



MEDIA ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dutchess County, Williams Lumber & Home Centers and Thomas Chieffo Honored at Abilities First Community Breakfast

Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (April 12, 2016) – On Wednesday, April 6, 2016, over 250 community members attended the 2016 Abilities First Community Breakfast at The Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel in Poughkeepsie, NY to celebrate and share the organization’s mission “Enriching the Lives of Children & Adults in our Communities” and this year’s theme “Building Partnerships to Enhance Workforce Diversity.” Abilities First serves over 1,200 children and adults with developmental disabilities through educational, vocational, residential, and habilitation services throughout the Hudson Valley.

Abilities First honored Dutchess County’s Think Differently initiative with the first Abilities First Innovation Award for their efforts in elevating the community’s awareness and positive approach and inclusiveness of those of all disabilities. The 2016 Business of the Year was awarded to Williams Lumber & Home Centers for providing vocational training and job opportunities through the Abilities First Integrated Employment Services (IES) and School to Work Programs for adults and high school students. Every year, the organization honors a participant who has demonstrated an enthusiasm and commitment to reaching his or her greatest potential. This year’s honoree, Thomas Chieffo, has won several gold and silver medals at the International and National Special Olympics Games, has served over 8,500 volunteer hours at MidHudson Regional Hospital, and is currently employed at the Bard College dining services with an exemplary attendance record.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Wendy Strobel Gower, a faculty member at the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University, who spoke on the theme “Building Partnerships to Enhance Workforce Diversity.” Gower’s speech highlighted how businesses and the community can better understand the opportunities to create inclusive work environments.

“Abilities First looks to forge new and creative relationships which will help meet the needs of its community with innovative programs like the recent Workforce Readiness Program established solely for our students’ preparedness for the workplace, and made possible through a grant by the KeyBank Foundation. We hope to engage local businesses to create vocational opportunities for our students and adult population,” said Melissa McCoy, Chief Advancement Officer.

The 2016 Abilities First Community Breakfast was sponsored by MidHudson Regional Hospital, a member of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network, along with additional support from Central Hudson, the KeyBank Foundation, and Henry Page Development.

To learn more about Abilities First’s program and services or to find out how you can help, visit www.abilitiesfirstny.org or contact Melissa McCoy at 845-485-9803 ext. 223 or melissamccoy@abilitiesfirstny.org.

PHOTOS:



(Left to Right) Melissa McCoy, Abilities First Chief Advancement Officer; Dr. Jeffery Fox, Abilities First Chief Executive Officer; Thomas Chieffo, 2016 Abilities First Participant of the Year; Marcus J. Molinaro, Dutchess County Executive and 2016 Abilities First Innovation Award Recipient; David Melby, Abilities First Board of Directors President



(Left to Right) Melissa McCoy, Abilities First Chief Advancement Officer; Kimberley Williams, Williams Lumber and Home Centers SVP of Retail Operations; Dr. Jeffery Fox, Abilities First Chief Executive Officer



(Left to Right) Melissa McCoy, Abilities First Chief Advancement Officer; David Metrand, MidHudson Regional Hospital Director of Food & Nutrition Services; Thomas Chieffo, 2016 Abilities First Participant of the Year; Dr. Jeffery Fox, Abilities First Chief Executive Officer

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About Abilities First

Founded in 1962, Abilities First is a not-for-profit organization serving the needs of the community, as well as those with developmental disabilities, from pre-school through adulthood. Abilities First has had a long-term commitment of providing a cohesive culture of compassion, empowerment and respect for people with a variety of disabilities through educational, vocational, residential and habilitation services. It presently serves over 1,200 children and adults throughout the Hudson Valley region of New York State. AF is accredited for the person-centered care by the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) and given the honor of participating in a coalition of leaders in the field through New York Integrated Network and Coordinated Behavioral Health Services (CBHS).

Abilities First's mission is to provide people with disabilities and their families support to attain independence, self-determination, integration and acceptance by others through education, exploration and experience.

For more information, visit www.AbilitiesFirstNY.org or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AbilitiesFirstInc and [@AbilitiesF](https://twitter.com/AbilitiesF) on Twitter.