

HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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Hamaspik Of Orange County Celebrates Grand Opening Of New Administration/Day Habilitation Building

Monumental milestone marks culmination of decade-long dream

On Thursday, October 29, 2009, gray skies and the last-minute absence of Guest of Honor Diana Jones Ritter, New York State OMRDD Commissioner, couldn't dampen the excitement in the air at Hamaspik of Orange County.

The exciting morning began as staff began arriving in fives and tens shortly before 10:00 a.m., walking up the landscaped Hamaspik Way beneath the new building's towering façade.

A giant welcome banner was draped across the building's face. A huge bouquet of flowers stood beneath it. At the head of the sweeping outdoor staircase leading up to the row of glass front doors, a table bearing a pair of giant ceremonial scissors heightened the excitement. Completing the atmosphere of anticipation, a bright, wide red ribbon was strung across the entryway, awaiting the ceremonial cutting that would mark the official moment of opening.

It was the long-awaited Grand Opening Day of Hamaspik's biggest-ever building, and as Hamaspik staff and consumers joined New York State officials for the gala grand opening event in Kiryas Joel, even the sun came out.

Reaching new heights:
Hamaspik of Orange County's newly-dedicated headquarters



Sinking new roots

The striking three-story edifice allows Hamaspik to realize its long-time dream of expanding its current Day Hab program and provide ample, custom-built spaces for other existing and new programs. The building also serves as Hamaspik's new administrative hub.

As the crowd slowly grew as the ten o' clock hour neared, officials were seen chatting with Hamaspik leadership, staff and employees, many of whom have enjoyed mutually beneficial relationships for years. Smartly dressed waiters also circulated through the crowd, distributing delightful cookies and program schedules.

"So, what's your next project?" one official was overheard tastefully teasing Executive Director Mr. Meyer Wertheimer. "Or are you taking a rest?"

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Consumers Threatened by Paterson's 10% Budget-Cut Proposal

Governor's Deficit Reduction Plan (DRP) would hurt most vulnerable individuals with special needs and ultimately cost more

Facing the dreadnought of a catastrophic budget deficit, New York Governor David Paterson proposed his Deficit Reduction Plan (DRP) this past August.

The measure would cut 10% of spending by state education and human-services agencies to help close what Paterson estimates is a \$3.2 billion deficit.

But the reaction by the Empire State's vast community of state and voluntary human-services agencies and their beneficiaries' families was swift and sharp: Don't do it.

Grassroots protests have been organized both in Albany and at public hearings throughout the state in recent weeks, with families of children and adults with special needs making personal appearances to put a human face on the proposed cuts.

Specifically, \$65 million in cuts is being proposed for the New York State OMRDD, or Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities—a suggestion devastating enough to the special-needs

charges of Hamaspik and its peer agencies.

However, the real potential damage lies in the fact that the proposed state budget cut would eliminate federal matching funds.

Under the Obama economic stimulus plan, New York State would qualify for up to \$1.61 in federal funding for every dollar spent by OMRDD—but without the state spending, there will be no federal funding.

The result could be a total loss of over \$150 million in funding over the next four-and-a-half months alone, which is the time left in the

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Nursing Loved Ones Back Home, or At Home

Hamaspik's NHTD Waiver program can help seniors and others come home—or stay home

When we were small and helpless, they cared for us. As we grew, they sheltered and steered us. And today, as middle-aged parents with children of our own, we want to do everything we can to at least partially express gratitude for a lifetime of giving. To the world, they may be little more than nameless, faceless seniors—"old people" increasingly dismissed by a society that emphasizes eternal youth. But they are our parents, and we owe them everything.

This sentiment is one of the several reasons New York State's Dept. of Health has offered the NHTD Waiver Program for the past three years.

NHTD is an acronym for *Nursing Home Transition/Diversion*. As one of the state's Waiver, or standard-rules-exempting, programs, NHTD Waiver provides qualifying Medicaid-receiving seniors with over one dozen comprehensive services to help them *transition* back to

their own homes from nursing home facilities.

Additionally, the program also provides qualifying Medicaid-receiving seniors with services that *divert* them from entering nursing homes in the first place.

Thirdly, and of equal note, the program disburses the same services to any Medicaid-receiving individual above the age of 18 who faces a long-term stint at a nursing home, or is completing one.


From Community Integration Counseling and Moving Assistance to Assistive Technology and Independent Living Skills Training, NHTD purveys a variety of services. However, loving children and/or caregivers of our precious seniors are cautioned: the NHTD program is not a cure-all. NHTD is only available to duly qualified Medicaid recipients, and its application process is neither simple nor short.

Essentially, explains Hamaspik of Rockland County Director of

Operations Yoel Bernath, the program provides a "circle of support" to consumers that allows them to live comfortably in their private residences and communities. "The purpose of the program is to bring people home from nursing homes and prevent them from going into nursing homes," Bernath explains.

This circle of support includes regular visits by aides with HCSS, or *Home Community Support Services*, a Medicaid service for qualifying individuals, as well as environmental modifications (a.k.a. E-MODS) such as grab bars and wheelchair ramps. The Assistive Technology service provides consumers with canes, wheelchairs and other devices that increase personal mobility and overall physical function. The circle even includes Nutrition Counseling and Wellness Counseling.

Benefits received by Hamaspik's NHTD Waiver consumers are arranged by Service Coordinators, our dedicated advocates who use



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their cutting-edge familiarity with all Medicaid programs to procure any and all necessary resources and applicable benefits for qualifying NHTD consumers.

Upon creating the statewide program, the DOH contracted with nine non-governmental agencies to serve as RRDCs, or *Regional Resource Development Centers*. For consumers in the Hudson Valley, the agency that administers the region's RRDC is the Westchester Independent Living Center, or WILC. Consumers in Kings County are under the jurisdiction of CIDNY, or Center for the Independence of the Disabled of New York, based in Manhattan.

To apply, explains Mr. Bernath, concerned caregivers must first contact their regional office to determine whether their loved one(s) even qualify.

The key qualifier is "severe level of medical disability"—persons with conditions temporary or permanent that would warrant care in a nursing facility, regardless of age.

One typical example would be an elderly father or grandfather whose family has neither the time nor the resources to properly care for him at home. Another qualifying scenario would be a middle-aged (or even young) man or woman returning home from the hospital after a serious car accident for months of

intensive rehabilitation. (Prospective NHTD Waiver consumers must be at least age 18.)

Once potential consumers are rigorously scrutinized, a process that takes several weeks at the least, program administrators decide whether to qualify said for the Waiver program. Upon qualification and assignment of Hamaspik as Service Provider, the consumer is coupled with a Hamaspik Service Coordinator who ensures that the mission of NHTD is realized in the consumer's life to the fullest possible extent.

Hamaspik of Rockland County was only recently approved by its RRDC to begin services to its first Waiver consumer, and Hamaspik of Kings County was likewise approved for two—but the organization is sure that there are many more qualifying individuals out there.

"We need to reach out to families. We need to let people know about this program, because there are so many things that it can do," says Mr. Bernath. "We're a community-based organization and people trust us."

Find out whether you or your loved one may qualify for the NHTD Waiver Program. In Kings County, contact Mr. Joel Brecher at 718-387-8400x102. In Rockland and Orange Counties, contact Hamaspik's Central Intake at 845-503-0200. ■

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New FDA Commissioner Launches Anti-Drug Error Program

The misuse and misdiagnosis of prescription and hospital-only drugs is a growing and underreported problem—and one of the several underlying causes of the still-rising private health care costs combating which is one of the Obama Administration's central missions.

Under the leadership of a new Commissioner, the FDA now seeks to reduce patient deaths and injuries from improper drug use on the part of caregivers.

Newly appointed Commissioner Margaret Hamburg estimates that half of each year's 1.5 million "adverse drug events" are preventable. According to the FDA's Institute of Medicine, these events cost the economy \$4 billion annually.

As such, Hamburg's agency will be working with drug manufacturers, patient organizations, nurses,

physicians and other involved parties to develop strategies to prevent drug misuse, dosing errors and dangerous interactions. The pharmaceutical industry already has announced its support for the program, which is known as the Safe Use Initiative.

Specific problems which Safe Use seeks to combat include:

- Improper drug use, which can be fatal to unintended patients;
- Accidental overdoses of acetaminophen, the active ingredient in Tylenol;
- Surgical room fires fueled by alcohol-based prepping solutions;
- Dosage errors in liquid medicines, which would be counteracted by including small spoons or cups with each prescription; and
- Confusing/complex language in medicine package inserts, labels and instructions. ■

Top State CPR Instructor Leads Annual Training at Hamaspik of Kings County

Family Care Providers also honored for devotion, diligence at first-ever awards ceremony

Veteran CPR trainer Mrs. Malky Tropper lent her expert touch to Hamaspik again this past Sunday, October 25, leading her fourth consecutive session for Hamaspik Home Family Care (HFC) and Family Care Respite Providers at its Williamsburg, Brooklyn-based Day Hab Center.

