

# HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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## “I Can’t Thank You Enough”

Governor David Paterson Lauds, Rallies Hamaspiik at Legislative Breakfast

The guest of honor at Hamaspiik’s recent gala was no mailman, but this past January 28, 2010, neither snow nor ice nor bumper-to-bumper New York State Thruway traffic stayed New York Governor David A. Paterson from swiftly completing the personal delivery of a very special message to the Hamaspiik community.

The Hamaspiik Inaugural Legislative Breakfast, held on a surprisingly snowy Thursday morning, was designed to foster and strengthen the voluntary agency’s relationship with elected officials and public servants. It drew a capacity crowd to Hamaspiik Terrace, the on-site social hall at Hamaspiik of Rockland County’s main office on Monsey’s Route 59 thoroughfare.

As the weather laid a blanket of snow on the ground outside, Gov. Paterson laid the groundwork for improved relations between Hamaspiik and several levels of government—and improved Hamaspiik-related communication between those levels of government.

“For all Hamaspiik consumers



Standing together: New York Gov. David A. Paterson takes the crowd by storm

and their families, the honor of having the Governor of New York State at our agency for an official event was a dream come true,” said Meyer Wertheimer, Executive Director of Hamaspiik.

### All hands on deck

Though the event officially began at 9:00 a.m., Hamaspiik staffers were on site as early as 7:00 in the morning, opening the doors for a flood of caterers, technicians and logistical staff to execute final touches on extensive plans laid in previous weeks and days.

By 8:30 a.m., dozens of staffers from Hamaspiik of Rockland, Orange and Kings Counties were milling about and socializing with the first of the sizable crowd of guests that had already arrived. Though a moderate snow was falling outside, the inclement weather didn’t stop several dignitaries from showing up early.

A group of consumers were clustered around the front lobby area,

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## First Major Overhaul of Crib-Safety Laws in 28 Years Coming to Washington

Rockland County imposing one of nation’s first crib bans; Graco recalls strollers

In the wake of the recall of over 7 million cribs of various popular brands since 2007—and the tragic accidental deaths of more than a dozen infants due to defective crib

hinges, pins, wooden slats and other parts—Consumer Product Safety Commissioner head Inez Tenenbaum testified on Thursday, January 21, 2010 before Congress about her

agency’s plan to dramatically overhaul the CPSC’s crib-safety guidelines.

The new crib guidelines will comprise such heightened standards as stronger wood components, improved mattress supports, and the gradual phasing-out of the still-popular drop-side cribs, whose side railings can be lowered to facilitate removal of infants.

The overhaul will be the first major update of federal crib-safety guidelines since 1982.

The testimony before a House subcommittee, and the tough new standards for which it called, comes at the same time that Rockland

County is considering a drop-side crib prohibition of its own. The new county law would ban the sale of drop-side cribs, the second such county-wide ban in the United States. (Long Island’s Suffolk County became the first several months ago.)

According to County Legislator Alden Wolfe, the Suffern Democrat behind the law, the ban was proposed in reaction to state and federal inaction. “There is no state or federal legislation on this issue and I’m the kind of guy who likes to take action... and do what’s best for our

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# Hamaspik of Rockland County Holds Orientation/Refresher Training Sessions for Employees

On two consecutive Mondays, January 11 and 18, 2010, Hamaspik of Rockland County held orientation training sessions for a group of employees both new and old. The sessions were conducted on the premises of Hamaspik of Rockland County at 58 Rt. 59 in Monsey.

Direct Care Workers are legally required by both state and federal government to receive full instruction in all proper consumer-care and safety techniques.

Additionally, to ensure that all

DCWs maintain their edge, Hamaspik includes existing Direct Care staff in these regular sessions to refresh their command of all care information.

The first three-hour session was introduced by Yoel Bernath, Hamaspik of Rockland County's Director of Operations.

In Bernath's introduction, recent hires and experienced workers alike were presented with the function and purpose of the New York State OMRDD (Office of Mental

Retardation and Developmental Disabilities) and the 14 statewide branches of the DDSO (Developmental Disabilities Services Office) under its purview.

Bernath then reviewed Hamaspik's mission and vision, including an explanation of Hamaspik's iconic symbol.

Shaya Werberger, Hamaspik of Rockland County's Director of Residential Services, next brought session attendees up to speed on the privacy-protecting HIPPA (Health

Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) laws and the appropriate sharing of consumer information, followed by the related consumers' rights and care performance standards.

After a brief break, that important subject was followed by an even more important one: the painstaking reporting of *reportable incidents* and *serious reportable incidents*, two categories of incidents involving abuse and/or neglect of consumers with special needs.

Because of its lowered functionality and self-defensibility, the mentally- or developmentally-challenged population remains at heightened risk for abuse and/or neglect at the hands of unscrupulous staffers. The now-infamous Willowbrook scandal of the 1960s rendered a New York State-run institution synonymous with systematic abuse and neglect, and most recently, the state enacted Jonathan's Law after a severely disabled group-home resident died at his caretaker's hands.

That's why state-mandated sessions provide extensive training in abuse and neglect prevention and response: to teach fresh employees the precise definitions of *physical*, *psychological* and *non-verbal* abuse, to familiarize them with the incident-related Part 624 laws—and apprise them of the need for rigorous documentation in the aftermath of any incident, suspected or real.

The session concluded with a review of requirements binding on Hamaspik as a workplace under OSHA, or the Occupational Safety Hazards Administration, presented by Hamaspik of Rockland County IRA/Family Care Nurse Mrs. Evie Steinhart, RN. The OSHA requirements applicable to Hamaspik involve preventing the transmission of blood-borne and airborne pathogens in the course of physically tending to consumers with special needs.

"It was very respectful towards all consumers," said Miriam Kind, a Direct Care staffer at Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Hab program, commenting on the orientation's underlying philosophy. "I just like going to trainings in general," she continued, explaining that the sessions serve as refreshing reminders of Hamaspik's mission that reinvigorate otherwise rote daily routines. "I've been working here for a long time and sometimes you forget... Hamaspik really goes out of its way to take care of the consumers, and I feel that I'm part of that."

"Every training [session] is new. The instructor always has new regulations [to teach]," pointed out Joseph Lebowitz, a two-year veteran of Hamaspik who recently transferred to the agency's Wannamaker IRA in Monsey. Pressed for an

example, he cited Hamaspik's ever-increasing alacrity toward evacuations and other fire-safety-related issues. "Fire safety is much stricter," he pointed out—"how to handle consumers in fire evacuations."

"There are topics you must cover. The training is very important," Bernath later noted to the *Gazette*. "If you want to have good staff, they've got to be well trained."

The following week, Werberger led a second full presentation, this one on fire safety, slip-and-fall prevention, consumer safety in beds and baths, and safety in the community. Werberger's presentation also encompassed proper lifting and moving of non-ambulatory consumers so as to prevent staff back injuries. It also included numerous slide shows and video tutorials.

By law, staff at every state-funded agency must be fully adept in the latest fire safety and evacuation rules; towards this end, the Hamaspik presentation comprised both the fire-safety video created by the OMRDD and the standard-issue fire-safety video produced by the state's Office of Fire Safety and Prevention (OFSP).

"He said some very interesting things, for example, like how to carry heavy things using two people," said Yehudis Allison, who joined the Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Hab a year-and-a-half ago. "Fire safety was explained very well with lots of examples." Ms. Allison also took note of the mention of proper staff seating when transporting consumers in agency vans—namely, the driver up front and the second staffer in the main cabin with consumers, the better to directly tend to them should needs arise.

"I learned how important fire safety is—that's what hit me the most. It wasn't just a bunch of regulations. These are real-life situations," said Chaim Neuman, a new Hamaspik employee who is slated, along with his wife, to become the "live-in" at Hamaspik's Wannamaker IRA group home in Chestnut Ridge at the end of February 2010.

Hamaspik of Rockland County's Director of Patient Services, Mrs. Lauren Wieder, RN, wrapped up the session with a review of state-mandated consumer nutritional standards, which help ensure that consumers' health and wellbeing is maintained.

"They got a lot from the presentation," said Werberger. "You could see it on the faces of the crowd."

"I'm impressed by the organization," commented Neuman on working for the voluntary agency. "They do their job well and I hope I do mine too." ■

## All In The Family

*A profile of Hamaspik's corporate culture at 61st St. Briderheim*

The Hamaspik IRA is a home in so many more ways than one.

Besides being the physical place of residence for the worthy human beings that are Hamaspik's consumers, the Individual Residential Alternatives spread across Kings, Rockland and Orange Counties under the Hamaspik umbrella are home to staffers and caregivers too.

And where there is a home, there is a family—a sentiment concretized at every personal milestone reached by consumers and staff members.

A recent case in point was the profoundly personal engagement celebration for 61st Street Briderheim Direct Care Worker Yossi Moskovits, who recently announced his upcoming wedding plans.

Of course, he had to share his joy with his family—his Hamaspik family.

Home Manager David Mizrahi describes a palpable thrill in the air when the news hit 61st St. "I can't tell you enough how big of a *sim-*

*chah* [happy occasion—ed.] it was," says Mizrahi.

Mr. Mizrahi paints a picture of a thoroughly dedicated staffer, one whose contributions to Hamaspik since his coming on board in early 2008 have been so substantial that when he had to take a six-month leave for personal reasons, Mizrahi held his job for him.

