

# VentureVoice

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Camp Venture's second summer, 1970, on the Rosary Academy grounds in Sparkill, NY. Venture would eventually purchase the school and property in 1986, and it is the current site of Venture Center Day Habilitation and the Kathy Lukens Independent Living Center.

## Venture Celebrates 50 Years

Venture began in 1969 as a free summer camp for a few dozen children with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

Venture was founded by the parents of those children, and has dedicated itself to providing loving, family-like care for the past 50 years.



At right, Venture's founder and first Executive Director, Kathleen Lukens with her son, David.

Today, Venture serves more than 850 children and adults every year. We operate 25 group homes and 11 day programs in every corner of Rockland County. And, we employ nearly 700 dedicated and caring staff. All that, and we're still a family!

## The Voice of the Future



THE OLD ADAGE "the more things change, the more they stay the same" came to mind as we worked to prepare this issue of the *Venture Voice*, which we are bringing back after a years-long hiatus. I'm reminded that, as we change and roll with the times, Venture is—at its very heart—a family-driven organization that provides family-like care to the hundreds of people we support each day. Our past informs our future, and as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary, we can look to our history—not to rest on our laurels, but for inspiration to guide us for the next 50 years.

In that light, we're excited to bring back the *Venture Voice*—a great love of our founder Kathleen Lukens—and use

it to show you some of Venture's current activities and future aspirations. We have projects focused on improving staff recruitment and retention, and the revitalization of our Day Habilitation programs. We've got updates on our Board of Directors and Administrative staff, and a brand-new look to our Staff Orientation. But mostly, we're excited—through pictures and words—to connect with families and to reinforce our enduring commitment to providing the best possible care to Venture's people.

So, welcome back to the *Venture Voice*, and welcome to our future. We're excited to share our stories with you, and want to hear from you. Call or stop by anytime to voice your thoughts on how we can best continue to serve our mission. And please know that you are an important and valued part of the Venture Family—now and in the future!

**Matt Shelley, CEO**

# Venture Launches New Programming Initiatives

## DSP Project in Full Swing

LAUNCHED IN MARCH 2018, Venture's DSP Project was tasked with the mission of improving two critical staffing concerns faced by Venture: successful recruitment and staff retention. The project team was comprised of a cross-section of Venture employees.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are the lifeblood of Venture; they are the frontline staff who care for the people we serve, supporting them at home, day programs and workplaces. Their dedication and devotion ensure that their lives are safe, secure, and deeply fulfilling.

The DSP Project, led by Chief Program Officer Marie Pardi, conducted interviews, made observations, held focus groups and completed online research to discover how the agency could improve recruitment, streamline the application process, and maintain levels of job satisfaction.

Venture has begun conducting job fairs throughout Rockland County, and regularly attends job fairs at local colleges. Posters, tear-off flyers and other collateral materials have been created to entice job applicants to consider Venture as their employer of choice.

The application process has been simplified, and applicants now are able to apply online. The Venture website has been updated to include job postings, and those postings are shared on other job sites to increase the potential number of applicants.

The DSP project team learned that the majority of our staff arrive to Venture upon the recommendation of a family member or friend who already works for the agency. To capitalize on this finding, the referral bonus policy was revamped and better communicated, and is now a key factor in the increase of our new hires.

Hand in hand with recruitment initiatives, our staff retention efforts have led to a more engaged, happier work force. Staff feel heard, involved, and a greater part of the Venture community. Special events, like June's Appreciation & Awards Dinner Dance honor the contribution and achievements of our DSPs.

Venture is continually exploring new and innovative ways to continue the work of the DSP Project to ensure successful recruitment and retention of our most valuable asset—our staff.

## Day Programs Revitalized

ANOTHER AMBITIOUS undertaking led by Chief Program Officer Marie Pardi is the Day Habilitation Project. The project committee spent five months speaking with program stakeholders, running focus groups, and visiting schools and the Day Habilitation programs of other agencies to gather information, new ideas, and discover best practices.

The project was able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our programs, and discover what families and participants are looking for now and in the future. Peer group matching was one of the most requested features, wherein those with similar interests and age-range attend programs together.

Also high on the list of program wants is greater access to technology. Our state-of-the-art Tech Lab at Venture Center is one of our most popular

program sites, and Venture is seeking to expand on the use of technology throughout the agency. By modernizing our networks and Wi-Fi signals, computers, tablets, and smart TVs will be readily available to all.

It's key that Venture's day programs continue to be flexible and adaptable to all abilities and interests. As students face the transition from high schools to day programs, parents want to be sure their children are presented with the best options.

"Venture hears...parents are worried about where their children are going to land after graduating from school. This project was designed to address their concerns," said Pardi.

Over the coming months, Venture will be rolling out new curriculum, and will keep exploring ways to keep our Day Hab programs as engaging and individually tailored as possible. 🌟

## Meet Our Executive Team



**Debbie Archambault** is Venture's Director of Residential Services, leading the team that cares for our 25 residential sites and the more than 200 people who call them home.



**Alice Kayser** has recently taken the role of Chief Compliance Officer, and heads a team of three in the Compliance/Quality Assurance office.



**Lisa Kirrane** serves as Director of Human Resources, managing the hiring, retention and benefits of over 750 Venture staff; plus oversight of insurance coverage, liability and staff voluntary counseling services.



As Chief Program Officer, **Marie Pardi** oversees six Venture departments, including Day Habilitation, Residential, Community Habilitation and Training.



**Celia Solomita** is not only our Chief Financial Officer, but also serves as Chief Administrative Officer, overseeing a variety of departments including Facility Maintenance and the Just-A-Buck store in Garnerville.