Mrs. Tropper is a professional emergency medical instructor and EMT who has CPR-certified over 15,000 individuals in New York in over 20 years of teaching, and who has been recognized by the U.S. Congress for her career contributions.

Hamaspik's state-required training sessions are designed to keep Family Care Providers and Family Care Respite Providers fully trained to handle emergency medical crises among their charges.

In a first for Hamaspik, the event also comprised an awards luncheon, noting the diligence of its Family Care Providers in the many often-difficult duties required by the state-funded program.

The event began at 10:00 a.m. as attendees signed in to confirm their attendance. Excitement built as door prizes were handed to each participant upon entry.

Inside the center, a training space was set up in one area and a luncheon in another, allowing the former to flow seamlessly into the latter with no cumbersome downtime between.

Mrs. Tropper began her effec-

tive, educational CPR presentation almost immediately. For the next two hours, Family Care Providers were educated on the basics of the life-saving procedure for adults and children and its most important techniques.

Using her decades of experience and dramatic real-life examples of how CPR saves, the veteran trainer honed in on the essentials without missing any critical details.

"You don't have to do it exactly right," Mrs. Tropper repeats to the Gazette. "The worst thing to do [in an emergency situation] is panic. Do something. Pump and blow. You're not going to make matters worse—and you just might save them."

Mrs. Tropper continues to find her Hamaspik pupils quick studies. "Every year they're so much better," she comments. "This year they all got 100% on the written test; they're much more proficient. They did great! They know CPR very well."

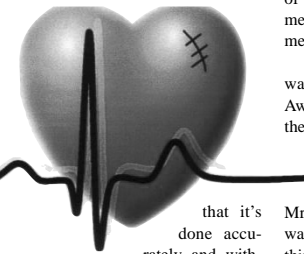
The adult/child CPR session also included training in Automated External Defibrillation, or AED, which uses controlled electric-shock pads to momentarily stop and restart the heart, thus recalibrating any erratic electrical currents.

The group broke for lunch at 12:00 noon.

A few minutes into the 30-minute lunch break, Hamaspik of

Kings County Family Care Home Liaison Julie Bergmann stepped forward to present awards to several outstanding Family Care Providers, conveying to them the thanks of the entire Hamaspik community.

"The reason we give out these awards is because of the difficulty of all the rules and paperwork, so, Number One, we want to acknowledge that this is the difficult part of being a provider," Mrs. Bergmann says. "We also want to acknowledge



that it's done accurately and without a lot of reminders. Most of the providers are really good but some need reminders, so we want to be pleasant that they should do their paperwork. If someone puts forth a lot of effort, they should be rewarded."

Mrs. Bergmann explains that the awards luncheon idea was actually inspired by the New York State OMRDD.

"The DDSO used to give out certificates annually" at special appreciation events, she explains in a phone conversation with the

Gazette. "Last year they cut their budget. They used to have it in a restaurant or gym. Some providers missed that: 'Why don't we have one?'"

The awards consisted of elegant certificates of appreciation, each specifying its recipient's contribution. For example, the certificate presented to Hamaspik of Kings County's Medical Compliance Awardee read, "In recognition of her outstanding efforts to assure that all of her consumer's medical appointments are made and accurately documented in a timely fashion."

Another certificate dispensed was the Records Maintenance Award, which was bestowed upon the Family Care Provider who best maintained accurate care logs.

"Her [records] book is always ready," explains Mrs. Bergmann. "I don't have to wait for her to finish writing; everything is in its place."

Each certificate was personally signed by Mrs. Bergmann and Mr. Joel Brecher, Hamaspik of Kings County's Family Care Coordinator.

Until the addition of the awards component, the event was little more than another burdensome training requirement, Mr. Brecher explains. "We wanted to make it exciting," he tells the Gazette, explaining the awards ceremony not only gives credit where credit is due, but also creates "a circle of support" for the Providers who otherwise are scattered all across Brooklyn.

The event also included an "Appreciation Raffle" for Providers who received no award; the winner was the proud recipient of an elegant leather-bound traditional prayer booklet as well as a delightful toy for young family members provided by our very own Brenda Katina, Hamaspik's Project Coordinator.

After the motivating awards ceremony and the conclusion of the catered lunch, the group reconvened in the training area at 12:30 p.m. to continue their adult/child CPR and AED training with Mrs. Tropper.

Notably, the session also included training on performing the critical Heimlich Maneuver on both conscious and unconscious choking victims.

Later, the training familiarized (or re-familiarized) participants in the proper execution of the life-saving procedures for infants, whose vulnerability and delicacy require a higher level of precision in the performance of CPR, AED and the Heimlich Maneuver.

"We hope to expand on it," adds Mrs. Bergmann. Asked what participants liked most about the event, Mrs. Bergmann replies, "the enthusiasm. They genuinely enjoyed being with each other... One of the Providers ... said, 'How lucky we are to be with Hamaspik!' That was very nice."

The event ended at 2:30 p.m. Hamaspik of Kings County has maintained its Home Family Care Program since 1998. ■

Rockland County Home Placement Typifies Financial Efficiency of Family Care Program

The beautiful little boy sits in his high chair, an attentive therapist before him. A colorful book of shapes is open on the high chair's tray. As the therapist points, the boy giggles and responds.

It's a typical session of learning, growth and love for a child with special needs—but for this 1.5-year-old, who suffers from Down syndrome and also must use a G-tube to aid his troubled digestion, it's also exemplary of the cost efficiency of the Home Family Care Placement (HFC) Program, a sacrosanct New York State human-services staple.

Case in point? Until this past month, the tender toddler was under the 24/7 care of a long-term nursing home in Manhattan—where daily fees, multiplied by 365 days, pile up into a staggering six-digit tower of cash. By contrast, monthly stipends for the loving, happy home in Rockland County, where the boy

was recently placed by Hamaspik's long-running HFC Program, add up to a mere fraction of that sum.

The HFC Program, while currently not accepting new program applicants and/or providers, is still funding placements with remaining allocations, or set amounts, previously provided to each of the 12 state-wide districts of the DDSO. These previously existing placements allow consumers with special needs to remain with the loving families that have that special room in their homes and hearts for them, with the allocation stipends defraying these families' added care costs.

In operation almost since Hamaspik's inception in 1986, this Hamaspik program has found homes for dozens of consumers with special needs in Orange County alone. Others have been placed by Hamaspik of Rockland and Kings Counties. The program has long

been considered inviolate by state providers, legislators and voluntary agencies alike.

Consumers placed by Family Care range in age from infancy to retirement, with children making up the largest group. Clinically, the largest diagnosis among Family Care consumers is Down syndrome, with severe autism a close second. (Others have milder needs and yet others more severe challenges.)

Today, over 100 consumers with various forms of developmental disability are currently benefiting from their Hamaspik-arranged home-care placements throughout Orange, Rockland and Kings Counties.

The New York State OMRDD, paying for the children's care as it does, continues its scrutiny of providers on a long-term basis. This scrutiny primarily consists of planned visits and inspections of provider homes—and, most impor-

tantly, unannounced visits to providers that are designed to catch providers doing their jobs well, or intervene if they are not.

Providers, as mentioned, receive monthly state stipends to help cover care expenses. These stipends depend on the consumers' individual needs and can range from \$800 to close to \$2,000 each month (with some extenuating exceptions).

Of course, extensive and meticulous paperwork and record-keeping are needed too—work that providers are helped with by Hamaspik's capable Family Care Liaisons such as Hamaspik of Rockland County's hardworking Mr. Elazar Klein.

"The Family Care Liaison is there to help the provider—to be the liaison between the provider and the state," says Mr. Klein, explaining his position's basic function.

Said function includes personally visiting each provider residence

once a month, ensuring execution of fire drills, and assisting providers in achieving their consumers' two monthly progress goals.

Besides assigning a Family Care Liaison to each provider, Hamaspik has also assigned an MSC, or Medicaid Service Coordinator, to each consumer. The MSC is the Family Care Liaison's counterpart, looking out for the consumer's interests just like the FCL looks out for the provider's interests.

Of course, the one task harder than that is providers' never-ending duty as caregivers. The state's stipends help—but providers' love is far more important.

"They become attached to their [placed] children," comments Mr. Klein, "and they wouldn't give them up for a million dollars."

For our little man, it's just another day. But for Hamaspik, it's another example of a system that works. ■

Consumers Threatened by Paterson's

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current fiscal year. Losses in the coming fiscal year could be just as catastrophic, if not greater.

"Who will take care of my loved one when I can't?"

As grassroots opposition to the drastic, but arguably necessary, cuts mounted across New York, families with children with special needs from across the state launched a vigil in the reception area of Gov. Paterson's office in the State Capitol facility. The vigil began on Thursday, November 5.

