A Musical Feast For The Eyes & Ears

Honoring
Dr. & Mrs. Murray Grossman

Thursday, May 17, 2012
The Lodge at Welch Allyn
Dr. Murray Grossman has been a leader and life saver throughout his professional medical career as a cardiologist. He continues to make a difference in the lives of many through his willingness, along with his wife Kathy, to be our Honorary Chairs for AURORA’s 10th Annual Musical Feast for the Eyes and Ears.

Our event will feature a fine buffet dining experience, and a Live and Silent Auction filled with elegant and interesting items for every taste. We will enjoy music for dancing from the Mere Mortals. Our venue will again be the gorgeous Welch Allyn Lodge in Skaneateles. The date will be Thursday, May 17, 2012 beginning at 6 p.m.

Many of our patrons return year after year to support AURORA and hear from those who benefit. This year we have two engaging speakers who will share their stories.

Please call Diane LaBeff at (315) 422-7263 to reserve your seat or table or to inquire about the levels of sponsorship available to promote your business or organization.

**Partners in Disability Rights**

Since 2004, Professor Michael A. Schwartz has been the Director of the Disability Rights Clinic of Syracuse University’s College of Law. In that time he has mentored more than 80 future lawyers and exposed them to the real-life barriers and injustices faced by people with disabilities. Each semester ten students work (in teams of two) on up to 25 projects and cases that involve working with real clients, with real problems, to give them hands-on experience in disability law.

Over the years, AURORA has partnered with the Disability Rights Clinic to tackle some of the most urgent advocacy and access needs for the people we serve.

Many of these projects are on-going and oriented toward systems change in our community. Currently we are working together on ensuring that two major renovations in the area, the airport and the CENTRO bus terminal are fully accessible for people with vision and/or hearing loss. Dr. Schwartz is a dynamic and passionate advocate and expert in disability rights law and we are pleased to be working with him on these projects. Dr. Schwartz will be a featured speaker at this year’s Musical Feast for the Eyes and Ears Fundraiser on May 17, 2012.
Thank you to the following members and donors who are committed to the continuation of AURORA’s vital services for those with vision and/or hearing loss. Names listed are of those who have contributed from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011. Please notify us of changes or corrections. Thank you!!

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**Membership 2012 ... It’s Time to Join Us!!**

We value your membership in our organization and every day we strive to be good stewards of the investment you make in us. As a member, you support services that might not otherwise be possible such as our support groups, outreach and education activities and vision screenings. You also help us to offer exciting new initiatives like our pre-vocational program for youth who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Nonie Culeton Fundraiser**

Bowling balls rolled and chicken sizzled on Saturday, November 26, 2011 at Oswego’s Lighthouse Lanes in memory of Nonie Culeton, a lifelong Oswego-area resident who was 72 when she died a year ago. The event raised more than $7,000, which was divided between AURORA and Oswego County Visually Impaired (OCVI).

Nonie’s family planned the fundraiser to raise awareness of macular degeneration, which took her vision toward the end of her life. “We decided to raise money for macular degeneration because a lot of publicity is given to diabetes, kidney disease and breast cancer. She had those too, but not as much attention is given to eye diseases,” said granddaughter Kathy Healy.

“When she lost her sight, she lost her independence,” said Nonie’s husband, Bob. “She couldn’t read the paper, she couldn’t drive, she couldn’t watch TV or even do her crossword puzzles.” She regained some independence through services from AURORA. “AURORA got her a talking watch and a large-print remote control, arranged for her to get talking books, and helped in many other ways,” Bob said.
Welcome New Board Members

We are happy to announce the addition of four new members to our Board of Directors.

Ted Pasinski is past president and CEO of St. Joseph’s Hospital Health Center, where he helped shape the local healthcare landscape through the development of successful collaborations with community stakeholders. Evidence of his hard work at St. Joseph’s can be seen today in the continuation of neighborhood improvements on Syracuse’s North Side and in the expansion of the health center’s campus. Ted is currently a consultant with Franciscan Management. Ted, an avid golfer, serves on AURORA’s ForeSIGHT Golf Classic committee and was honorary chair of the event in 2011.

Edwin Kelley, Jr. is chair of the Business Law Department and the Public Finance Practice Group at Bond, Schoeneck & King. He is on several local boards of directors, including those of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, the YMCA of Greater Syracuse, and St. Joseph’s College of Nursing. He earned a bachelor of arts degree from St. Lawrence University, a master of science degree in accounting from Syracuse University and a Juris Doctor degree from Syracuse University. “I decided to join AURORA’s Board of Directors because, over the last several years, through my work with various organizations, I’ve become more involved with people who have disabilities,” he said.