Now that's family.

"It was a great excitement for the group home. We had a big party. He's really involved so it was a real celebration, a huge *simchah* in the home," says Mizrahi.

Furthering that family feel is the uniquely caring treatment received by a very high-functioning consumer who suffers from nothing more than a serious case of cerebral palsy. The gentleman is painfully aware of his debilitating condition and of the stereotypes and challenges presented by society to individuals like himself.

That's all the more reason he expressed heartfelt gratitude when

Hamaspik staged not one but two impromptu birthday parties for the deserving young man—stating at the second, and private, of the two that moving into the group home was "the best decision I ever made. The quality of love and quality of service—I wouldn't get it anywhere else."

On the other end of the functionality spectrum, one of the lowest-functioning consumers not just in the entire Hamaspik community but in the state OMRDD system as a whole resides at 61st. That's why no less than an OMRDD Associate Commissioner has personally visited 61st to see to the consumer's ongoing long-term care—coming away, as Mizrahi reports, with high marks for the agency.

As agency-servicing psychiatrist Dr. Charles Cartwright, Director of the Autism Center at the YAI Network, put it, "I don't know any other agency that would be able to handle such difficult challenges as you have in your group home other than Hamaspik. Those consumers are lucky that they are in your home."

But what else are you supposed to do when they are not consumers but family? ■



The family home: an unassuming exterior, a "family-sized" kitchen

# Hamaspik Launches Licensed Home Care Services Division

*Contract signed with managed-care provider Fidelis; sweeping initiative to meet rising Baby Boomer need*

Home care services have long been a well-entrenched industry in New York State. With the Empire State home to the United States' most populous city and one of its largest senior populations, New York's hundreds of private home-care firms provide all levels of med-

ical care to seniors, the chronically ill, the disabled and other worthy individuals living at home.

Against that background, with New York's thousands of Baby Boomers now approaching seniority, the industry is seeing the earliest tides of what may become a tower-

ing wave of seniors requiring any level of home care services in the years and decades to come.

A possible indicator of this rising tide are the progressively mounting calls received by Hamaspik to add its own home care services to its plethora of existing programs.

"Calls for nursing related services have come in since I began working here," notes Mrs. Tress, Hamaspik's Central Intake Coordinator, in an e-mail to the *Gazette*. Mrs. Tress has been with Hamaspik since February of 2000. "Quite a few come in every month—family members of patients who are being discharged from hospitals, social workers from hospitals, etc. In the past, we tried to help people by referring them to other agencies. There is a great need for the elderly, for our consumers who require nursing, and for many CDPAP clients."

In response, Hamaspik began planning to become a *Licensed Home Care Services Agency*—LHCSA for short. The lengthy process of applying for state LHCSA certification was begun in the summer of 2007; it was completed in the spring of 2009.

"With Baby Boomers becoming seniors, the need for nursing homes is growing," points out Executive Director Meyer Wertheimer. However, Hamaspik believes that said seniors may remain in their own homes with proper assistance through such service as LHCSA, and, to a lesser extent, NHTD (see the Dec. '09 issue of the *Gazette*).

Today, Hamaspik is licensed to provide LHCSA services in seven New York State counties: Kings, Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, Ulster, Putnam and Dutchess.

division.

Because some LHCSA-related work is part-time and need-based, occurring as it does in early-morning and late-evening hours, a large and detailed amount of employee tracking is required—mostly via extensive ongoing paperwork. And because managing that personnel and paperwork requires experience and leadership, Hamaspik has tapped its very own Shaya Brach, currently the coordinator of Hamaspik of Rockland County's CDPAP program, to head up the Human Resources department of the new LHCSA initiative.

## **Knowing what you do, doing what you know**

As CDPAP coordinator, Mr. Brach bears responsibility for numerous consumers and the precisely-recorded time sheets for each—experience sure to serve Hamaspik in good stead in his similar new position.

According to Hamaspik of Rockland County Director of Operations Yoel Bernath, the need for a full-time new HR person is three-fold: LHCSA requires a dedicated employee coordinator; state-funded LHCSA programs are under the purview of the Department of Health, unlike most of OMRDD-based Hamaspik programs; and, with a long-term goal of hiring many new staffers, Hamaspik seeks to be able to provide LHCSA services in a quick manner.

Because of the needs-based nature of their industry, a LHCSA agency may have no work for employees one day and a flood of demands the next, not unlike residential cleaning services. Hamaspik consumers may require an HHA for as little as one hour or a PCA for just one afternoon—and they may need them right away.

That's why a quality agency should provide results almost immediately, notes Bernath, setting the bar high for Hamaspik's expectations and allowing consumers to eventually call Hamaspik and get the home care they need almost immediately.

Most significantly, Hamaspik recently signed a groundbreaking contract with Fidelis, a managed-care company that, like many in New York State, is authorized to provide health care to Medicaid and Medicare recipients.

The arrangement will allow Fidelis to offer Hamaspik's LHCSA services, including all above-mentioned levels of nursing and home care, to its Medicaid- and Medicare-bearing consumers who require it.

Additionally, the contract will allow Hamaspik to provide occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy, speech therapy and nutrition therapy to Fidelis subscribers.

Hamaspik plans to capitalize on its niche, introducing its trademark love and caring into a wide new arena. "We believe that the senior community deserves the Hamaspik brand," says Bernath. "We feel that we have a good service." ■

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## Intake Assistant to Assume At-Home Respite Coordination Responsibilities

Hamaspik of Rockland County's capable intake assistant Mrs. Elky Eger, whose duties primarily consist of assisting Central Intake specialist Mrs. Tress, has been promoted to At-Home Respite Coordinator, according to a Wednesday, January 20 in-house memo sent to Hamaspik staff

by Director of Operations Yoel Bernath.

"Please be advised that Mrs. Eger assumed responsibility as the At-Home Respite coordinator effective January 15, 2010," read the message. "Mrs. Preisler will be responsible for the At-Home Res

Hab program only."

Mrs. Eger's new responsibilities are designed to relieve Mrs. Preisler, the now-former At-Home Respite Coordinator and current At-Home Res Hab coordinator, of the oversized workload created by the growth of both programs; until the new change, the long-time Hamaspik of Rockland staffer handled both.

The contributions of a high-school senior who walked off the street into a Hamaspik center six years ago is not lost on Hamaspik's leadership. In that span, Mr. Bernath notes, Mrs. Eger has gone from a part-time direct-care staffer in a Hamaspik after-school program to a full-time Day Hab caregiver, executive assistant, and, most recently, intake assistant.

Hamaspik thanks Mrs. Preisler for her years of hard work, itself one of the reasons for growth of both programs, congratulates Mrs. Eger upon her assumption of new duties, and wishes good luck to both. ■

### *The experience to care*

For starters, a typical LHCSA agency offers *Personal Care Aides* (PCAs) and *Home Health Aides* (HHAs) to consumers in need. These staffers provide non-specialized, minimally-involved care to individuals who require assistance with such simple needs as dressing or shopping.

For consumers with more advanced needs such as injections, administration of medications, wound care and bandage replacements, LHCSAs will provide *Registered Nurses* (RNs).

With a constituent community numbering in the thousands, Hamaspik is now poised to meet this previously-unmet need. "The need is there, so we'll bring the services to them," says Mrs. Lauren Wieder, RN, Hamaspik of Rockland County's Director of Patient Services.

A team of PCAs, HHAs and RNs is currently being assembled by Mrs. Wieder with assistance from various Hamaspik staffers, and a new office space on Hamaspik of Rockland County's premises has been prepared for the new LHCSA



# Hamaspik of Rockland County Stages Corporate Compliance Training Day for All Employees

On Wednesday, January 20, 2010, Hamaspik of Rockland County organized a day-long series of back-to-back training sessions in the federal Corporate Compliance Regulations for its numerous employees.

Earlier in the month, on January 12, an official Hamaspik letter signed by Hamaspik of Rockland County CDPAP Supervisor Arthur Sabel and Director of Operations Yoel Bernath had gone out to all said employees, informing them of the upcoming training day.

In part, it read: "To ensure that Hamaspik stays compliant with all local, state and federal laws, all Hamaspik employees must now be trained in New York State's Corporate Compliance Regulations... This means you must visit Hamaspik of Rockland County's main office ... to watch a short but important training video."

To accommodate employees' busy schedules, the showings of the

informative video ran every hour on the hour, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The last showing was at 4:00 p.m.

Viewing the video was obligatory for both new and existing employees, with new hires not considered official employees until certifying that they had seen the video and existing employees being given a full day on which to come in and get up to speed.

The viewers were schooled on the definition and application of the *Corporate Compliance Regulations*, New York's state-level response to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, a federal law requiring government to reduce wasteful spending.

New York's CCR takes aim at waste by specifically targeting Medicaid fraud and abuse, among other excesses; the video urges viewers to report any fraud or abuse at Hamaspik by using its in-house anonymous reporting system created in response to the regulation.

Throughout the course of the

day, the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of the Hamaspik employee body was well represented as dozens of Hamaspik employees of every background were seen streaming in and out of Hamaspik of Rockland County's front lobby.