The vigil served to communicate to the Governor the devastating effect that his proposed budget cuts would have on the tens of thousands of New York families and individuals with special needs.

"I am terrified at the prospect of a 10% cut in OMRDD funding," said Margaret Puddington, the mother of a son with significant disabilities. "A cut that deep will draw blood: staff will be laid off, programs will be overcrowded, and supervision and oversight will vanish. My son will no longer get the care he requires. We families will do anything to avoid the wreckage that a 10% cut would produce. We believe it is unconscionable—and unforgivable—to compromise the well-being of our beloved children by imposing the same level of cut on OMRDD's services that are essential to survival, as on other, nonessential state services that are basically administrative."

But well before the vigil,

Hamaspik and many other agencies began taking civic steps to oppose the proposed cuts.

In letters sent out to elected representatives towards the end this just-passed October, Hamaspik Executive Director Meyer Wertheimer pointed out that the cuts would result in lost state-funded services and lowered quality of care and services for consumers in their districts, not to mention dozens if not hundreds of lost local jobs in the health and human-services industry, which would in turn hurt local economies.

"There is no way this impact can be absorbed," wrote Mr. Wertheimer. "It will cause lost services, abandoned families, lost work for direct support staff, and fiscal chaos for the entire system."

Worst of all, the plan, while reasonable, will actually backfire, Mr. Wertheimer argues, emphasizing the human side of the ongoing drama. "This will end with more expenses because consumers will be institutionalized," he tells the *Gazette*. And what's worse, long-term institutionalization or incarceration will ultimately cost the state more.

For example, Mr. Wertheimer points out that without state-funded care, an 18-year-old with mental retardation could legally leave his home and inevitably end up on the street, where he is most likely to end up in a city- or state-run hospital, or in a prison facility—where his daily care will cost several times that which the state would have spent had it retained its existing care program.

Just as the U.S. President's security detail always remains in full force regardless of budget woes, continues Mr. Wertheimer, so too must New York's human-services programs remain intact—as the temporary savings would be lost by increased costs later.

Over the next few days, Hamaspik consumers joined the call to pressure public servants, writing letters highlighting the human tragedy sure to occur should the 10% cut go through.

"Our daughter [name omitted for privacy] has been diagnosed with Down syndrome since birth. Now 27 months old, she has been, and continues to be, the greatest blessing to us and her siblings," wrote one couple in a letter provided to the *Gazette*. "Currently, [name omitted for privacy] gets therapeutic support and human services through Hamaspik ... where she is thriving [and] ... receiving vital support services ... Cutting funding to the OMRDD would cut funding to Hamaspik—and would hurt [name omitted for privacy]. It would force Hamaspik to stop providing her with the care that she so desperately needs to thrive. It would also force Hamaspik to lay off employees who need to support their families."

Other letters provided to the *Gazette* were equally poignant. "I have five children, two of whom are mentally retarded... they are non-verbal, wheelchair bound and cannot even feed themselves," penned one mother. "If OMRDD funding was cut, Hamaspik would not be able to provide services to my two children

and to the many other needy mentally retarded individuals in our community."

"I am the mother of two Down syndrome girls... I was not able to do it on my own so I turned to ... Hamaspik of Rockland County," another lamented. "I am aware of the budget cuts that Governor Paterson has proposed... My friends and I who are all in the same situation are distraught at the thought. We absolutely cannot manage without the funding of OMRDD. Where will we turn? How will our kids continue to progress? How will we be able to cope without some respite?"

A third mother outlined how the overwhelming care required by her son with special needs really hit home. "My husband lost his job because he was preoccupied dealing with my son's issues," she wrote. "Thanks to Hamaspik's constant support in all areas ... my family did not fall apart... Please oppose Gov. Paterson's suggestion to cut the NYS OMRDD Funding."

The human cost

The cuts are especially significant to New York State's developmental disabilities services system, because the system took an \$87 million cut only last year.

The proposed 10% cut is projected to trigger the elimination of vital programs and services and an estimated workforce reduction of over 10,000 employees, many of which are lower-paid direct support staff responsible for the health and safety of numerous individuals.

Many parents and family members of individuals with developmental disabilities rely on State-funded services to care for their adult family members with developmental disabilities, and as such, these parents and family members are terrified by the Governor's proposed cuts. They worry about who will care for loved ones when they cannot due to death or incapacity.

"Let me die in peace knowing that the system that cares for my child will be there when I am gone," pleaded Margaret Raustiala, whose adult son has severe developmental disabilities, including autism, and lives in a residential program.

"A 10% cut may not sound like much, but ... this will devastate our programs and will call for a reduction in services that we provide to people," recently wrote one human-care services executive director in a letter to the editor of the *Madison County Courier-Madison County News*.

"There was a time in recent history that ... the only option was institutional care. We fought for ... inclusion in the community. As a result we learned that people with developmental disabilities, if given the necessary supports, can be valued members of our community," continued the executive. "Now programs and services ... are at risk. Many of the people we care for require care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. ... What are they to do when services are cut?"

Also on Thursday, November 5, self-advocates, family members and providers were among a crowd, estimated at perhaps 1,000, who rallied outside the Manhattan office of Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver to protest the dramatic impact of the cuts on OMRDD services. Protestors informed Silver staffers that the industry is concerned by what seems to be the Speaker's tacit acceptance of the Governor's cuts in that while he has not endorsed them, neither has he vocally opposed them as have other public servants.

A balancing act

In the latest development in the saga thus far, Gov. Paterson addressed Albany lawmakers in a rare joint session of the State Legislature. Members of the State's Assembly and Senate convened at the State Capitol building on Monday, November 9 at 3:00 p.m. to hear the Governor's call for grim fiscal sobriety.

"We stand on the brink of a financial challenge of unprecedented magnitude in the history of this state," said Paterson as he stood in

Will Albany hear? Hard budget-cut decisions will be made at the State Capitol, pictured here.



10% Budget-Cut Proposal

the ornate chamber. "This is a historic moment. We're going to have to make historic decisions."

Later in the speech, the Governor defended his proposed 10% cuts to education and Medicaid spending, explaining that the old approach of loaning money to cover deficits, then raising taxes to repay those loans, was no longer viable. "Frankly, we are running out of money at this moment," he said.

"I will endure the heat from the special interests," Paterson continued. "I will mortgage my political career on this plan. But I will not mortgage the fate of the State of New York."

The speech essentially served as no more than an exhortation to the Legislature to get working post-haste on the problem, not sweep it under the rug. As such, meetings between Paterson and legislative staff on the particulars of the proposed cuts were held following the speech.

However, that very Monday evening, an Albany insider reported that "the Legislature is scheduled to be in session tomorrow afternoon, but at the moment it appears a budget-cutting deal is still a way off." Still, "that could change at any time," he added.

On Tuesday, the State Legislature remained deadlocked over the DRP.

Legislators convened briefly for session but did not act on the DRP or any other budget-related actions.

"Much of the day was spent in closed-door negotiations and legislative conference meetings as differences remained among key Senate and Assembly leaders over how to close an estimated \$3.2 billion current-year budget deficit," an industry insider reported.

With the Veterans' Day holiday falling on Wednesday, the following day, the Governor said he would again summon lawmakers back to Albany on Monday and Tuesday to act on a DRP.

"This delay provides additional time for much needed advocacy," said the insider. However, he continued, "in the coming few days, anything can happen. This is why it remains critical ... to persist unabated in ... outreach to lawmakers conveying the ramifications of a vote in favor of the Governor's decimating cuts."

Another Albany observer noted the Governor's stated expectation of Assembly Democrats and Speaker Sheldon Silver to propose health care cuts that do not implicate the loss of federal dollars through Medicaid cuts. "That is good news, since it appears the Governor might be agreeable to cutting in areas other than those he has proposed, if the ultimate result is the elimination of the deficit," added the observer.