Pat Culeton became interested in AURORA while she watched her aunt cope with macular degeneration, which causes central vision loss and is a major cause of blindness in people 60 and older. In November, Pat and her family held a fundraiser to raise awareness of the disease. The event raised more than $7,000, which was divided between AURORA and Oswego County Visually Impaired (OCVI).

James T. Snyder, a partner in the law firm of Greene & Reid in Syracuse, decided to join AURORA’s board of directors after watching his father, aunt and uncle all become deaf in middle age. Jim's father was one of the first recipients of a cochlear implant in Syracuse; this experience made Jim acutely aware of the lack of access and accommodation for those with sensory and other disabilities and led to his interest in disability rights law. He serves on the Board of Advisors of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, served on the board of the Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society, and is a member of the Disability Rights Bar Association. In 2003 he received the New York State Bar Association’s President's Pro Bono Service Attorney Award. Jim founded the Franciscan Legal Referral Clinic and teaches at Syracuse University and LeMoyne College. Jim received his bachelor of arts degree magna cum laude from Colgate University and his Juris Doctor degree from the Albany Law School of Union University.
The 16th Annual ForeSIGHT Golf Classic has found a new home at The Links at Erie Village, one of the premier semi-private golf courses in Central New York. The event will be held on Monday September 10th, and we are pleased to announce this year’s Honorary Co-Chairs will be Doug Logan, Director of Time Warner Cable Sports and Coach Dick MacPherson, former Syracuse University Head Football Coach. Mark your calendars as we continue the tradition of fun, good food, and great times. We are already filling slots and gathering sponsors for this popular tournament. For reservations, sponsorship opportunities or more information, contact Diane LaBeff at (315) 422-7263; TDD (315) 422-9746.

With THANKS to our 2011 ForeSIGHT Sponsors

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A new Glaucoma Support Group offers support and education about glaucoma, a condition in which increased pressure in the eye damages the optic nerve. The support group was founded by Mark Lesselroth, president of the Central New York Chapter of The Glaucoma Foundation, after he was diagnosed with glaucoma. The meetings are generally held monthly on a Saturday afternoon at AURORA. To find out when the next meeting is, or for more information, contact Mark at mark@glaucomafoundation.org or 569-0642.

Vera Lange Celebrates Her 103rd Birthday!!

We were pleased to share in the celebration of Vera Lang’s 103rd Birthday celebration recently. She is pictured here with Debra Chaiken, AURORA’s Executive Director who states, “Vera has been a mentor and a friend for so many years to me and AURORA. She is a treasure to the community!” Vera was all smiles and enjoyed the company of family and friends. We wish her continued health and happiness.

AURORA Demonstrates Adaptive Equipment for Individuals With Hearing Loss

Joe Maira, came to AURORA in search of something that could help him with his hearing loss. At 90 years young, he still remains active in his community. He met with Outreach and Education Director, Dave DeFrancis at our office who showed him some of the most popular and helpful devices available: a CapTel Phone (with captions to read the conversation) and a Pocket Talker Pro which helps amplify voices in small groups such as while dining or playing cards. If you would like to try these devices or learn about other equipment or services to help with a hearing loss, contact AURORA.

AURORA of CNY has joined the social media universe!! Like us on Facebook and visit our page for interesting facts, helpful tips and the latest information about AURORA’s events and services. Go to www.facebook.com/auroraofcny
EXCELLENCE Awardees 2011

AURORA presented its Excellence Awards on November 18, 2011 at its annual meeting at the Mulroy Civic Center in Syracuse.

Nasser Fitwi: Blind since he was eight years old, Nasser came to Syracuse almost two years ago from a refugee camp in Ethiopia. Without the help of any vision at all, he had to learn his way around and adjust to a new culture, country and climate. AURORA helped with mobility training, assistive devices such as tape recorders, and advice on the reams of paperwork that face a new immigrant. Nasser learned quickly and now he is working to give back and help others. At AURORA he tutors consumers in English as a Second Language.

Timothy Conners: Tim, an 11th-grader at G. Ray Bodley High School in Fulton, says he’s up for the challenge of dealing with both cancer and blindness. It’s a relatively new challenge for Tim. He became legally blind just over a year ago due to the cancer, and he had a bone marrow transplant in 2010. Tim is still a member of G. Ray Bodley’s varsity football team and, wears his jersey when he goes to games to root for his team. Although Tim plans to attend college after graduation, he says with a smile that his biggest challenge right now is finishing high school on time because of all the classes he’s missed.

