



ABILITIES FIRST
ENRICHING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN
& ADULTS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT TO BE A FOCAL POINT AT THE 2019 ABILITIES FIRST COMMUNITY PARTNERS BREAKFAST

**MIKE OATES, AMERISOURCEBERGEN, AND WILLIAM EUGENE VAN ORNUM, JR. TO BE
HONORED**

Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (April 3, 2019) – Abilities First, a nonprofit organization serving the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, will recognize those who have advanced the opportunities for individuals with disabilities seeking employment in the Hudson Valley. Mike Oates, President and CEO of Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation (HVEDC) and AmerisourceBergen will receive the Innovation Award and Henry G. Page, Jr. Business Leadership Awards respectively. The 2019 Abilities First Ambassador of the Year will be awarded to William Eugene Van Ornum, Jr.

The 2019 Innovation Award honoree, Mike Oates, has long championed for equal access to employment for all. Oates has worked with Abilities First over the past four years to connect businesses with the Employment Services Program, including the current success with Green Panda, upon their relocation from China. AF individuals assist with the assembly and packaging of The Green Panda Bamboo Toothbrush, an environmentally friendly product designed to be 100% biodegradable. As its new CEO, Oates has included the advocacy and inclusion of employment for all in HVEDC's core objectives. Oates's joined the board of Abilities First in 2018.

"Mike has taken a personal interest in the advocacy for individuals with disabilities, and woven it naturally into the economic impact initiatives of HVEDC, whereby the vision and collaborations are a win-win for both those seeking meaningful employment and businesses in need of committed workers," said Melissa McCoy, Chief Advancement Officer at Abilities First.

AmerisourceBergen, a global healthcare solutions leader based in Valley Forge, Pa., will be recognized with the Henry G. Page, Jr. Business Leadership Award. AmerisourceBergen is host to twelve Abilities First individuals in the Integrated Employment Services Program. The AF



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program works with several hundred employers in the region to assist individuals in assessing vocational interest, exploring work opportunities and offering skills training to aid in their success. At the AmerisourceBergen Newburgh Distribution Center, individuals receive on-the-job-training by job coaches and AmerisourceBergen staff where their tasks involve the cleaning and de-icing of totes. AmerisourceBergen has a corporate citizenship commitment to fostering a positive impact in the neighborhoods they serve, which is reflected through their partnership with Abilities First. The award is named after Henry G. Page, Jr., business owner and longtime friend of Abilities First, who led with kindness, acceptance and a personal and professional commitment in providing opportunities to our individuals seeking employment or vocational experience.

“As a parent of a child with special needs, I am honored to work for a company like AmerisourceBergen that supports an organization like Abilities First,” said Kevin Burlew, Director of Operations II for AmerisourceBergen’s Newburgh, NY Distribution Center. “The work completed by the Abilities First workers is very valuable to our customers and the team does a great job each and every day. We’re thrilled and humbled by this recognition.”

The Ambassador of the Year Award will be awarded to William Eugene Van Ornum, Jr., who was selected by the Abilities First staff, in recognition for his enthusiasm and accomplishments in continuing to reach his greatest potential and serve as a role model to his peers. As Ambassador of the Year, Van Ornum will represent the organization through the spring of 2020 at various events and community activities and play an important role in advocating for his peers.

The annual Community Partners Breakfast celebrates those in the community who make it possible for our mission to enrich the lives of others. Community members and business leaders interested in learning more about the Abilities First Breakfast and ways they can help advance employment opportunities for those with disabilities within their industry are welcome to attend.

Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation will provide support as the Hospitality Sponsor with Denise VanBuren, Vice President of Public Relations, serving as the emcee for the event. For sponsorship and event information, please contact Melissa McCoy at 845-485-9803 ext. 223. Visit www.abilitiesfirstny.org/breakfast for additional details or to register.

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PHOTOS



Mike Oates, President and CEO - Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation (HVEDC), Abilities First Innovation Award Recipient



William Van Ornum, Jr., Abilities First Ambassador of the Year Award Recipient



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ABOUT ABILITIES FIRST

Founded in 1962, Abilities First is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization serving the needs of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities from preschool through adulthood. More than 650 dedicated and passionate employees are committed to 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 1,400 children and adults with disabilities in the Hudson Valley region of New York State. AF is accredited for 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 or on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/AbilitiesFirstInc.