By Wednesday evening, the same observer reported some

grounds for cautious optimism. "It does appear that there is momentum toward moving away from cutting Medicaid items in the current state fiscal year budget to close the \$3.2 billion deficit," he said. "Indications from the Governor's office are that

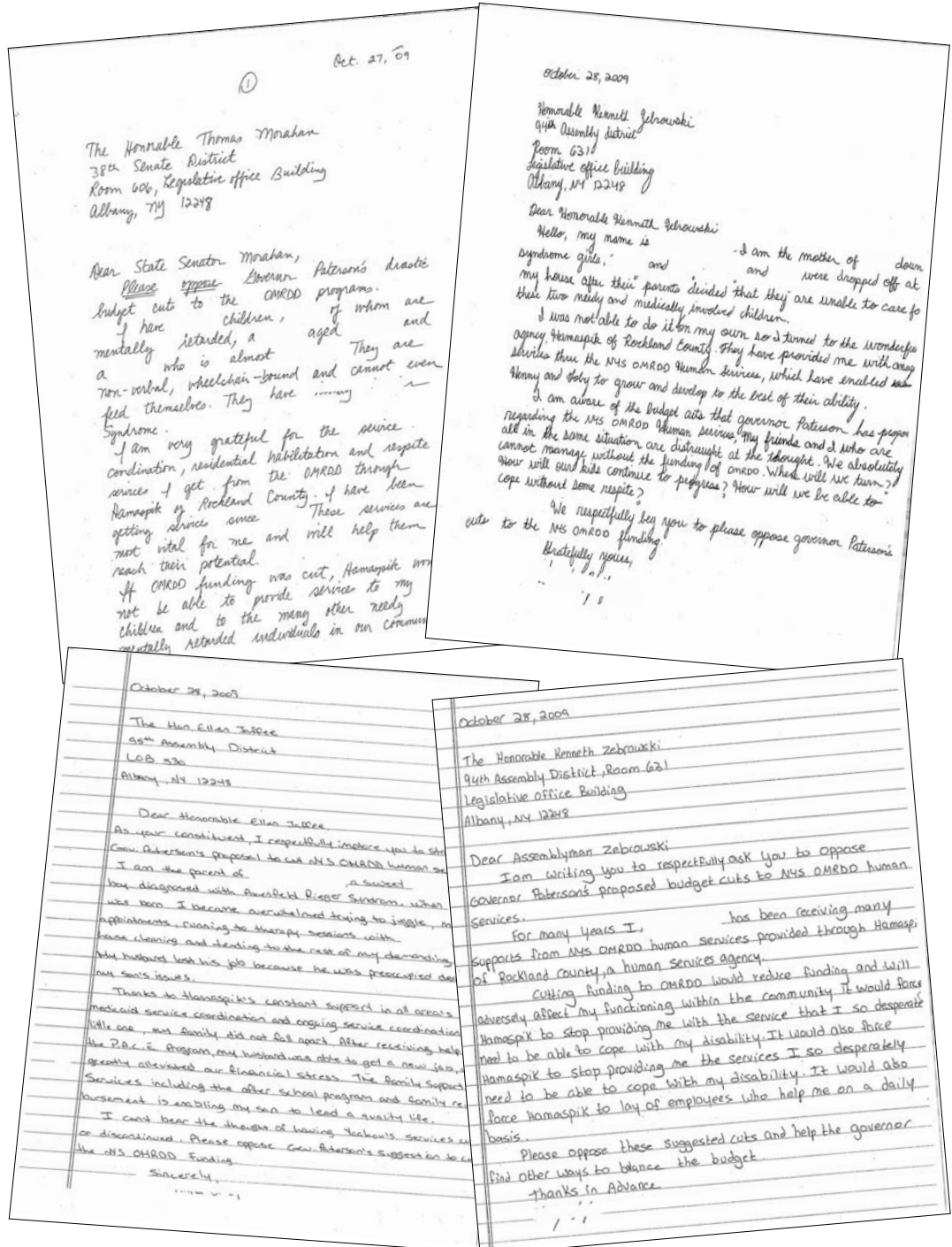
the Governor has eased his position on Medicaid cuts quite a bit due to the resistance in the Assembly and Senate." The observer also mentioned that the Governor and top Legislature members may shortly begin looking at cuts in non-

Medicaid and non-mental health areas of health care spending, such as the HEAL NY program.

Most importantly, the insider emphasized the critical impact of healthy political protest and pressure, something which Hamaspik

encourages. "The work you have done is impressive and highly important," he said.

Hamaspik will keep its entire family of consumers, caregivers and staffers fully informed as this saga develops.



More powerful than the sword: Copies of actual letters sent by Hamaspik consumer parents to elected officials (identifying details have been erased for privacy purposes)

A Look at the Affordable Health Care for America Act

Hamaspik scrutinizes President Obama's historic, and gigantic, healthcare reform bill

History was made this past Saturday night, October 7, 2009, as a Democratic-led U.S. House of Representatives passed HR 3962 EH, or the Affordable Health Care for America Act. The bill, which is the largest overhaul of America's health care system to date and a vast expansion of government into new and uncharted territory, has equivalent numbers of champions and detractors.

As of this writing, however, questions about the bill are moot, as it first must be ratified by the Senate before it can actually be signed into law by the President. In the meantime, however, Hamaspik takes a look at the text of HR 3962.

Immediate Reforms

Curiously, or perhaps tellingly, the text of the mammoth bill begins with "Immediate Reforms," reflecting the progressive ideal of using government to solve as many societal problems as possible, as soon as possible—for several included in this section, beginning January 1, 2010, actually. The 15 sections under "Immediate Reforms" include a "national high-risk pool program" that would provide temporary health insurance to qualifying individuals until the bill's permanent government insurance program is launched. It would also:

- Immediately bar treating domestic violence as a preexisting condition;

- End "health insurance denials and delays of necessary treatment for children with deformities";

- Eliminate maximum lifetime spending limits by insurance companies on plan holders;

- Partially fund companies' reinsurance expenses for retirees; and
- Fund "wellness grants" to allow employers to run employee health education programs.

The "Immediate Reforms" text is part of the bill's four enormous Divisions, labeled A through D.

Division A

Division A is named "Affordable Health Care Choices." Its five subdivisions, called *Titles*, and the 15 *Subtitles* within them, contain the

ideas most hailed by liberals and most reviled by conservatives: New laws, rules and regulations for the current private insurance industry and new related taxes.

Among these are revisions to existing laws that will require insurers to give group health insurance policy holders "the option of extension of dependent coverage for uninsured young adults" under the age of 27. In plain English, if your independent, uninsured adult son or daughter wants health care under your existing group healthcare plan, your insurer will have to give you the option of covering them as your dependent—as long as they're less than 27 years old.

Division A also prohibits companies from denying coverage because of preexisting conditions, and dictates health insurance premiums (after an 18-month study). Importantly, perhaps to address conservative fears, Division A protects the citizen's right to retain his or her private insurance.

Most significantly, Division A creates a "Health Insurance Exchange" which will "facilitate access of individuals and employers, through a transparent process, to a variety of choices of affordable, quality health insurance coverage, including a public health insurance option." And Division A's Subtitle B creates that very "public health insurance option"—in plain English, the government health insurance that the "tea parties" rallied against this past summer.

Division B

Though this is the largest of the bill's four Divisions, with its nine Titles and 26 Subtitles, its contents are less intrusive and less threatening to the current system than Division A, which creates systems that currently don't exist. For its part, however, Division B, appropriately entitled "Medicare and Medicaid Improvements," does just that: It improves Medicare, the government's socialized medicine program for seniors, and Medicaid, the government's socialized medicine program for the rest of us—or at least purports to do so.

Of notable interest to Hamaspik and its greater community is Division B's Title I, Subtitle C, Section 1155B, which permits "home health agencies to assign the most appropriate skilled service to make the initial assessment visit under a Medicare home health plan of care for rehabilitation cases."

Other notable items in the largely legalistic Division B include discounts for certain drugs currently not covered by Medicare Part D, improving low-income Medicare eli-

gibility, increasing the reimbursement rate for certified nurse-midwives, expanding access to vaccines, dementia and abuse prevention training, and the creation of a \$50,000 penalty for each instance of certain fraud or abuse violations.

Division C

The five Titles and nine Subtitles of this Division, which is entitled "Public Health and Workforce Improvement," primarily expand and improve upon all existing medical infrastructures. Division C covers a wide range of initiatives, including improving the ratio of local school nurses to students, creating a registry to track the performance of certain new medical devices, opening community obesity-prevention programs, providing former military EMTs with civilian EMT training, and even mandating the listing of calories on restaurant menus and even vending machines.

Division C also pours copious amounts of federal funding—billions, actually—into grants for such things as researching Autism Spectrum Disorders (an area of significant interest to Hamaspik) and training more doctors and dentists to work in underserved rural areas.

Much of Division C consists of "legalese" that rewrites the existing text of the U.S. Code and adds new text to it.

Towards the end of Division C, the bill creates the CLASS (Community Living Assistance Services and Support) Program, an insurance plan of sorts that "provide[s] individuals with functional limitations with tools that will allow them to maintain their personal and financial independence and live in the community through a new financing strategy for community living assistance services and supports"—which sounds pleasantly similar to Hamaspik's philosophy in general, and several Hamaspik programs in particular.

However, Subtitle E, Section 2585 contains the following ominous text:


"A State is eligible for Federal funds under the provisions of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 201 et seq.) only if the State—

(1) agrees to be subject in its capacity as an employer to each obligation under Division A of this Act and the amendments made by such division applicable to persons in their capacity as an employer; and

(2) assures that all political subdivisions in the State will do the same."

In plain English, this seems to be saying, "If you're a state and you

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want federal funding for the many programs described in Division C, you had better make sure you participate in every part of Division A for your state employees"—something sure to be seized upon by the bill's conservative opponents.