Overseeing the eight consecutive showings was Hamaspik of Rockland County PACE Coordinator Shaya Brach, accompanied by Medicaid Services Coordinators Shlomo Katz and Mordechai Follman. The staffers were on hand to answer any questions and ensure that participants signed and handed in their attendance confirmation sheets, a stack of which stood at the entrance to the viewing room.

By day's end, close to 100 employees had attended.

"Hamaspik is serious about keeping all its employees up to date," the original notice letter concluded. And judging by their robust turnout, Hamaspik employees are equally serious too. ■

# Group Health Plans to Equally Cover Mental, Physical Health Treatment

## Obama Administration Issues Parity Legislation Rules

New rules rolled out this Friday, February 5 by the Obama administration will benefit over 140 million people receiving mental-health coverage through their jobs.

"The rules ... will, for the first time, help assure that those diagnosed with these debilitating and sometimes life-threatening disorders will not suffer needless or arbitrary limits on their care," said Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius. "I applaud the long-standing and bipartisan effort that made these important new protections possible."

Introducing the new rules, the Obama administration said that visits to primary care physicians had typically elicited higher co-payments than visiting mental health professionals. The administration believes that more patients will be treated by mental health professionals under the reduced disparity. This, in turn, "could lead to more appropriate care and thus better health outcomes," it said.

The rules will effectively establish mental-health treatment equality. Traditionally, for a number of reasons, numerous health plans have maintained limits on hospital inpatient days and outpatient visits for mental health treatments.

The new rules will bar employers and group health plans from either providing less coverage for mental health care than for physical health care, or collecting higher mental health care co-payments and deductibles. The new rules also disallow employers and group health plans from limiting mental health treatments to levels lower than physical health treatments.

The rules will make it easier for covered employees to receive treatment for depression, autism, schizophrenia, eating disorders, alcohol and drug abuse and several other disorders.

The rules finally realize a 2008 Congressional bill adopted with bipartisan support that significantly expands the rights of people with

mental illness—much of which goes untreated because of insurance restrictions. The new rules will take effect on July 1, 2010.

While insurers will still be able to review claims for "medical necessity," require prior approval of some services and charge consumers more for using doctors and hospitals that are not on a list of preferred providers, they will now be unable to use these techniques more restrictively for mental health care than for standard medical services.

However, the administration said the new requirements could increase premiums by four-tenths of 1 percent, or \$25.6 billion, over 10 years. And the new rules do not apply to employee insurance plans offered by businesses with 50 or fewer employees. Neither are they applicable to the individual insurance market, which sells health insurance policies directly to families and individuals.

Still, the government's decision to require a single deductible for mental health and medical-surgical coverage was a good one, according to Irvin L. Muszynski, a lawyer at the American Psychiatric Association. "Patients with mental illness often have general medical conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure that require treatment at the same time," he said.

The rules were developed by the Labor Department, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Internal Revenue Service, which share responsibility for their enforcement.

By U.S. government estimation, the new rules would affect approximately 446,400 group health plans offered by private employers, reaching 111 million people, plus 20,000 plans state- and local-government plans, covering an additional 29 million insured.

The law requiring parity in the coverage of mental and physical illnesses is named for its sponsors, former Senators Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota) and Pete V. Domenici (R-New Mexico). ■

# Being of Benefit

## Comprehensive Hamaspik employee benefits package renewed with 2010 fiscal-year onset

Exemplifying effective benefits management and eagle-eyed fiscal discipline, Hamaspik recently renewed its existing OMRDD-funded employee benefits packages.

To counteract a high employee turnover rate in the home care industry, a raft of valuable benefits for workers at non-profit health-care agencies was conceived several years ago by the New York State OMRDD and vigorously advocated by OMRDD Commissioner Diana Jones Ritter.

The benefits package, known as *Home Care Enhancement*, or HCE, was subsequently signed into law by the State Legislature. The package's first iteration was dubbed HCE 1, with HCEs 2 through 5 being included in following years' state budgets. Most recently, after a fierce battle fought by Commissioner Ritter, HCE 6 was included in the current budget.

Central to the benefits package is the *flexible spending account*, or FSA. The FSAs—and other state-sponsored benefits—give each employee a yearly stipend towards covering co-pays for doctor visits, prescriptions, and visits to clinics.

The benefits are particularly noteworthy at a time that the United States in general, and New York State in particular, weathers the worst economic recession since before World War II, sending

Hamaspik and other OMRDD-funded agencies scrambling to trim all possible costs.

With health insurance the most important—and most costly—of employee benefits, Hamaspik was able to renew its group coverage with the Oxford Freedom Access plan, providing coverage with minimal cost to all parties involved.

The renewal comes after several months of rigorously scrutinizing the fine print of several plans, scouring each with both state price tag and Hamaspik employee needs in mind and ultimately renewing the existing Oxford plan.

In particular, the Oxford plan was renewed for its provision that allows bearers to visit medical spe-

cialists without the time-consuming, tedious referral-obtaining process from primary care physicians that is the bane of much of today's health insurance industry.

Besides the health care plan, a pension plan offered through the respected John Hancock financial firm also helps Hamaspik recruit the top-quality staff so critical to the success and cost-effectiveness of its state-sponsored services.

The complete package also includes dental and vision benefits, as well as catastrophic-illness and accidental-death benefits.

Stretching the dollar without breaking the bank: that's budgeting done right. At least the way Hamaspik sees it. ■



Hamaspik 24 Hour Emergency Hotline:

**1-877-928-9000**



# Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Hab Surprises Consumer with Regal Birthday Party

How far would you go to cheer up a friend?

On Monday, January 18, 2010, the friend of Hamaspik that is one particular Day Hab consumer found out—as the Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Habilitation Program staged a grand surprise birthday party for him on the premises of its Day Hab facility.

Day Hab consumers went through their morning routines thinking it would be just another day, with Day Hab-attending IRA residents and locally-living consumers alike being picked up by their dutiful Direct Care Workers and brought to the Day Hab center.

The usual morning activities and work sessions went off without no sign of anything out of the ordinary. However, as soon as consumers entered the Day Hab's dining hall at

the start of the afternoon, all bets were off.


The large multipurpose space had been transformed. Tables were covered in white. Walls were festooned with laudatory traditional passages of Psalms. Food and drink was abundant. And at the head of the tables, a table upon a raised platform, bedecked with a *shtetel mezonos*, a bit of cake, awaited the "guest of honor."

The middle-aged consumer, an affable teddy bear of a man, had not been left to sulk in solitude as his birthday arrived. With precision scheduling, all the consumers were brought to the facility before his arrival, allowing Hamaspik to completely surprise him upon his entry.

When the consumer was privately transported to the center, the ruse was fully set and the consumers huddled



King for a day: "His Majesty" (seated, center) triumphantly pumps fists



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dled around the tables quivering in anticipation. The door opened, the consumer entered—and several dozen consumers and staff burst out: "Happy birthday!"

Upon realizing what was happening, the consumer's face broke into a mile-wide smile that came from some inscrutable place within. And the festivities began.

A seven-piece orchestra struck up a lively tune as the consumer stood in the doorway, taking it all in. He then slowly made his way across the room, cries of "mazel tov!" coming from all sides, and took his place at a head table set for royalty.

An enormous birthday cake decorated with a personal message was brought forth. The consumer exulted in his president-for-a-day position, cheerily presiding over the distribution of the dietetic chocolate slices and their accompanying Yiddish best wishes, respectively conveyed by round plates and a round of handshakes.

Around the room, numerous guest staff from Hamaspik of Rockland County stood by, soaking up the scene while the exuberant music continued and consumers danced in small clusters. Day Hab staffers began clearing away the tables, and in moments, the room

became a dance hall.

With the band pounding away, the consumer stepped off his podium and waded into the crowd, selecting a succession of individual consumers and staff to join him in the customary back-and-forth line dance, a hallmark of the great Chasidic houses of old-time Europe.

Accenting the moment per tradition, the consumers on hand formed great dancing circles around the consumer and his friends, singing and clapping.

For over an hour, the band played melody after popular melody, and the consumer was in his element.

The party eventually wound down and the consumers were led out in ones and twos to the parking lot, where huge transport vans awaited to ferry them back to their various homes. The consumer, for his part, was personally chauffeured by Hamaspik of Rockland County Director of Residential Services Shaya Werberger to his humble home.

It was just another day at Hamaspik, where staffers give consumers their all—even if that means giving a consumer a birthday party fit for a king. ■



Receiving line: The traditional dance communicates friendship, bonding and love

# Heart Where The Home Is

*The Gazette gets a feel for the feelings behind the brand-new 38th St. Shvesterheim*

"Home is where the heart is," goes the old saying. It follows, then, that where there's a heart, there's a home—in this case, a Hamaspiik IRA group home.

Hamaspiik's newest IRA officially opened its doors this past January 10, 2010. Most of the consumers moved in within a week, making themselves at home in bedrooms meticulously planned down to color-coordinated linens and painstakingly-picked wall paints. The remaining consumers will be moving in shortly, according to Home Manager Yom Tov Malik.

A visit to the brand-new home, nestled snugly between adjacent brownstones at 1115 38th St. on the fringe of the Brooklyn neighborhood of Borough Park, brought the *Gazette* up close and personal with staff and consumers alike. The two-hour stay lent the *Gazette* first-hand familiarity with the site's interior design—and with staff's innermost designs for its fiercely beloved consumers.

