



**MEDIA ALERT**  
**May 11, 2017**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**ABILITIES FIRST ANNOUNCES \$30,000 MATCH CHALLENGE  
TO BUILD ADAPTIVE PLAYGROUND.**

**KEARNEY REALTY GROUP, RAY LUGO, AND JESSICA DOERING RECEIVE ABILITIES  
FIRST AWARDS**

**COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE LOCAL NONPROFIT**

**Poughkeepsie, N.Y.** (May 11, 2017) – Shaneka R. Paulin, an Abilities First participant since 1980, shared her inspiring story with Community Breakfast attendees on Thursday, May 11, 2017 at The Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel, Poughkeepsie, NY. Paulin was first diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at 8 months old and despite many challenges and obstacles, has gone on to earning a degree from Marist College and becoming a Paralegal at Rosicki, Rosicki, and Associates, PC.

Paulin also announced that an anonymous donor has challenged Abilities First to a \$30,000 matching challenge gift to move the organization closer to the \$200,000 goal in order to build an adaptive playground at the Abilities First School in LaGrange, NY. The School currently serves over 100 students with intellectual and developmental disabilities from 22 school districts in the Hudson Valley.

“While I have persevered, I have and sometimes still must watch from the sidelines. Today the Abilities First students ask for your help in building them an accessible playground so they are not left out and might enjoy the same memories and activities you once did on the playground,” said Shaneka Pulin.

Abilities First will be participating in Hudson Valley Gives, the region’s second annual day of online giving, to be held Wednesday, May 17, 2017. The community is asked to help reach the

\$200,000 goal to build an adaptive playground and provide recreational equipment so that children of all abilities can play together. Donations can be made at <http://gvgb.co/hvgivesaf>.

Members of the community came together to celebrate the organization's mission "Enriching the Lives of Children & Adults in our Communities" and to honor several honorees. The honorees that were recognized:

### **2017 Abilities First Innovation Award - Ray Lugo**

Ray Lugo was inspired by his son, Ryan, who was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, to use his role as an Assistant Scout Master for the Boy Scouts of America, Hudson Valley Council, Troop 40 to help his scouts realize they can participate in scouting regardless of their challenges.

### **2017 Business of the Year - Kearney Realty Group**

Kearney Realty Group in collaboration with Abilities First recently opened The Mews at Hopewell Junction in the Town of East Fishkill, which provides new integrated and affordable housing options for area residents.

### **2017 Participant of the Year - Jessica Doering**

An Abilities First participant since 1986, Jessica Doering is being recognized for her enthusiasm and commitment to reaching her greatest potential by working or volunteering at various local businesses such as Habitat for Humanity's ReStore and Batemans Senior Meals. She is also a self-advocate for the Down Syndrome Association Hudson Valley.

Abilities First serves over 1,400 children and adults with developmental disabilities through educational, vocational, residential, and habilitation services throughout the Hudson Valley.

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## **PHOTOS**

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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).

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](http://www.AbilitiesFirstNY.org) or on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/AbilitiesFirstInc](https://www.Facebook.com/AbilitiesFirstInc).