Yet closer to its end, Division C calls for the creation of an *Office on Women's Health*, a large new division of the Department of Health and Human Services. The Office on Women's Health will in turn create the National Women's Health Information Center.

Don't get confused, but in perhaps typical bureaucratic government fashion, Division C also calls for the creation of an "Office of Women's Health," which will be a division of the Centers for Disease Control. And even further, an "Office of Women's Health" is to be created several additional times under the auspices of several other existing government entities.

Division D

The "Indian Health Care Improvement" Division is the last and the shortest of the bill's four divisions. Its two Titles, comprising nine sections, dramatically amend existing laws of the U.S. Code that apply to Native American tribes, mostly by adding large amounts of text that create new health-related programs or build upon existing ones. Division D also revamps various parts of the Social Security laws that apply to Native Americans. More specifically, Division D entails

the "expansion of payments under Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP for all covered services furnished by Indian Health Programs."

Summary

There is one red thread running through the entire bill—as mentioned earlier, the ambitious drive to solve society's most pressing problems (in this case, the current health care system) using government. Much of today's debate over HR 3962 is actually the same as the debate 70 years ago over the creation of the Social Security system and whether government had the responsibility, the capability, or even the Constitutional right to create and manage a socialized-medicine and retirement safety-net program.

So, will it pass? In a compromised form, most probably. Will it adversely affect you? Not particularly. Is it really as good as its supporters say it is? Answer: Somewhat. It's an ambitious start, but will require a tremendous amount of tweaking over the years to work the bureaucratic loopholes, snafus and kinks out of its system.

Conversely, will it do all the dark, democracy-destroying and Draconian things its opponents claim it will? Answer: Not really, although a majority of Americans are uncomfortable with the vast changes it will bring, particularly the bureaucratization of medicine and the associated taxes.

After all, change, even good change, can be uncomfortable at first. ■

Soon-opening 38th St. Shvesterheim hires assistant home manager

Experienced Res Hab Worker promoted to demanding position

The soon-to-be-opened 38th St. Shvesterheim, Hamaspik of Kings County's newest group home, has taken the next of the last few major steps required before opening: Hiring an assistant home manager.

Like the selection of its home manager (as reported in Issue 65 of the *Gazette*), the hiring process for the "second in command" was painstaking and thorough. After researching numerous resumes and other applications for the job, Home Manager Mr. Yomtov Malik opted for a current Hamaspik staff member: Mrs. Fraidy Landau, a Borough Park, Brooklyn resident and a seasoned Hamaspik Res Hab Worker

who capably handled Hamaspik's most challenging Res Hab consumers in the past.

Mrs. Landau was hired in early November.

Since coming on board, Mrs. Landau has been diligently and efficiently working with Mr. Malik to hire staff and conduct family interviews in preparation for the Shvesterheim's planned opening.

Mrs. Landau is also eager to actualize the numerous goals that Hamaspik's consumer care teams—social workers, schoolteachers, parents and Direct Care staff—have already compiled for each of the home's future consumers.

Asked how her Res Hab experience translates to running a group home for Hamaspik consumers, Mrs. Landau says, "By understanding their needs and giving them a lot of love. This will be their home away from home."

According to Mr. Malik, the new home is 95% complete, with contractors expecting to complete their "finishing touches" within the next two weeks. "All the furniture and carpeting are waiting," he says. "Right now, I'm hiring staff, sifting through resumes to get the best people. We want to get people who are meant for this job." ■

Senator Schumer Pushes for School EpiPen Training Grant

Program would train teachers to prevent tragedies in lactose-reaction student emergencies

We've all heard the stories of severely allergic children tragically

perishing after accidentally ingesting dairy products. Statistically, the number is low. But for grieving parents, even one is too many.

That's why U.S. Senator Charles "Chuck" Schumer (D-NY) is now urging strong support for the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Management Act, a bill currently being deliberated in the Senate. Among other things, the Act would create a federal training grant to fund the training of schoolteachers to administer EpiPen injections in the event of lactose-reaction emergencies.

Consumption of lactose, the primary ingredient of dairy products, can be fatal to individuals with severe intolerance and/or allergy to the substance, particularly to teens and children. However, lives can be saved by administering such antidotes as Epinephrine, the critical ingredient of the EpiPen injection device, if administered within the first few minutes after consumption.

The Act would develop voluntary food allergy handling guidelines

for schools and early childhood education programs, allocating \$30 million in funding—parceled out in grants of up to \$50,000—to eligible schools and programs to implement new procedures and staff training.

More specifically, the Act would allow qualifying schools to train teachers on the proper usage of the life-saving EpiPen device, and produce more student-friendly menus that allow kids to know which foods contain which allergens.

The Senator points out that youth allergy rates are rising, with 1 out of every 25 children in New York State afflicted with some level of intolerance to various foods and/or drinks. According to one expert, the allergic-reaction rate to such items as milk, eggs, and nuts has risen by 18% in the last ten years. One of Schumer's own children, the lawmaker says, is allergic to specific fish as well as to cashew nuts.

According to Schumer, the training program will go a long way towards allaying parents' fears. ■

Sticking to Plans



Building and maintaining basic life skills is the overarching goal for Hamaspik consumers at its network of Day Hab centers in three counties. Throughout these comprehensive programs, Hamaspik assists high-function individuals with special needs with a wide array of skills-building, ranging from basic reading, writing and arithmetic to housekeeping, comparison shopping and even parenting. With the backing of several county, state and federal programs, worthy Hamaspik consumers such as those pictured above can integrate into local communities and economies to the extent possible. Here, consumers from Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Habilitation Center label containers, coming away with skills—and that all-important self-esteem.



Hamaspik Of Orange County Celebrates Grand Opening Of New Administration/Day Habilitation Building

Monumental milestone marks culmination of decade-long dream

Continued from Page 1

On a more somber note, with possible budget cuts casting a pall across the entire state human-services industry, the official was also heard remarking, "Now's a good time to adjust priorities."

As ten o' clock arrived, the *Gazette* chatted briefly with Sheila Warren, the Orange County Health Dept.'s Director of Intervention Services, about the communal position and impact of Hamaspik of Orange County's EI program—a program that, testifying to its success and popularity, comprises a surprisingly large 5% of the entire EI population of the whole Orange County.

Hamaspik of Orange County's EI program "makes sure that families are trained," said Warren. "The most important thing is the family."

The crowd then gathered on the front steps for the formal ribbon-cutting ceremony, with employees taking up positions to the sides while

loose soil from the pit, symbolically representing the groundwork necessary before the "planting" of "new roots."

As Mr. Wertheimer personally wielded the shovel blade to expand the small cavity, Commissioner Ashman joked, "Meyer, can you come to my house?"

The group of five officials then lifted an adjacent fresh sapling and inserted it into the hole, symbolizing the opening of the new center with the planting of a new tree.

Representing her superior, Ceylane Meyers then unveiled a small plaque on a stake before the newly-planted tree—a plaque the Commissioner would have personally unveiled had she been able to attend.

Gingerly tugging at a small ribbon, Meyers released and pulled back an elegant shroud to expose a sign reading, "This tree was planted on October 29, 2009 by Honorable Diana Jones Ritter, Commissioner of OMRDD, to Commemorate the



Marking the moment: A capacity crowd listens intently as years of work come to a head

Inside the room, several consumers grinned gleefully as a group of four officials crowded around their activity table to admire their handiwork. Along one wall, Hudson Valley DDSO Director Jill Gentile was seen admiring a painstakingly decorated "Happy Birthday" bulletin board, while Team Leader Eileen Wood struck up an animated conversation with a thrilled consumer. Wood then complimented the program's supplies on hand. "Nice organized closet," she said, referring to neatly arranged rows of items.

"Can I see?" earnestly asked Commissioner Ashman in the next room down the hall, where consumers were decorating hand-crafted tote bags. The consumer responded in kind, a genuine smile wreathing her face as she pushed forward her handiwork for Ashman to inspect.

"They have so much to share!" one official remarked to another as they headed out to the hallway.

In the next room, Mr. Wertheimer conversed with Meyers about a particular consumer who, upon arriving in Hamaspik's program, was transferred to the agency with ominous diagnoses. Among other things, the girl was non-verbal and was not expected to ever talk. But defying expectations, Hamaspik patiently and diligently worked with the young lady, and within one year, the agency succeeded where others had predicted failure—empowering her to speak.

"You must be very proud," Meyers remarked.

Traversing the first floor to observe the second wing, the group looked in on several additional activity rooms. "You have nursing staff?" asked one official of staffer Mrs. Landau when shown a private medical room. Mrs. Landau nodded, affirming Hamaspik's attentive professional care of its precious charges.

"You don't realize how much math is involved in cooking!" Meyers commented as Mrs. Landau showed several officials the wing's kitchen, explaining that consumers learn not only how to cook, but how to use basic math skills in working with ingredients. "And then you get to eat it!" quipped another official. Everyone laughed.