## Getting in on the ground floor

Approaching from the outside, little identifies the 38th St. Shvesterheim as such save the Hamaspiik of Kings County van parked across and up the street. Not even the zigzagging wheelchair ramp leading to the front door is any particular indicator that a number of young women with special needs, and a home custom-built for them, can be found here.

Two workmen safely lug oversized pieces of leftover construction materials out the front door from the unfinished basement. Were the consumers home at this time—all are currently away at work or at their Hamaspiik Day Hab programs—state regulations, Hamaspiik standards and simple common sense would proscribe said materials' transport for possibility of accidents. But it is now shortly after 2:30 p.m. on the afternoon of Monday, February 1, 2010, and the freshly commissioned facility is devoid of Direct Care Workers and their charges.

The youthful, multi-careered Yom Tov Malik greets this writer when he appears in his office; a certain informality defines Hamaspiik's corporate culture. "You're here?" We had spoken by telephone earlier. The *Gazette* had been expected. He smiles readily. "So let me show you around."

Moments earlier, this writer had stood in the IRA's front living room, having opted for the left entryway leading from the lobby just inside the front door. (The right entryway gives way to a soaring staircase that, it is later learned, leads to the third floor.) This cozy space features a huge ceiling-mounted video entertainment center, which at the



**A place of her own:** A consumer's custom-decorated bedroom

moment had been playing a local girls' school play, a huge easy chair placed at a picturesque angle under bay windows, and two irresistibly mushy couches meeting in the opposite corner. A stand-mounted keyboard stands under an oil painting along one wall; consumers are later heard playfully hammering its ivories. Like a maître d', Mr. Malik led me to this chamber to begin our tour.

A disarmingly breezy, extra-wide hallway runs from the front door to the very rear of the building, where a corresponding door opens to a studiously manicured back lawn edged with young saplings. Looking down the corridor from the living room, one sees a long line of doors; Mr. Malik identified and opened most.

On the left side, at the rough lengthwise midpoint of the floor, a door opened to Mr. Malik's office, a clinical study in technology-driven organization. Beyond that, the hallway evaporated into an arena-sized wraparound kitchen/dining room that would make any wannabe chef—or at least 38th's professional cook—feel right at home with its stand-alone freezer, two ranges and sinks and veritable miles of cabinets and marble countertop. Bringing up the rear was an ample dinette outfitted with an oversized dining-room table. The backyard beckoned.

Out in the custom-landscaped recreational rear space, a recently poured concrete patio gave way to a tree-trimmed, close-cropped and vibrant square shock of grass. Stately faux wood walls to the left and rear guarded the yard against intruding bodies and eyes and, perhaps, outgoing projectiles of the sporting sort. While the winter weather bars any extensive use of the outdoor enclosure, Mr. Malik has prodigious plans for the private plot

come spring and summer. With that, we head back in.

## The next level, and the next

On the second of three floors, the *Gazette* discovers a cluster of bedrooms, each delightfully decorated to microscopic detail and boasting but one bed, being the private expressions of consumer individuality that they are. Every room also has a tidy closet.

One room is heavily flavored in purple, from bedspreads and throw pillows to blinds and wall treatment. The consumer who resides here, the *Gazette* later learns, relishes the purple color of her February birthstone. Another bedroom is likewise accented with cheery yellow.

Besides a puffy-quilt-covered bed and silky white dresser in each room, each also boasts a bedside night table festooned with personal knickknacks like family portraits, alarm clocks and stuffed animals. Most rooms also have stereos atop the dressers, as most consumers love music.

Being new, the rooms don't yet look lived in; with the combination of diligent housekeeping and gentle good-habits enforcement, each room looks almost like something out of a home furnishings catalog. The *Gazette* takes note of the abounding photographic opportunities—and the storybook-like, magical aura. "It's the least we can give them," replies Mr. Malik, remembering how one consumer arrived from a broken, neglectful home with little more than the clothes on her back. "Our staff bought her everything," he said.

We complete our rounds of the bedrooms, all of whose doors bear hand-decorated name placards whose vibrant scrawlings almost shout at the picture-perfect cleanli-

ness all around.

Along the hallway, one door revealed a closet amply stocked with personal care items. Stacks of wrapped soap bars, shampoo bottles and new toothbrushes stood soldier-like at attention. Another door opened onto a laundry room where a uniformed cleaning-crew member was operating one of the four washers and dryers.

To get to the third floor, one must return to the lobby and take the staircase to the right as mentioned. The hike up the looming steps is manageable, and at the top, we find ourselves in a dining/recreation room.

This area is filled with a large, chair-ringed table with a smaller but full-featured kitchen in the background. But before the dining room, occupying the front half of the floor, several additional bedrooms may be found, these for the IRA's lower-function consumers. In Shvesterheim style, each room is also individually outfitted per each consumer's tastes.

Behind the kitchen is a door that leads to a large fenced-in porch. Much of the surrounding neighbor-

hood, classic working-class Italian and Polish "Brooklynese," is visible from a bird's-eye view here. Right now, the chilly cold doesn't allow the rooftop porch much use—but with the arrival of warmer days, the space is sure to be a beehive of outdoor activity. "In the summer, we'll be doing barbeques up here," says Mr. Malik.

## Making it home

Inside once again, Mr. Malik elaborates on the home's number of duly state-screened husband-and-wife teams who spend parts of the weekend with the young women at 38th Street, each maximizing the home experience come the traditional Friday-night and Saturday-afternoon Shabbos meals.

Some consumers, Mr. Malik notes, sense the absence of the nuclear family home structure, especially as it is epitomized by the archetypal Shabbos meal experience: attentive father, doting mother, and precocious siblings all bonding, laughing and sharing around a food-bedecked table replete with song and spirit. That's why, come each weekend, Hamaspiik supplies the consumers here with the next best thing: genuinely loving parental figures.

Though the Home Manager concedes that these couples' duties are not unlike those of camp counselors, their visits' missions are simple: "They just need to bring *ruach* [spirit—ed.]—a spirit that only a father and mother, if only figurative ones, can bring. For the consumers, introducing father and mother figures quite literally to the table makes all the difference.

"The meals are very warm," he adds, not referring to the food's temperature.

## A team building

Like all other Hamaspiik group homes, the 38th St. Shvesterheim was born several years ago of that special synthesis of community need and state generosity. And like every other of the state's hundreds of group homes, Hamaspiik and other-



**Taking pulse:** Fielding a call from his office, Mr. Malik now ensures a different heartbeat



**A place to play:** No home is complete without a backyard

wise, it was not an overnight development.

Fastidious planning, mostly state-required, resulted in oodles of necessary paperwork. Construction and, later, interior design, was equally rigorous. Walking consumers' guardians through the lengthy application, qualification and transition processes were lovingly laborious duties for Hamaspik's hardworking staffers.

In October of 2009, a versatile community educator and activist named Yom Tov Malik was tapped as Home Manager (see *Gazette* Issue #65) and over the ensuing months, Assistant Home Manager Mrs. Landau, a team of Direct Care Workers and ancillary staff was brought on board.

"Mission accomplished," Hamaspik of Kings County's Executive Director Joel Freund later tells the *Gazette*. "It's the end of development, but the beginning of a whole new thing. We are finally where we are."

#### **Caring 'round the clock**

The 38th St. Shvesterheim's

consumers typically begin their day as early as 7:00 a.m. With several being high-function enough for steady employment, a number attending Board of Education-funded schools and yet others functional enough to improve numerous life skills at state-funded Day Habilitation programs, these consumers must rise relatively early to take life head-on.

That's why Direct Care Workers will arrive some mornings at 7:00 to help consumers through their morning routines like wake-up, personal hygiene and breakfast. (Other mornings are handled by the night-shift staff, which is wrapping up its nightly stint at that time.)

Between eight o'clock and 9:30 a.m., the consumers depart for work, school or Hamaspik's Day Hab facility in Williamsburg. They return around 2:45 p.m.

Upon their return, the team of Direct Care Workers will be on hand to warmly greet them, helping them transition from work or Day Hab to home as surely would any mother greeting her kids upon afternoon return from school. And like said children, the consumers here are free

to relax and recreate after enjoying cookies and milk or some other nutritious snack.

Dinner is served at about 5:00 p.m., with the previously mentioned recreational program getting underway at about 6:00 p.m. "Painting, dancing, aerobics," cites one Direct Care Worker as examples of activities, explaining that this recreational period does not consist of structured therapy coordinated with Hamaspik's professional staff. "We just let them have a good time."

By 7:00 p.m., the Direct Care Workers are shepherding their charges to their nightly showers or baths followed by bedtime routines. At 8:00 p.m. the DCW team sits down to complete their daily consumer-tracking paperwork—and by 8:30 p.m., usually with the simultaneous arrival of the overnight staffers, "we're out of here," quips the Direct Care Worker.

#### **The right stuff**

Employees come to Hamaspik by different routes: ads, word of mouth, referrals. But one red thread runs through the lives of virtually

all: an innate, almost innocent natural comfort around individuals with special needs, whether due to special-needs family member, previous employment, quality of character—or any combination of the above.

