and the Harvest Honors.

Overall, though, my priority as a chair is to get our house in order, and I know we'll be able to accomplish all of our goals.

## Max, Cont.

- Children with special needs are seen as viable members of the community with education and support provided.
- School districts want to work with PN to enhance educational outcomes. Schools invite PN involvement.
- PN becomes the service provider of choice in the community.

A copy of the Strategic Plan is available on our web site. Please review the plan and give us your comments. It is our intention to make this document the centerpiece of all we do. As always, we welcome your feedback. Please contact us if you would like a copy.

At the March 7th Board meeting, three new members were voted in. They are: **Jan Bensman, Esq.**, an attorney who specializes in Special Education law and a former member of the Board; **Donna Gonser, CPA**, an accountant with Lumsden & McCormick

and a parent of a child with special needs; and **Jim Maloney, CAS**, the Director of Pupil Personnel for the Clarence Central School District, and a father of a child with special needs. Welcome to all of our brand new Board members!

**Executive Director:**  
Max Donatelli

**Dir. of Parent Training:**  
Susan Barlow

**Parent Resource Mgr.:**  
Kim Walek

Elizabeth Wright, Esq.,  
*Chairperson*

Donna Gonser, CPA,  
*Treasurer*

Joan Roetter, *Secretary*  
Stephanie Sass, *Imm. Past Chair*

### Board of Directors:

Jan Bensman, Esq.  
Susan Davidson  
Howard Doueck, PhD  
Ann Maghran  
Jim Mahoney  
David Reichert

Christine Schweikhard  
David Whalen  
Jodene Wheeler  
Kimberly Young  
Marsha Zielinski

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