In another room on the wing, consumers gladly held out their math workbooks, allowing officials to see what they've been recently studying. This same room, and the same consumers, was visited by officials in August, with Eileen Wood jokingly recalling how one particularly personable consumer is the "mayor" of Hamaspik's Day Hab.

In a third activity room, this one for low-function consumers, officials exulted in the carefully decorated "Noah's Ark" built out of three stories of cardboard and festooned with working lights and even a



Faces of gratitude: Mr. Reisman and son at the podium

the dozen or so officials took the top landing behind the ribbon.

Orange County Mental Health Commissioner Chris Ashman, a long-time Hamaspik friend and supporter was honored by Mr. Wertheimer with the cutting of the ribbon. Stepping forward to take up the oversized shears, Ashman deftly sliced the crimson strip. Spunky applause erupted from all sides.

The impressive bow marking the ribbon's midpoint was then separated from the strip with a quick second cut and presented to Ceylane Meyers, Director of Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs, who was filling in for Commissioner Ritter.

The group of officials was then invited by Mr. Wertheimer to step down to the building's front lawn, where a small pit for a ceremonial tree-planting had been dug. Three shovels stood at the ready.

The group took turns retrieving

Grand Opening of Hamaspik of Orange County Administration/Day Habilitation Building." The surrounding crowd clapped.

As the officials slowly headed back to the building, Hamaspik of Rockland County Director of Operations Yoel Bernath half-jokingly remarked, "You'll have to come back to water it." The symbolism was not lost on the officials.

The group then moved into the building's lobby to begin a tour of the Day Habilitation program.

Love and learning

"I've known Hamaspik a long time," Orange County Community Development Coordinator Bill Flanigan said to the *Gazette* as the group found its way to the first of several Day Hab activity rooms. "There's been a ten-fold expansion—when Hamaspik started, there was no day program in the community."



What it's all about: Commissioner Ashman greets a Hamaspik consumer



Present in spirit: OMRDD Commissioner Ritter would have personally planted this tree (see inset, left) and addressed the crowd (above) if not fighting for consumers in Albany

moments tucking into fine fare around the dining hall's elegantly set tables, affable Project Coordinator Mrs. Brenda Katina, one of Hamaspik's "main engines," took the podium.

First welcoming the crowd, Mrs. Katina delivered an icebreaker to welcome officials Jackie Spring, Chris Ashman, Ceylane Meyers, Jill Gentile, Vivian Street, Eileen Wood, Melissa Marcone, Bill Flanigan, Sheila Warren, Meghan Hawk, Debra Scudroni and Denise Thomas.

Architects and contractors Peter Cirillo, Timothy Ryan, Joseph Gingrich and Kevin Babcock were also welcomed.

Mrs. Katina then presented a special gift to Commissioner Ashman, first remarking that Hamaspik had once given him an ornamental candy dish that the public servant keeps outside his office door to this day. Mrs. Katina then called upon Ashman to accept another gift.

As the crowd cheered, Ashman pulled a cloth away from a tall object, revealing a tall Plexiglas

cylinder brimming with candies. "This will last until 2010," Ashman wryly estimated. In case it wouldn't, Mrs. Katina completed the gift by presenting several bags of "refills" as the crowd chuckled.

The Emcee then welcomed several friends of Hamaspik: Orange County's Sheila Warren and several of her lieutenants, Initial Service Coordinators Meghan Hawk, Debra Scudroni and Denise Thomas.

"Thank you all for being here," she said. "Maybe we'll have an Early Intervention program in this building. Who knows?"

Acknowledging the expertise invested in designing and building the new center, Mrs. Katina publicly lauded the contributions of architect Peter Cirillo and assistants Timothy Ryan and Kevin Babcock, whose long-time relationship with Hamaspik has spanned the building of several facilities, most recently the new center.

The story is told of a father and son on a long-distance fishing trip. Mrs. Katina related, setting up her next set of remarks with a little humor. After miles and miles on the road, the exasperated little boy finally asked his father, "Will I still be four years old by the time we get there?"

"This building was a dream for years," pronounced Mrs. Katina. "And here we are, celebrating our new building at last!" The crowd cheered heartily in approval.

But such monumental human achievements are not possible without a Higher Power. Mrs. Katina thanked Hashem (the traditional Jewish phrase for G-d) for helping Hamaspik arrive at this day.

Continuing with another trademark story, the experienced crowdworker recounted how a wise old professor asked a former student "What are you doing?" three times, rejecting his disciple's replies and explaining that business success and a wonderful family are G-d's doings, not Man's.

"What are you doing for the

community?" the professor explained—a point that Mrs. Katina tied into Hamaspik's community work as a human-services agency.

With another anecdote, Mrs. Katina diplomatically compared consumers to diamonds whose superficial scratches are turned into etched roses, rendering the diamonds as valuable as any others.

An emotionally evocative video was then screened, with the crowd cheering each time a familiar consumer or staff member appeared. "That's just a glimpse into the treasure chest of diamonds etched with roses," said Mrs. Katina when the video ended.

The proceedings then took a brief intermission for the luncheon's main course.

Notes of praise

During lunch, the Gazette struck up a conversation with Rabbi Litt, a Hamaspik parent and virtuoso violinist who would later perform. In contrast to previous generations which feared exposing their children

in the rate of inflation would give the impression of a recession of the depression."

Hamaspik parent Mr. Chaim Reisman followed Mrs. Katina with a few personal words of gratitude.

"I thank Hashem for giving me and my wife the wisdom and strength for handling our challenges," he began. "It would not be possible without Hamaspik!"

Explaining that gratitude is an essential part of being happy, Mr. Reisman conveyed special thanks to Mr. Wertheimer for founding Hamaspik. "And G-d bless America and its people for enabling him to create it!" he added.

Mr. Reisman then shared some wisdom from legendary British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who famously said, "We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give."

The village water carrier, Mr. Reisman next related, was asked why he insisted on keeping his old, leaking bucket. "Get one that doesn't have a hole in it!" the villagers



Key to friendship: Bill Flanigan accepts a well-earned gift

with special needs to the public for a number of reasons, "You don't have to keep it in the closet" today. Rabbi Litt told the *Gazette*, what with the growing understanding and mainstreaming of MR/DD children. Still, he pointed out, "You can't go it alone—parents need each other."

This community of support is why the South Fallsburg, New York educator is an avid fan of Hamaspik, which services the Litts' own son. "Hamaspik is a family. They do their homework—and they call you" to inform consumers of available programs, Rabbi Litt added. "You don't call them."

The Emcee resumed her position at the podium to continue the program. Mrs. Katina noted that the regrettable last-minute absence of Commissioner Ritter. "We're sorry she couldn't be with us here today," said Mrs. Katina. "She's in Albany, fighting for all of us."

Mrs. Katina then delivered a delightful play on words revolving around the "upturn" of the "economic downturn" and other puns that left the crowd equally amused and confused. "It should be noted that a slowing up of the slowdown is not as good as an upturn in the downturn," she said, "and finally, the inflation of the recession would turn the recession into a depression while a defla-

insisted. "You can only fill it up halfway!" The water carrier replied, "I don't get a new one because the fruits that grow from the trees watered by my leaky bucket are worth more than the profits I could make from a complete bucket."

"Even a broken bucket has its value," said Mr. Reisman as he concluded the telling analogy. "It produces such beautiful flowers!"

Mr. Reisman then introduced his son Shloime, a beloved Hamaspik consumer. In his brief but powerful remarks, Shloime thanked Hamaspik "for helping me live a full life!" Mr. Reisman concluded by thanking his supportive wife and life partner, saying, "The mother is everything!"

Rabbi Litt then stepped forward, violin in hand, to offer several rousing renditions. "The Star-Spangled Banner" came first, with the crowd rising reverentially for the National Anthem, followed by the classic "G-d Bless America" and Broadway favorite "If I Were a Rich Man" from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Mrs. Katina publicly acknowledged Hamaspik's receipt of a large garland of flowers from the Kiryas Joel School District. Attached to the garland was small note reading, "Dear Hamaspik Staff: Mazel Tov!"

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Food for thought

After guests had spent several



Playing up support: Rabbi Litt's music says it all

Satmar Grand Rabbi Honors HamaspiK With



Grand Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum honored HamaspiK on Wednesday, November 4, 2009 by personally visiting HamaspiK's brand-new Administration/Day Hab building to ceremonially install the main entrance's *mezuzah*.

A *mezuzah*, Hebrew for doorpost, is a Biblically mandated parchment scroll mounted on most doorposts.

The visit by the Rebbe (Grand Rabbi) was seen as the culmination of the new center's grand opening, held just the week before on Thursday, October 29.

In the Orthodox Jewish communities served by HamaspiK, a visit by a spiritual leader is seen as a veritable visit by the U.S. President, with an equivalent level of respect and protocol in place.