Direct Care Worker Mrs. Horowitz, who as a teenager had enjoyed several summers working with special-needs kids, joined the Hamaspik family by responding to an ad in the local paper. She was hired by Mr. Malik and Mrs. Landau in November after an interview at Hamaspik of Kings County's Borough Park office. Her husband, she notes, is also a Hamaspik Direct Care Worker, employed since November at the 61st St. Briderheim after simply knocking on the door. "Hashem [G-d—ed.] gave it to me," she states in simple faith. "If you're meant for this job, it will come to you."

Another of the Shvesterheim's Direct Care Workers, on hand as the *Gazette* interviewed staff at the home's first-floor dinette table, volunteered that she too had transitioned to Hamaspik from a background of At-Home Residential Habilitation. She ended up at Hamaspik after being given the phone number of a secretary at Hamaspik of Kings County. "It takes the same patience," she said of working with youths with special needs in their private homes. "But you feel at home here."

Mr. Malik was a licensed paramedic, elementary-school principal and summer-camp head counselor in his previous careers before coming to Hamaspik. But the resourceful Home Manager, rather than abandon his past experiences, merely brought them with him.

As a head counselor and, later, as a principal, Mr. Malik found that many disciplinary problems could be solved by giving kids managerial responsibilities. Instead of spoon-feeding them their schedules and their curricula, Malik found that empowering them with decision-making and leadership actually helped them grow more, not less—all the while having fun.

"I need satisfaction with what I'm doing, and with these kids, I can make a difference in their lives," says Mr. Malik of his decision to take up the Home Manager mantle—especially with what he calls "educational management," the abovementioned approach wherein young charges are given a goal and a wide berth in which to fulfill it. "Kids shouldn't feel that pain is gain."

Mrs. Landau graduated from three years of individual At-Home Res Hab work for Hamaspik of Kings County consumers to become 38th's Assistant Home Manager. Like other Hamaspik homes, consumer Res Hab goals are worked on here every day, she points out. "Our main goal to create independent individuals," she says, tangentially mentioning how hard all her Direct Care Workers work. "As soon as we accomplish one goal we go up to the next one."

Working on personal life goals

carefully chosen by a team comprised of parents, management and Direct Care Workers may technically be the Shvesterheim's primary mission. Then there are the early-morning meetings, cleaning crews, individual consumer diets and miscellaneous problems that crop up in the daily operation of a group home.

But far more important than all those, Mrs. Landau notes, is "to be a mother for the girls: to help guide them through any difficulty they have. Some go through an emotional rollercoaster through their day, and we're here for them with a smile."

#### **Heart where the home is**

It's about 3:15 p.m. now. The afternoon is just getting underway at the 38th St. Shvesterheim. Sounds of glee can be heard from the front half of the building as the consumers flow in, greeted by honest, earnest hugs and kisses by their Direct Care Workers. They're home in more ways than one, and they know it.

Some make their way to the first-floor living room, where they collapse into the comfortable couches and engage in bubbly chatter with their caregivers. One "Shvesterheimer," a low-function third-floor resident, is led soothingly up the stairs by her one-on-one Direct Care Worker, a gentle, middle-aged woman who has been in her life for the past five years, well before she came to Hamaspik. The *Gazette* is later informed that this particular caregiver can practically read her charge's mind.

A third consumer, a high-function, highly personable young lady with a day job in downtown Brooklyn, meanders into the kitchen where she rummages through the fridge, emerging with cold drink in hand. "I like living here... I especially like the staff," she says, pulling up a chair to charmingly join the conversation. She then lists several employees by name, telling the *Gazette* how nice each is, and then amusingly tries to guess this writer's age. We discover that our birthdays are but two days apart.

Meanwhile, up on the third floor, the aforementioned consumer has arrived at the main room's table. Her Direct Care Worker immediately produces paper and markers, and the young woman responds "red" when asked what color has just been placed in her hand. "Good!" the Direct Care Worker responds, the warmest of smiles wreathing her face. The consumer grins and claps, thrilling to the genuine encouragement. Mr. Malik, standing by to observe, notes that the consumer began verbally identifying colors just recently.

It's just another day in that relaxed spiritual, emotional and physical space where one feels totally free to let down the guard, unchain inhibitions and open up. It's where a team of caring souls have invested their hearts.

It's what a group of Hamaspik consumers call home. ■

## **Stipend Pay Increase for Family Care Providers Secured**

### **Direct Care Staff Recruitment Also Successfully Included in 2010-2011 Budget Recommendations**

Few things are as difficult as caring for those you love and paying your bills—especially when there's barely enough money to do both, or not even that much.

That's why Hamaspik Family Care providers were thrilled to learn that their monthly stipends will be slightly but significantly increased, thanks to months of quiet but vigorous efforts by OMRDD Commissioner Diana Jones Ritter and the Providers Council.

At the same time, the OMRDD announced that trend factors for

direct care professionals receiving OMRDD-provided benefits were included in the state's 2010-2011 Budget Recommendations after determined advocacy efforts by OMRDD's leadership.

"OMRDD has been working for several years to improve recruitment and retention of direct care staff. The 2010-2011 Budget Recommendations for OMRDD support enhancement of direct support professional recruitment and retention efforts," wrote OMRDD Regulatory Affairs Unit Director Barbara

Brundage in a February 8, 2010 memo to voluntary agencies and others. "The voices of advocacy for the trend factors were loudest and most steadfast in expressing the need to enhance the salaries and/or benefits of direct support professionals."

On paper, these two improvements may only seem like small numbers. But translated to the reality of love and hard work that is the world of the Hamaspik Family Care provider and Direct Care Worker, these two developments make all the difference in the world. ■



# The Fruits of Diligence

*Hamaspik of Rockland County  
Day Hab Group Visits Kedem Winery*

Individuals with special needs may be compared to fine wine: with aging, they can reach optimal condition.

But regardless of how far each

Hamaspik consumer has come and how far each needs to go, the theme of wine was the spirit of the day as a group of girls from the Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Hab program

paid a "spirited" visit to the Kedem Winery.

The visit to the cavernous, 180,000-square-foot production and bottling facility in Bayonne, New Jersey was part of the girls' ongoing Day Hab curricular theme of food and food products.

For the past three months, with diligent groundwork laid by Direct Care Worker Yehudis Allison, this group of consumers has been receiving ongoing habilitation on the world of food around them. In the process, they are becoming familiar with the various categories of foods, where they come from and how they are produced—an effort that dovetails with the traditional Jewish categorizations of foodstuffs into fruits, vegetables, baked goods, breads and liquids.

Thus far, the programming effort has covered bread and other grain-based products, dairy products such

as milk and cheese, and the juices of such common fruits as apples, oranges and lemons. Consumers also learned about the origin of eggs, chickens and all.

Staffers have been instructed to "Go slow—let them know it," explains Mrs. Kresch, a Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Hab Coordinator, explaining that the long-term goal was internalization, not coverage, of material.

Most recently, the subject matter at hand has been grapes: how they grow, what they look (and taste) like, and the world of fine beverages that flow from the fruits of the vine. (Of course, sampling is limited to

grape juice only.)

That's why a group of Hamaspik consumers found themselves in a Hamaspik transport van this past January 7, 2010 heading to the fascinating wine-making factory in the Garden State for an exciting activity.

The visit was arranged through the gracious good offices of a Kedem manager who is also the father of a devoted Hamaspik employee. A few phone calls were made, and despite the factory currently being in the midst of peak production season, a special tour just for Hamaspik was scheduled.

"Hamaspik in general has been here a few times," explained Kedem's Mr. Eli Herzog in a phone conversation with the *Gazette*. "We try to have a good relationship with everybody."

The group of wide-eyed visitors was walked through the high-ceilinged premises, awed by the enormous temperature-controlled storage vats and the monstrous tanker trucks that fill them, as well as the highly mechanized bottling lines that fill hundreds of bottles an hour.

The guide explained to his guests just how wine is made, and accompanying staff returned to Hamaspik with complimentary bottles of fine Kedem wine for grateful parents—an appropriate gift, and perhaps a reminder that, like a bottle of good cabernet sauvignon, Hamaspik consumers cannot be judged by their labels. ■



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**Bottled-up feelings:** Consumers affixed their signatures to an aptly-themed message of thanks to Kedem (above); a Kedem production line (below)

## Crib-Safety Law Overhaul

*Continued from Page 1*

families."

Wolfe learned several months ago of a Long Island family who lost a child to a drop-side crib accident; the hardware failed and the tot suffocated between the crib's railing and mattress. "Once I started looking into it, I was amazed that there has been recall after recall after recall involving millions of cribs," the legislator tells the *Gazette*. "As a matter of fact, on the day we voted on the law, 635,000 cribs were recalled."

The intent of the law, which has not yet been signed by Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef, consists of two "prongs," as Wolfe puts it: firstly, removing the potentially hazardous

crib design from the "stream of commerce" by prohibiting its sale and secondly, educating the public of its danger.

The elected official also notes that while no "top-down" regulations exist at the federal or state level governing drop-side crib safety at the local level, an industry shift away from drop-side cribs is in the air, as evidenced by last month's decision by the ASTM, a national standards group, to no longer deem drop-side cribs compliant.

The ban, which could take effect as early as April of 2010 (depending on whether it is signed by the County Executive), will impose a \$500 fine on any Rockland County retailer selling drop-side cribs and \$1,000 on any following sales.

Once ratified, the Rockland

County Dept. of Consumer Protection would be responsible for enforcement. "We'll be relying on the public to notify the Department of Consumer Protection if they suspect any violation of the law," said Wolfe. But, "I don't think an army of inspectors will be knocking on doors," he added.