Venture is pleased to bring on-board **Axiom Technology Group** as our IT managed service provider. Axiom works with Venture sites and staff to provide daily tech support and training. Axiom will also upgrade and innovate new systems, including a new phone system, network infrastructure, and wifi environment.



Venture's Axiom IT Team, clockwise: Dipak Panchal, Logan Stallings and Victor Signes.

## Staff Orientation Remade

IN JANUARY 2019, Venture debuted a top-to-bottom revamp its Staff Orientation, a four-day course of critical trainings all new employees are required to attend. The trainings have been streamlined and enhanced in ways that provide new staff with mandated trainings and "best practice" skills for success.

Spearheaded by CPO Marie Pardi, Director of Training Dante Giordano and Training & Development Specialist Dana Andrews, the new curriculum focuses on teaching new staff positive behavior supports.

More instructors have been added to the course schedule, each teaching to their specialties. Fifteen Venture staff now participate, and new staff have the chance to meet most of Venture's senior staff.

New hires have expressed overwhelmingly positive reactions to the new trainings, and staff returning to Venture say the new Orientation is far more interesting and instructive than before. 🌟







Venture's Director of Human Resources, **Lisa Kirrane**, has joined the ranks of graduates from the **Leadership Rockland** program, whose mission is to "identify, inform and inspire leaders to better serve" the Rockland County community.

Lisa joined 17 others at a ceremony on June 11, which honored the Class of 2019. Participants from every type of business—for-profit and non-profit, the arts, healthcare, finance, and law enforcement—met monthly for a year, where they were immersed in the issues that face Rockland, learning about the county's history, politics, economy, and more.

Leadership Rockland is referred to as "a master's degree in Rockland County," and Lisa called her time in the program "a wonderful experience, I'd recommend it to anybody."

Director of Residential Services **Debbie Archambault** and CEO **Matt Shelley** are also Leadership Rockland alumni; Matt serves as vice-chair of the organization's Board of Directors.

Congratulations to Lisa and the entire Class of 2019!

## Mazurek Named Board Chair



Dario Mazurek



Janet Wheeler



Teresa Bader



Quinton Van Wynen

AFTER NEARLY 50 YEARS, the Hon. John A. Murphy has retired from the Venture Board of Directors, handing the gavel over to new chairman of the board, Dario Mazurek.

Murphy has always been a fierce advocate for the rights and dignity of people with developmental disabilities, and the gratitude from Venture for his strong leadership is deep and heartfelt.

Dario Mazurek first joined Venture's board in 2008. As the father of a child with autism, Dario says "you personally experience the challenges affecting your loved ones and the impact it has on your family, career, and friendships."

"My wife Janet and I try to do our part to contribute to this special community. We are glad for the opportunity to assist—and lead—where we can."

Mazurek is an experienced sales and business leader for technology and professional services firms, working at such giants as Eastman Kodak, AT&T, and IBM. He is currently Vice President of BPO Sales at NTT Data, a global IT services and consulting firm.

With Murphy's departure, further reorganization of the board includes the elections of Quinton Van Wynen, Jr. as treasurer, and Teresa Bader as secretary. Janet Wheeler continues on as vice-chair.

Retiring from the board after years of dedicated service were Josephine Hallett, Carol Yablonski, and Nicholas DeSantis. 🌸



John Murphy



Nicholas DeSantis



Josephine Hallett



Carol Yablonski

## Venture Goes Back to School

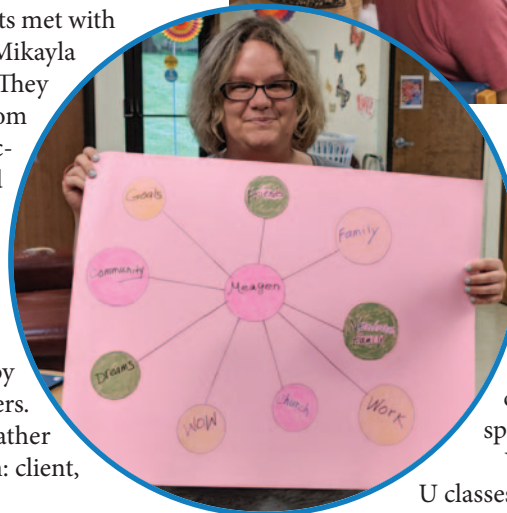
A GROUP FROM VENTURE recently went back to school to learn about disability rights and self-advocacy in a six-week course presented by the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS).

SANYS is run by—and for—people with developmental disabilities, working to promote public understanding of disability issues, and to encourage people with developmental disabilities (DD) to become advocates for themselves.

At the first "SANYS U" class, eight Venture students met with SANYS Regional Coordinator Cynthia Gilchrist and Mikayla Hoskins, treasurer for the SANYS Board of Directors. They were introduced to the history of DD self-advocacy, from the Willowbrook exposé of 1972 to more recent protections granted by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Padavan decision.

Students discussed how making decisions for themselves is a fundamental right, and were encouraged to share decisions they like to make, and how they feel when they can't make their own choices.

The group also discussed how they are perceived by the community, and how they want to be treated by others. All agreed that they just want to be called "people" rather than other words that have been used to describe them: client, patient, consumer.



About the use of the "R-word" and other derogatory terms for people with developmental disabilities, SANYS U attendee Michael G. said "I still hear people today using these words out in the street, and I just walk away. I don't have time for that."

On graduation day, students presented their final projects to the group, which included posters, written reports and heartfelt speeches.

Venture looks forward to continuing SANYS U classes with new students in the near future. 🌸





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