As such, a large Hebrew-language banner hung outside and above the main entrance, bearing a reverential greeting to the Rebbe from HamaspiK.

Inside the dining room, a large group of consumers, several in wheelchairs, huddled and conversed in one corner as they awaited the honored leader's appearance.

Tables stretched across the room in three long rows, with a head table at their head with settings appropriately fit for a king, centered by an elegant chair awaiting the Rebbe.

The long tables, for their part, were set like a *tish*, the traditional communal Chasidic meal gathering, with foodstuffs and drinks at the ready.

Out in the rear parking lot, shiny HamaspiK vans were neatly lined up like military vehicles.

Standing and sitting around in small clusters, consumers and staff chatted and caught up with each other as the crowd slowly grew. Several non-HamaspiK guests were also seen walking in.

At approximately 11:50 a.m., the crowd began trickling out of the dining room to re-congregate at the

A regal departure (top left): The Rebbe completes his visit. **Opening doors (left):** Affixing the traditional *mezuzah*. **A royal welcome:** Mr. Wertheimer (standing, left) addresses the crowd as the Rebbe (seated, center) looks on.



Continued from page E9

A HamaspiK of Orange County Day Hab consumer then took the mike to share a few simple but effective words. "One behalf of the Day Hab Program, where I live: Welcome!" he said. "When I came here, I was lost. Now I am a secure

and confident adult."
"That was one of the best speeches today," Mrs. Katina aptly remarked. Mrs. Katina then called upon Mr. Wertheimer.

A present for the past

Mr. Wertheimer first thanked all the previous speakers.

"Today is a very special day—a special day personally to me," Mr. Wertheimer continued, pausing to weigh every word. "In our two decades, we have celebrated many, many affairs, but this is something out of the ordinary. This is really a dream come true. This is a milestone that we envisioned, and it took a lot of hard work, a lot of diligence... It is a special day for the special people we serve, and it is a special day for special families, done by special people... We have to recognize and thank those people who were involved, and continue to be involved, because it doesn't end here. We need to continue to try, flourish, and fulfill our mission."

The Executive Director then thanked a list of HamaspiK's loyal friends, beginning with the Commissioner herself. "Commissioner Ritter called me the other day and said, 'Meyer: I was called on duty,'" Mr. Wertheimer remarked. "In the Commissioner's words: 'I'm in full advocacy mode.'"

Addressing the absent

Commissioner on behalf of a grateful HamaspiK family, Mr. Wertheimer said, "Commissioner: You're on duty, and you work for us." The crowd robustly cheered.

Mr. Wertheimer pointed out that the New York State Senate's Finance Chair had just admitted that the proposed budget cuts would hurt the state's most vulnerable population. As such, Mr. Wertheimer continued, "We feel we have a true representative staying in Albany and making sure that we should be able to continue. This building, as nice [as] it is, needs support to be able to continue to provide those supports. So not only [do] we understand, we appreciate the Commissioner's staying in Albany and advocating."

However, he added, the Commissioner did send Ceylane Meyers; applause broke out as he acknowledged her presence.

Comparing the numerous government officials present to family, Mr. Wertheimer went on to thank them by name along with words of appreciation. These included

Hudson Valley DDSO Director Jill Gentile, Deputy Director Jackie Spring, and Orange County Team Leader Eileen Wood.

Many people in the Hudson Valley DDSO have left or retired over his two decades of involvement, Mr. Wertheimer observed. "The only one left is our dear friend: Bill Flanigan!"

To pay tribute to HamaspiK's long-term relationship with the long-time DDSO official, Mr. Wertheimer called up Mr. Flanigan to accept a golden honorary Master Key to the new complex. Mr. Flanigan gratefully accepted his inscribed gift amid spunky applause.

Though Mrs. Katina had already thanked Chris Ashman, Mr. Wertheimer mentioned him again, noting that the Orange County Commissioner "has been our advocate for the past ten years."

"We always talk about prevention, how a person should stay healthy and not enter the DDSO system," then said the Director. "Preventing them at the beginning is



Sharing the love: Mr. Reisman Jr. embraces Mr. Wertheimer

Visit to New Admin/Day Hab Building

building main entrance in anticipation of the Rebbe's arrival.

Brandishing colorful greeting flags, consumers took up positions on the front steps as the Rebbe's car pulled up at 12:00 p.m. After a personal aide opened the vehicle's passenger door, HamaspiK Executive Director Mr. Meyer Wertheimer personally greeted the Rebbe as soon as the Rebbe emerged.

Mr. Wertheimer then accompanied the Rebbe up the stairs, walking a respectful half-step behind the Rebbe to the Rebbe's right. As the Rebbe ascended, the Rebbe personally greeted the awed consumers.

At the head of the stairs, the Grand Rabbi was handed the building's first mezuzah. Holding the trim steel casing in the left hand and

a screwdriver in the right, the Rebbe deftly installed the sacred scroll as HamaspiK consumers and staff respectfully looked on.

Escorted by Mr. Wertheimer, the Rebbe then proceeded to visit the Day Hab activity rooms, where the Rebbe spent several moments reviewing the daily proceedings.

Grand Rabbi Teitelbaum is particularly known for activism on behalf of children with special needs, having spearheaded the now-legendary U.S. Supreme Court case that allowed Kiryas Joel to create its own public school district for its special-needs population.

At the end of the first-floor hallway, the Rebbe climbed the staircase to the third floor, where accompanying HamaspiK Service

Coordinators and other Orange County staffers proudly showed the Rebbe their workspaces.

At a quarter past 12, both Rebbe and entourage found themselves back in the main dining hall, where the Rebbe took a seat. The crowd, which had been respectfully standing as the Rebbe had entered, then sat down too. Mr. Wertheimer took his seat to the Rebbe's left.

Acting as Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Wertheimer then stood to open the event and formally welcome the Rebbe.

With consumers and staff seated at long tables (extra chairs were added to accommodate the larger-than-expected crowd), the Executive Director began with the customary inspirational thought, then segued into a review of HamaspiK's humble beginnings, particularly, its Day Hab program.

Mr. Wertheimer gave special mention to the previous Satmar Rebbe, Grand Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1914-2006), of righteous memory, a fighter for children with special needs in his own right. He next briefly touched upon HamaspiK's school respite program.

Being the first large-scale HamaspiK assemblage that presented the opportunity to do so, Mr. Wertheimer continued by recognizing a long list of individuals for their contributions.

The thanks were pleasantly interrupted when Mr. Yisroel Meilech Wertheimer, the Executive Director's own father and a dogged Holocaust survivor, suddenly walked in. Son showed father immense respect as Mr. Wertheimer stopped speaking until his father was seated at the head table to the Rebbe's right.



Grand Rabbi, grand tour: Outside the new reception area

Continuing, Mr. Wertheimer mentioned the building's numerous contractors involved—and its low cost despite its high quality. All honorees were then called up to the head table, where each was handed a gift by Mr. Wertheimer.

During Mr. Wertheimer's presentations, Rabbi Shlomo Rubin, the spiritual leader of the Tzetzenever Synagogue in Kiryas Joel and a HamaspiK consumer parent, entered the hall and was seated to the Rebbe's right, next to Mr. Wertheimer Senior.

The Grand Rabbi himself then delivered the visit's central "keynote address."

Speaking for approximately ten minutes, the Rebbe elaborated upon love for others and giving to others, themes which the Rebbe connected to the mission and daily work of HamaspiK, which the Rebbe

highly praised. The Rebbe concluded his inspirational remarks by blessing HamaspiK with an "abundance of blessing and success."

Following the Rebbe's address, the crowd rose for the Rebbe's departure, and Grand Rabbi Teitelbaum and his aides left the building.

Outside, the Gazette observed as a HamaspiK Direct Care Worker lovingly loaded a non-mobile consumer into a Day Hab transportation van for the ride back home, painstakingly operating the lift and gently rolling the wheelchair into place, all the while keeping up a stream of friendly patter.

Were one's eyes closed, one would never know that one of the two conversationalists was a special-needs consumer—which, at HamaspiK, is exactly how it's supposed to be. ■



With respect to that...: Mr. Wertheimer honors his father

one of the utmost [priorities of] importance. We run today a successful program which is called 'Early Intervention,' but I would say, 'Early Prevention.' [As such,] we must recognize [Orange County Director of Intervention Services] Sheila Warren." The crowded

clapped. He then listed the Director's staff: Meghan Hawk, Debra Scudroni and Denise Thomas.

HamaspiK could not have built anything without the "constructive" input of Habig and Cirillo, PC, the contracting company with whom

HamaspiK has shared a relationship that spans several building projects. "We thank you so much," said Mr. Wertheimer to Messrs. Peter Cirillo and Tim Ryan, who were both present, "and we appreciate all you have done."