In related news, the day before Tenenbaum's Congressional testimony, the Graco manufacturing company issued yet another recall for close to one million of its popular strollers due to a hinge problem that could possibly result in severed children's fingers.

Graco's recall came in the wake of a previous recall by Maclaren, the British stroller maker, of over one million of its own products due to similar finger-catching concerns



**Disarmingly dangerous:** Drop-side cribs like this one are to become history, at least in Rockland County

about a particular stroller's hinges. *stroller recalls, Gazette readers may For information on Graco call 1-800-345-4109.* ■



# Paterson Legislative Breakfast



An enthusiastic crowd responds to Paterson's support

*Continued from Page 1*

which had been appropriately redecorated per the high-caliber visit. Two trays of custom-made, individually-wrapped chocolates, each imprinted with a Hamaspik logo and greeting, were on hand for guests to enjoy. The consumers also branched specially-printed flags with which to greet the governor.

While Gov. Paterson's aides and security paced the lobby outside the hall as they awaited the arrival of their boss, whose vehicular convoy was delayed by the snowstorm, emcee Brenda Katina took the podium at a few minutes past nine to officially start the event.

## Thanks and gratitude

After opening remarks, Mrs. Katina welcomed State Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee (D-95th Dist.), joking that the public servant speaks 12 languages. Assemblywoman Jaffee was then called upon to speak.

In her brief comments, Jaffee talked about the contributions of Hamaspik of Rockland County's social-services system, emphasizing Hamaspik's Early Intervention programs. "As you all know, research has proven that early intervention is extremely critical to a child's developmental success—the earlier the intervention, the better chance the child has to maximize his or her

potential," said the public servant.

Jaffee then mentioned "one young man," a Hamaspik group resident, whose "passion for politics" drives him to call her office frequently, saying that Hamaspik allows him and others like him to be "vital members of our Rockland community."

Drawing upon her own past experience as a special education teacher, Jaffee then stressed the importance of the right staff. "Your compassionate and highly professional staff delivers the highest quality services. I know how hard you work, as do the families and the consumers we serve," she declared. "We're all grateful that you recognize the special strengths of every single person you care for. Ultimately, Hamaspik is about families... I applaud you for your determination that your child gets the best possible services... Your programs enrich our entire community."

Katina then introduced retiring OMRDD Associate Commissioner Kathleen Broderick.

By way of introduction, the emcee shared the story of an elderly Roman citizen carrying a soldier's pack for the required one mile—and then some. When the soldier asked why he persisted, the man explained that while the first mile was duty, the second was service.

"Kathy has always gone the extra mile," said Katina. Ms. Broderick then took the podium.

"I think we all carry things an extra mile because we get so involved in what we do and it has become our lives," Broderick began, segueing into a soliloquy on gratitude. Never forget to say thank you to at least one person each day, especially consumers, she advised, noting that consumers and their families are likewise grateful. "They also thank you because you have been a difference in their lives... without you, their children would have no life."

"The answer to so many families is Hamaspik," continued Broderick. "You are doing such a tremendous job for the people that you serve. I encourage you to never forget why it is we are here... You are a success because... of what you have formed: You have formed a community that makes a difference."

In the midst of her next point, however, sustained applause suddenly erupted with the entry of Governor David A. Paterson, who had just worked a receiving line of consumers outside the hall.

## Hail from the chief

After instructing the standing crowd to take its seats, Mr. Wertheimer reiterated a formal opening: "Ladies and Gentlemen: Welcome to the Hamaspik Inaugural Legislative Breakfast; welcome, Honorable David A. Paterson, Governor of New York State."

In his concise, compelling comments from the podium, the Governor spoke from the heart. (See sidebar for transcript.)

Paterson first thanked Hamaspik founder and Executive Director for "23 sound years of service," then thanked his "colleagues in government," including Congressman John Hall, Senator Tom Morahan and Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee, though Hall and Morahan could not attend. "To all of you who have been of assistance to this great



At the podium after formal introduction

organization, I want to thank you on behalf of the people of the state of New York." Vigorous applause broke out, with the crowd of Hamaspik employees and their supportive public servants internalizing the high praise from no less than a governor.

The governor next took note of Hamaspik's growth from a single ICF in 1987 to a network spanning 12 New York State counties. "That is incredible development in a short period of time," he asserted, also pointing out that New Yorkers of all backgrounds now benefit from Hamaspik's care.

Paterson commented that Hamaspik employs thousands. "What better job would there be than

the service and care of others?" he rhetorically asked.

"We had a long, big word we used to talk about: *deinstitutionalization*," continued the Governor, recalling that his workforce career began over 25 years ago working with mentally disabled defendants at the Manhattan DA's office. "The problem with deinstitutionalization is that we effected it so quickly that there weren't the kind of service providers that were strong enough to care for them. And that's what gave Mr. Wertheimer the idea of creating Hamaspik... What you did was give people who are disabled greater opportunities than they ever would

*Continued on Page E10*



Left: Mr. Wertheimer thanks Gov. Paterson again upon departure; right: dignitaries and staff listen intently; above: a consumer at the receiving line

# Paterson Legislative Breakfast

Continued from Page 9

have had before to be part of our society."

Affirming his personal support for Hamaspiik's work as both a disabled person and New York's first legally blind governor, Paterson railed against the "staggering" unemployment rate in America's disabled community, averaging to 37 out of every 100 disabled individuals,

and thanked Hamaspiik deeply for its work. The Governor elicited a fierce round of applause upon declaring his desire to bring "the kind of integrated care that Hamaspiik has brought to the Hudson Valley and New York City and Long Island and Westchester... all over the state. I can't thank you enough."

"Hamaspiik," the Governor continued, may mean "provider." "But it isn't just a word. It's your work that informs people who are the recipients of your care, the family members, or those even at the administrative level of the state who observe the tremendous way you give of yourselves for others," he stated.

Continuing his supportive, almost folksy rhetoric, Paterson said, "There is a new sheriff in town" while playfully putting fist to hip, noting that his administration would be working with state agencies "so we can expand your facilities and expand your wonderful service to those who need it all over the state."

The state's chief executive then outlined his affinity for Hamaspiik's line of work, connecting on a powerful personal level with the Hamaspiik crowd.

"There were a few Hamaspiiks before Hamaspiik. There were a few organizations that cared for those who had ability but not opportunity, whom society did not believe in, the stones that that builder refused. I tell you that because I am one of them," he shared. "If I hadn't got the opportunity to be mainstreamed into public education but at the same time have organizations that could help me with the special needs that I have, I wouldn't be standing here as Governor—I don't know if I would even be employed. I'm lucky. I am one of the truly blessed people."

Wrapping up his poignant remarks, Paterson concluded that he would be "remiss" if he didn't purvey executive backing to Hamaspiik and like agencies for inspiring special-need individuals to life's highest aspirations. "Maybe they can go out and help save the world," the Governor pointed out.

A robust round of cheers sub-



Cantor Weiss renders respect unto the Republic



Tables are set

sided as Emcee Katina introduced her own Family Care child, 14-year-old Trani, who recited a special message of thanks for Paterson, who stood by looking on, visibly moved. Katina then presented the governor with a gift from Hamaspiik: an elegant music box that plays "What a Wonderful World."

With the band playing the appropriate Frank Sinatra classic "New York, New York," the crowd clapped once again as the Governor made his way to the exit.

"Gov. Paterson's visit is sure to go a long way to demonstrate equality and integration for people with disabilities," Mr. Wertheimer later told the Gazette. "We were all inspired by his words, which he delivered with compassion and grit."

## Remarks by the Hon. David A. Paterson, Governor of New York State, at the Hamaspiik Inaugural Legislative Breakfast

January 28, 2010

"...this Inaugural Legislative Breakfast for Hamaspiik, and for 23 sound years of service, I want to thank its founder, Meyer Wertheimer." [Applause]

"And to my colleagues in government—not all of them could join us this morning—but: Congressman John Hall, Senator Tom Morahan, Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee, to all of you who have been of assistance to this great organization, I want to thank you on behalf of the people of the State of New York." [Applause]

"I have to apologize. I was asked by the administration to represent the President's view on the State of the Union Address on the television show *The View* this morning, and the weather is so inclement that it took much longer than it should have to get here, even when you're in a police car with sirens. [Laughter] I always thought you just turn on the siren [and] everybody gets out of your way—well, they can't in the snow. And so, I have to leave momentarily to be on time to do that program."

"But I do want to point out that Hamaspiik started in 1987 as a single Intermediate Care Facility in Monroe, New York. And it's grown since then to a multi-service, multi-facility network that spans 12 counties here in the state of New York. That is incredible development in a short period of time." [Applause]

"[Hamaspiik] has expanded its care, personal care, to traumatic brain injury, to servicing some who have traumatic brain injury; received it overseas fighting for our country and also, for those who are in need of different types of integrated care."

"And though this care was initially designed for people of the Jewish faith, it is now benefiting people of all nationalities, of all religions and of all races right here in this state." [Applause]

"Boy, you know, if the President got this kind of reception, I wouldn't even have to go talk for him!" [Laughter] "Thank you so much for that."