The Executive Director then paid tribute to several employees involved "day and night" in the raising of the new building, as well as HamaspiK's ongoing operations:

- Director of Development and Planning Moses Wertheimer
- Access to Home Coordinator David Daskal
- Development Coordinator Joseph Meisels
- Office Manager Aron Rubinstein
- Group Home Maintenance Manager Samuel Falkowitz; and
- PACE Coordinator Shaya Brach.

Mr. Wertheimer finally shared some special words of thanks for the indefatigable Mrs. Brenda Katina, HamaspiK's endlessly devoted Project Coordinator, pointing out

that he received a HamaspiK-related e-mail from the unstoppable Coordinator at 1:57 a.m. that morning. "That shows her dedication, and I thank her for all her work and devotion," said Mr. Wertheimer.

Mrs. Katina returned for the last time to the podium to deliver closing remarks that bore the event's theme of trees, warmly thanking Commissioner Ritter and Team Leader Wood once again and presenting brochures to both officials.

Director Meyers then rose to deliver remarks representing the Commissioner. "I'm really honored to be here on behalf of Commissioner Ritter... on this very special occasion," she began. "Congratulations! I can't say that enough. It's obvious that you all have such a generous, loving heart for the consumers," she continued, "and to walk around today and see the activities and the smiles on their faces, to see the video, to hear from the families... it's wonderful, the work that you do in Hudson Valley and it's wonderful, the partnership

that you have with Jill and our team here in the Hudson Valley. And again: Congratulations on behalf of Commissioner Ritter. This is a very special day, and I'm hoping that you don't just celebrate today but continue to celebrate for a very long time. Thank you."

In conclusion, Mrs. Katina presented Mr. Wertheimer with a new wallet, joking that everyone would get something out of the gift. The crowd strongly cheered, and the event drew to a close.

Just another day

Within ten minutes, the crowd had dissipated.

Meanwhile, on the third floor, a beehive of activity could be found as Service Coordinators buzzed about their cubicles tending to their daily duties. For the guests departing downstairs, it was the close of a special day. But for HamaspiK's hard-working, loving employees, it was just another day—and while the last attendee was ending his or her visit, they were already back at work. ■



Now now, reap later: Reflecting on achievement



So, What's Happening in Your Health Today...?



Disability Hate Crimes Protections Signed Into Law

Earlier this month, President Barack Obama signed an expanded hate crimes bill into law, making it a federal offense to commit a crime against a person based on their disability. The new law expands the definition of "hate crimes" to also include crimes committed based on a person's disability. Federal law already protects against crimes committed based on race, color, religion or national origin.

The new law also gives federal authorities more leeway to investigate and prosecute suspected hate crimes.

According to a Justice Department study released in early October, persons with disabilities are 50 percent more likely to experience nonfatal violent crime than those without disabilities. The study also found that about one in five crime victims with disabilities believe their disability was the reason they were targeted.

"We must stand against crimes that are meant not only to break bones, but to break spirits," Obama said at a ceremony commemorating the enactment of the new law. "No one in America should be forced to look over their shoulder ... because they live with a disability."

Medical Labels Don't Say it All

According to a commentary published recently in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, U.S. drug labels often omit key information about medications' side effects—or whether they work at all.

Two researchers with the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practices, Lisa Schwartz and Steven Woloshin, wrote that much of the information that the Food and Drug Administration has at the time it issues approval for new drugs "may fail to make its way into the drug label and relevant journal articles." The researchers also noted that label texts often are drafted by drug makers, with final wording negotiated with the FDA.

An FDA review document of the sleeping pill Rozerem (generic name: Ramelteon), for example, states that the drug made "no significant difference in time to fall asleep" and that patients "do not seem to recognize any benefit from treatment."

But the FDA's uncertainty about Rozerem's effectiveness is not reflected in the drug's label, which does not include the fact that a test found the drug no more effective than a placebo, and that users actually took a minute longer to fall asleep than those on the dummy pill.

So before you take that medicine, do your homework and/or speak to your doctor.

Toyota in the E.R.? Vrooom!

What would a large Japanese automaker and an American hospital emergency room have in common? Other than having a plethora of high-tech gadgets at hand, not much, one would guess.

But now, a university study has found that emergency departments that apply principles of Toyota's Lean manufacturing model are better able to provide prompt, quality care.

The Japanese auto giant's manufacturing model aims to minimize waste and inefficiency and produce higher-quality products—and according to lead researcher Eric Dickson at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, between 20 and 30 hospital emergency departments across the U.S. have adopted Lean-type principles to reduce inefficiency and improve care.

Dickerson added that success has been dependent on how closely the EDs follow the original Lean philosophy of the Japanese auto manufacturer.

The study was recently published in the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*.

Not Enough Doctors

"Is there a doctor in the house?"

The answer to that question, according to a study published recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, is more likely than ever to be "no."

The study found that there currently are only 788,000 active physicians in the U.S., 65,000 fewer than originally estimated. Using the most recent census data, the analysis also found that there will be 957,000 physicians in the U.S. by 2020, rather than the 1.05 million previously estimated, and that 9%, rather than 18%, will be ages 65 or older.

Study lead author Douglas

Staiger projected a 20% to 22% growth in the number of physicians between 2005 and 2020. However, he explained that "because you start with a lower number, you end up with a lower number in the future—with 9% fewer physicians [than the 1.05 estimate] by 2020."

Health Care Reform—or Waste Management Reform?

According to a study recently released by Thomson Reuters, America's health care system wastes about one-third of its national health care spending—between \$505 billion and \$805 billion—each year.

"By attacking waste, [the U.S.] can reduce health care costs without adversely affecting the quality of care or access to care," the report claimed.

The study also recommends steps such as fixing obvious inefficiencies like duplicate tests; instituting electronic health records; avoiding preventable conditions or mistakes; and combating fraud.

Simple enough—or is it?

Mental Medications May Cause Physical "Gain"

The group of medications known as *atypical antipsychotics*, widely used in young people to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, also caused youths to gain between 10 and 13 pounds on average over 11 weeks, according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The amount of weight gain linked to the drugs is much greater than previously estimated, according to the report. The study comes as several atypical antipsychotics await FDA approval for use in children.

Turmeric: the Healing Spice?

Turmeric, the yellow root that gives mustard its color and serves as one of the primary ingredients of curry powder, contains a chemical called curcumin—and curcumin

VIPs in the News

Senators Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) and **Michael Enzi** (R-Wyo.) introduced a Senate bill that calls on the federal government to replace the term "mental retardation" with "intellectual disability" throughout all health, education and labor policy texts. The bill is named Rosa's Law after a girl from Maryland with an intellectual disability. Similar legislation in New York State stalled over the summer, but passed easily in Ohio and other states.

Dr. Regina M. Benjamin, M.D. was confirmed as U.S. Surgeon General late last month. The immediate past chair of the Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States, Dr. Benjamin was previously named by a leading national magazine as one of the nation's 50 future leaders under age 40.

Hackensack University Medical Center named **Robert C. Garrett** President and CEO after serving in both capacities on an acting basis since May. Garrett has been with HUMC since 1981 and was named Executive VP and COO in 1986. Over 200 people had applied for the post.

New York-Presbyterian Hospital announced that acclaimed CEO **Dr. Herbert Pardes** will step down in 2011 after about a decade on the job. "He's terrific and he's done a spectacular job," **Dr. Steven Safyer**, Chief Executive of Montefiore Hospital, told *Crain's New York*, crediting the chief's "incredible energy, compassion and passion, and ability to talk to people—and listen."

The U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed **Carmen Nazario** as Assistant HHS Secretary for Children and Families (ACF). "Carmen Nazario has a distinguished record of more than 40 years working in human services at every level of government, as well as in the private and non-profit sectors," said HHS Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius**. ■

may prove to be a powerful medicine in the fight against esophageal cancer.

According to a new study in the *British Journal of Cancer*, a molecule found in curcumin kills esophageal cancer cells.

Previous studies have found that people who eat large amounts of turmeric-heavy curry may be less prone to the disease. Sharon McKenna, one of the researchers, said that curcumin could potentially be developed into a drug to treat esophageal cancer, which results in more than 500,000 deaths annually worldwide.

Gender Role in Cardiac Risk

Heart attack rates for middle-aged women are increasing, while those of men in the same age group are falling, according to a study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.


Researchers examined data from 1988 through 1994, as well as from 1999 through 2004, and found that men's heart attack rates had declined from 2.5% to 2.2%, while women's rates increased from 0.7% to 1%.

Tackling Prescription Misuse

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy convened a task force to consider what pharmacists are ethically and legally obligated to do with information garnered through prescription drug tracking programs.

The NABP is also considering whether to adopt new guidelines regarding pharmacists' responsibilities to the general public in cases of prescription drug misuse.

Prescription drug misuse has grown significantly over the past 20 years. According to 2008 Congressional testimony, U.S. retail pharmacies dispensed nearly 180 million prescriptions for opiates—including hydrocodone and oxycodone—in 2007, compared with 40 million in 1991. ■



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