"But in addition, you have provided the opportunity of employment to thousands of people, giving them the opportunity to make a living wage and have a valuable job. And what a better job would there be than in the service and the care of others?"

"Now, I began my career in the District Attorney's office working on cases that involved the mental disease or disability of defendants. So I became very familiar with mental-health issues before I was elected to government in 1985."

"In the early 80s we had a long, big word we used to talk about: deinstitutionalization. The problem with deinstitutionalization is that we effected it so quickly that there weren't the kind of service providers that were strong enough to care for 'em. And that's what gave Mr. Wertheimer the idea of creating Hamaspiik. And that's why you've filled a void that unfortunately those formulators of policy in the state ignored at that particular time. Well, what you did was give people who are disabled greater opportunities than they ever would have had before to be part of our society."

"We have a staggering unemployment rate in the disabled community. Seventy-one percent of legally or totally blind people in this country don't have a job. Nine out of every ten deaf people in this country are unemployed. And less than 50% of ambulatory disabled people are able to go to work every day. So there's a 37% unemployment rate in the disabled community."

"And the problem is that where care has been given, it has been in the types of facilities that I want to get rid of, of the OMRDD-operated facilities, and replace them with the kind of integrated care that Hamaspiik has brought to the Hudson valley and New York City and Long Island and Westchester, and [I] would like to bring it all over the state." [Applause]

"I can't thank you enough."

"Hamaspiik is derived from a word that really means 'provider.' But it isn't just a word. It's your work that informs people who are the recipients of your care, the family members or even those at the administrative level of the state who observe the tremendous way that you give of yourselves for others."

"We know that you are right now trying to open up another Article 16 and you were denied in the past. But that might not happen because there is a new sheriff in town. And now, we're going to take a good look at the seeming disagreement between the Hudson Valley disabled care units and the Brooklyn disabled care units and see if we can't get them on the same page so we can expand your facilities and expand your wonderful service to those who need it all over the state." [Applause]

"There were a few Hamaspiiks before Hamaspiik. There were a few organizations that cared for those who had ability but not opportunity, who society didn't believe in—the stones that the builder refused. I tell you that because I am one of them. If I hadn't got the opportunity to be mainstreamed into public education but at the same time, have organizations that could help me with the special needs that I have, I wouldn't be standing here as governor. I don't even know if I would be employed."

"I am lucky. I am one of the truly blessed people. And so I have all these problems with the budget and the Legislature. They have no idea. I'm so glad to be here. They can yell at me and scream at me all they want, but I'm still glad to be here." [Applause]

"I would be remiss, I would be guilt-ridden and I would have it haunting my conscience if I don't, in this decision-making capacity, provide strong leadership at the executive levels to providers such as yourselves who take individuals who don't believe in themselves and give them the kind of care and the kind of inspiration that maybe they can go out and live productive lives, maybe they can go out and help save the world, maybe they can go out and aspire to the highest leadership positions in this state. And when they're able to, then we'll really know that as a society, we have removed all the obstacles."

"But you are in the forefront of that movement. Your care is in the apex of that service and I came here on behalf of the people of the state of New York to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the wonderful service that you provide to the next generation of people like me who might amaze you if they're only given a chance. Thank you very much!" [Applause]



Legislators Schoenberger, Susskind and Wolfe with Wertheimer

We also received feedback from parents of consumers about the Governor's speech and they loved every word. The speech was amazing in its breadth of the issues at hand, and the deep commitment to the wellbeing of severely challenged individuals."

### Public servants, public thanks

After a brief intermission that allowed the excitement to drop down a notch, Mr. Wertheimer took the podium to respectfully ask Ms. Broderick to resume her talk.

Taking the floor where she had been preempted by Gov. Paterson, Broderick elicited chuckles by saying, "I didn't become Associate Commissioner by not knowing when to *move out of the way*." After noting the "privilege" of meeting the governor and hearing his recognition of Hamaspiik, Broderick reiterated that behind all the paperwork and occasional frustration of special-needs work is the difference that said work makes in consumers' lives.

"Never forget that everything that you do matters," said Broderick. "Thank you for everything you do."

Mr. Wertheimer returned to the podium to individually acknowledge the numerous public servants present, coupled with words of appreciation for each.

Mentioned first were Rockland County Legislators Wolfe, Schoenberger and Soskin. "The Rockland County Legislature is in the forefront of creating legislation for the welfare of the community," Mr. Wertheimer noted. "Rockland County was the first [county in the country—ed.] to pass laws in regards to cell phones, consumer credit gift cards, and it goes on and on. We are proud to have them as our Legislators."

The Executive Director next acknowledged "a partner in county government," Rockland County Coordinator of Long Term Care Susan Lettre, as well as Rockland County Dept. of Social Services Commissioner Susan Sherwood, who, unlike Lettre, was unable to attend. "To the credit of Susan, Hamaspiik became the largest agency in the county providing consumer driven personal care aides," continued Mr. Wertheimer. "This program is... the least restrictive and least bureaucratic, and today, in our own county, we serve close to 200 individuals who remain in the community and did not have to be placed into nursing homes." Mr. Wertheimer also noted that Hamaspiik's recently-acquired LHCSA contract will only enhance, not circumvent, its existing CDPAP program. "Thank you, Susan, and thank you to our Commissioner," Mr. Wertheimer concluded.

"I want to welcome the East Ramapo Board of Education who works so tirelessly to get services to the special needs population: Aaron Wieder, Eli Solomon, Moshe Hopstein and Moshe Cohen," continued Mr. Wertheimer. "Thank you

so much for all the efforts. I know you have no easy task, and we will continue to bombard you and to bother you until things will be settled."

Likewise acknowledged with warm words of praise New Square Deputy Mayor Israel Spitzer, recently-elected Spring Valley Mayor Noramie Jasmine and Trustee Joseph Gross, retiring OMRDD Associate Commissioner Kathleen Broderick, incoming OMRDD Associate Commissioner Jill Gentile, Brooklyn DDSO Director Donna Limiti, Hudson Valley DDSO Director Mike Kirschmer and Deputy Director Jackie Spring, Brooklyn DDSO Deputy Director Sheila Gholson, Brooklyn DDSO Director of Community Services Janet Strauss and Rockland County Team Leader Vivian Street.

Comparing the numerous government officials present to family, Mr. Wertheimer went on to thank several more by name along with words of appreciation. These included Hudson Valley DDSO Director Jill Gentile and Deputy Director Jackie Spring, and Orange County Team Leader Eileen Wood.

"Yes, indeed: G-d bless America," concluded Mr. Wertheimer. "But G-d blessed New York State with these individuals being in public service." The crowd responded with heartfelt sustained applause.

Mr. Wertheimer's heartfelt thanks to the governor for his expressed desire to assist Hamaspiik were followed by a recital of "G-d Bless America" and the National Anthem by Cantor Bentzion Weiss.

### Working together

After the vocal renditions, Katina proudly introduced her daughter to the crowd, and then invited Associate Commissioner Gentile to share a few words.

"We're honored to be partnering with Hamaspiik on a day-to-day basis to develop services for your members and family members," said Gentile from the podium. "Over the years, the quality of your services is evident. The passion and commitment that is in this room is evident, and it's exciting to continue on this partnership. Our mission at OMRDD is to help individuals live richer lives, and truly, Hamaspiik does that, day in and day out," she concluded to applause.

Winding down the program, Katina quipped, "I'm debating whether to continue entertaining you until the food is gone... but by me, an event is not complete if Jackie Spring is there and I didn't say anything." Katina then thanked the long-time friend of Hamaspiik for her notable attentiveness towards the organization. "You're assisting us with such grace, doing everything to perfection," concluded Katina, smilingly adding while looking in Spring's direction, "Sorry—I had to say something."

Mrs. Katina then praised Mike Kirschmer for his involvement with

Hamaspiik, beginning with a day 15 years ago when one of the first residents of Hamaspiik's Dinev Inzerheim ICF in Monroe, then an infant, was placed in the facility. Kirschmer had paid a personal visit to the child at the time—and today, Katina noted, he is a strapping lad of 15. "And we're looking forward to many, many more," she ended.

Praising Donna Limiti for doing her job "and then some," Katina graciously called upon the Brooklyn DDSO Director to share a few words.

"To tell you the truth, I'm really happy that I had the opportunity to publicly tell people how much I really, really like this agency," said Limiti. "I'm not saying I have any favorite agencies—I'm not saying that—but Hamaspiik might be right up there. I've had wonderful experiences from the very first person that I met... and what has always struck me is what others have said: Passion about the service that's delivered is just exceptional—and everybody just seems so young! I welcome to continue this relationship."

Limiti also had a few kind words for Hamaspiik of Kings County Executive Director Joel Freund. "And you know, Joel, I'm going to keep pressing you and asking you to do favors for us, and you always come through."

"I have to also say that Hamaspiik is one agency that has time and time again come to the plate to serve people who are incredibly difficult to serve—and Joel has never said 'No' flat-out. He's always said, 'Let me see what I can do.' If he can't do it, he'll be honest—but in most cases, Joel, you've come through, and I just want you to know, we really do appreciate it. So thank you." The crowd vigorously applauded.

New Square Deputy Mayor Israel Spitzer rose to share a few words of support for Hamaspiik and Mr. Wertheimer, recalling how the Executive Director went well out of his way, and on a Jewish fast day to boot, to help Spitzer's community assist a child with special needs. "I wish him the great success," Spitzer simply stated.



Wertheimer with Hudson Valley DDSO Director Kirschmer

"Thank you so much to all of you for enhancing this event, this historical event," said Katina in officially capping the program. "Thank you for giving us this opportunity to share."

The crowd then slowly dispersed, socializing around the hall's food-laden tables and spilling into Hamaspiik's hallway, lobby and offices.

### Looking forward

As staff and public servants mingled, the *Gazette* made its rounds of the crowd. *Hamaspiik Gazette* Yiddish Editor Isaac Schnitzler was overheard personally thanking Mike Kirschmer, both as an employee and a special-needs parent, for the OMRDD-driven Hamaspiik services received by the Schnitzlers' two-

year-old Down Syndrome daughter Malka Brucha.

In the main hallway, the *Gazette* caught up with the Brooklyn DDSO's Donna Limiti and Sheila Gholson, inquiring about the OMRDD's internal reaction to the budget-cutting winds currently blowing from Albany. "It's forced us to think outside the box, to brainstorm and think creatively," said Gholson. Fiscal conservatism? "That's exactly right," Gholson replied.

Still, Limiti added, the Brooklyn DDSO was able to recently release new RFS proposals—demonstrating that, with a little tweaking and ingenuity, individuals with special needs can always be helped.

And on that, Governor Paterson, the OMRDD and Hamaspiik can surely agree. ■



New Square Deputy Mayor Spitzer thanks Mr. Wertheimer



Kirschmer, Legislators cheer for the Governor



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



## Adult Emphysema Linked to Early-Life Exposure to Tobacco Smoke

A new study by Columbia University shows that children exposed to tobacco smoke face early emphysema in adulthood—a finding that suggests early-life exposures to tobacco smoke (ETS) causes permanent damage to children's lungs. The study used computed tomography (CT) scans to examine lung changes in 1,781 healthy non-smoking adults from six communities in the United States. About half of the participants had at least one regular smoker in their household during childhood.

An analysis of the scans showed that, compared to participants who did not live with regular smokers during childhood, those with early-life ETS had more emphysema-like lung changes. The changes were worse for adults whose childhood households had two smokers. Emphysema is a long-term, progressive respiratory disease with no current cure that affects nearly 2 million Americans. It is mostly caused by cigarette smoking.

## Study: ESDM Intervention Benefits Autistic Toddlers

A new study has found that a novel intervention called the *Early Start Denver Model* (ESDM) is effective for improving IQ, language ability, and social interaction for very young autistic children—some as young as 12 months.

The intervention, tailored for toddlers as young as 12 months old, is delivered by trained therapists and parents who receive instruction and training in the child's natural environment.

A five-year University of Washington study of two groups of 18- to 30-month-old children with autism and no other health problems—one group regularly receiving ESDM therapy and the other receiving standard therapies—showed a 33-point IQ increase of the ESDM group after two years, compared to only 11.4 points for the other group. "Many of the children (in the ESDM group) had virtually caught up to the typical kids their age," said Dr. Geraldine Dawson, one of ESDM's developers.

"Parents and therapists both carried out the intervention toward individualized goals for each child, and worked collaboratively to improve how the children were responding socially, playing with toys, and communicating," said Milani Smith, who oversees the UW Autism Center's clinical programs. "Parents are taught strategies for capturing their children's attention and promoting communication. By using these strategies throughout the day, the children were offered many opportu-

nities to learn to interact with others."

Dawson says that with the American Academy of Pediatrics urging doctors to screen all 18- to 24-month-old children for autism, it is essential that an effective program is available for children in this age group to intervene immediately after diagnosis. "By starting as soon as the toddler is diagnosed, we hope to maximize the positive impact of the intervention," she said. "The study strongly affirms the positive outcomes of early intervention and the need for the earliest possible start."

## Personality Key to Medical-School Success

A recent study in *The Journal of Applied Psychology* posits that personality is just as predictive of future medical-career success as is the standard *Medical College Admission Test*, or MCAT, exam. The researchers tested each student as they started medical school for five different personality traits, finding that students' likelihood of becoming emotionally upset was a constant predictor of academic performance and even attrition, while being conscientious was a particularly important predictor of success throughout medical school. The study, conducted by three industrial and organizational psychologists from the United States and Europe, followed more than 600 medical students in Belgium for close to ten years.

## British Study Finds Heart-Disease BPA Link

In a shift of position, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently expressed concerns about possible health risks from *bisphenol-A*, or BPA, a widely used component of plastic bottles and food packaging that it declared safe in 2008. The agency said that it had "some concern about the potential effects of BPA on the brain, behavior and prostate gland of fetuses, infants and children," and would join other federal health agencies in studying the

chemical in both animals and humans.

Concerns about BPA are based on studies that have found harmful effects in animals, and on the recognition that the chemical seeps into food and baby formula, and that nearly everyone is exposed to it, starting in the womb.

BPA has been used since the 1960s to make hard plastic bottles, sippy cups for toddlers and the linings of food and beverage cans, including the cans used to hold infant formula and soda. Until recently, it was used in baby bottles, but major manufacturers are now making bottles without it. Plastic items containing BPA are generally marked with a 7 on the bottom for recycling purposes. It is also banned throughout Canada, the city of Chicago and Suffolk County, New York.

At the same time, researchers at England's University of Exeter published a large epidemiological study that reported a significant association between levels of BPA and cardiovascular disease diagnosis.

## Why to Drive Safely

The most recent full national car-accident data, for Year 2006, was released in January by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a division of the U.S. Dept. of Health.

The 2006 data showed that U.S. hospital emergency departments treated 3.5 million motor vehicle crash victims with injuries ranging from bruises and scrapes to life-threatening trauma.

About 85% of patients were treated and released, 321,000 were admitted or transferred to another acute care hospital for inpatient care, and about 8,000 patients died in the emergency room.

Additionally:

- About 55% of the patients had private health insurance
- 25% were uninsured
- 10% had Medicaid coverage
- 4% percent had Medicare coverage, and

• 7% percent had other types of coverage

Also, perhaps indicating increasing automobile safety:

- 44% of the injuries treated were sprains
- 35% were superficial injuries such as scrapes
- 15% were fractures
- 10% were open wounds
- 5% were head injuries, and
- 3% were internal injuries of the thorax, abdomen and pelvis.

## Parents Should Take Concussions Seriously

Children who suffer a concussion don't just have a minor head bump, but a brain injury that parents and teachers need to take more seriously, researchers warn.

Parents often believe that concussion injury is mild and doesn't involve damage to the brain, said lead researcher Dr. Carol DeMatteo, an associate clinical professor in the School of Rehabilitation Science at McMaster University, in Hamilton, Ontario.

However, "concussion really is a brain injury—there's no question about that," she said.

"The term 'concussion' is used frequently, but there are no real guidelines in using it with children," DeMatteo said. "This means that many different types of injury of different severity can be called a concussion. This leads to misconceptions by families and coaches and teachers and children themselves."

Instead of using the word "concussion," these injuries should be called mild brain injuries and that may help these children get the care they need, DeMatteo added. "We only have one brain, so let's help kids look after theirs."

Gillian Hotz, director of the Pediatric Neurotrauma Program at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, said parents are often relieved to hear that their child has "only" suffered a concussion.

But concussion is only a catch-all term for a spectrum of non-struct-

tural brain injury, Hotz said. "Most kids who have a concussion, rest—the headache goes away, the symptoms go away, and they're fine. But you have to be very careful. If there is damage on a CT [scan] or prolonged unconsciousness then it's in another category, not a concussion. Concussions are cumulative so we are going to have a lot more severely injured kids if we don't start putting some of these policies into place."

## Ankle Replacements a Growing Trend

Over 4,400 Americans, mostly older Americans, are expected to undergo ankle replacements in 2010. Four models of artificial metal/plastic ankles currently have FDA approval. And demand is expected to grow as more and more baby boomers hobble into their 60s and 70s with debilitating ankle pain. An estimated 50,000 a year experience end-stage ankle arthritis, in which the ankle cartilage has worn away completely, causing painful bone-on-bone contact and some level of disability.

"My happiest patients I have in my practice are my ankle replacement patients," says Dr. Brian Donley, an orthopedic surgeon at the Cleveland Clinic. "They are so appreciative about how their life has been changed. They can go to their grandchild's wedding and get up and have a dance."

However, Dr. Donley also says patients should always ask their doctor to disclose any financial interest in an artificial ankle device.

## Prolonged sitting hurts health, shortens life

Researchers at Sweden's Karolinska Institute and the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences found that prolonged bouts of sitting lead to muscular inactivity which is linked to illness. "Prolonged bouts of sitting are strongly associated with obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer," said Dr. Elin Ekblom-Bak of Stockholm's School of Sport and Health Sciences. The study, in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, urges regular short activity breaks during the day such as using stairs, not elevators, walking around the office for a few minutes and other simple changes to minimize inactivity's detrimental effects. "In the future, the focus in clinical practice and guidelines should not only be to promote and prescribe exercise, but also to encourage people to maintain their intermittent levels of daily activities [that involve movement]," the study said.

The combined key finding of the research is that muscular inactivity such as sitting triggers detrimental chemical reactions in the body—reactions which cannot be negated or reversed by more exercise. ■



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