Lindsay Ryan Anthony: Lindsay, who has been Deaf all of her life, has a long history with AURORA. She worked in AURORA’s Summer Education Program and then joined the AURORA’s Deaf Rehabilitation Services. During her time at AURORA, Lindsay was willing to do whatever was necessary to represent AURORA and educate the community about Deaf culture. Lindsay is a member of the Deaf Advocacy Council of Central New York and works for Project EMERGE, a collaboration between ARISE and Vera House, where she advocates for people with disabilities who experience domestic and sexual abuse.

Breanne Kisselstein: Breanne, who is a senior at Cicero-North Syracuse High School, is dealing with the dual challenge of being hard of hearing and legally blind. That has not stopped her from maintaining a 90 GPA and setting her sights on college and a career in science. She is an active volunteer at her church, she spent this past summer working at the Aspen Athletic Club, and she recently enrolled in the Explore Your Future Program at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester.
**Employer of the Year**

*Affordable Cleaning Service*, based in Hastings, is our Employer of the Year. This business really “gets it” when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. The service specializes in general home, business and office cleaning as well as waxing, stripping and buffing of floors. Owner *Rosemarrie Stone* has hired some of our Deaf consumers to work for a variety of customers, including a post office, an apartment complex and an office building. Rosemarrie is flexible about our consumers’ transportation schedules and is also eager to learn about Deaf culture and the Deaf community. She sets a wonderful example for other employers.

**Mattie Letham Community Leadership Award**

*Laura Smith*: When Laura Smith sees a need, she goes about meeting it with determination and grace. “I am a let’s pull together and take care of this” kind of person, Laura admits. She is “an arranger” who, as the SUNY Oswego Assistant Dean of Student Services, and then as the Continuing Education Division Assistant Director, developed programs for non-traditional college students.

Laura has Master's and Specialist degrees in Counselor Education, College Student Personnel, from the University of Florida in Gainesville and a Master of Arts degree in Adult Education from Columbia University. In 1998, Laura received the Outstanding Continuing Educator Award from the Continuing Education Association of New York. She is a member of AURORA’s Board of Directors.

Diagnosed with macular degeneration in 1997, Laura states that she considers it a “fascinating aspect” of her life and refuses to dwell on the negative. Instead, she works to help others with vision loss. Laura is president of Oswego County Visually Impaired (OCVI) and she founded the Oswego County Book Club.

When asked how she would like to be remembered, Laura said, “... as a friend who is willing to work for what you need.” Right now, she admits, “I have lots of friends and we help each other. It’s a mutual admiration society!” We at AURORA couldn’t agree more.

**Please Help Us!!**

We need your help to update our mailing list. Please let us know if you have any changes to your contact information or would like to be removed from the mailing list. We also welcome new names, so if you know of anyone who would like to receive our newsletter please call 422-7263 or e-mail us at auroracny@auroraofcny.org
AURORA Joins Local Coalition and Offers Classes to Prevent Falls Among Older Adults

Although the phrase “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up” has turned into a punch line for some comedians, it’s no laughing matter for the more than 89,000 adults who are 60 and over in Onondaga County, which has the highest rate of death by falls in the catchment area of the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York. With funding and support from the Foundation the county has formed a coalition of local community organizations to address the issue.

AURORA is one of the core members of the new Onondaga County Step Up To Stop Falls Coalition, which includes the Department of Aging and Youth, Visiting Nurses Association of Central New York, St. Camillus Health and Rehabilitation Center, Salvation Army of the Greater Syracuse Area, and numerous other community partners.

Because muscle weakness can contribute to falls, AURORA began offering exercise classes to seniors at the Salvation Army senior program in downtown Syracuse. The exercises were designed to strengthen muscles and improve balance. For example, an exercise called the “pigeon walk” involved walking in place with arms extended backwards, and “burning shins” required raising the front of the foot off the floor, rapidly, while seated.

Ross Deforrest, rehabilitation and mobility instructor at AURORA, taught the class, where attendance ranged from 15 to 18 people. His instructions were explicit and, at times, hands-on. “People who are congenitally blind have trouble knowing where their body is in space,” he explained. “To just say, ‘put your arm behind you’--they don’t know what that means.”

The exercise sessions were videotaped, and Ross created verbal descriptions to make the videos accessible to people with vision loss. “Other organizations can use these tapes to train their staff,” said Debra Chaiken, AURORA’s executive director.

“Before this, there were no strength and balance exercises in the community accessible to people with vision and hearing loss,” added Nancy Anderson, who is legally blind and took part in the classes. Anderson is AURORA’s support group coordinator.

Besides muscle weakness, according to the coalition, factors that contribute to falls include medication mismanagement and cluttered or poorly designed living spaces. “In addition to these risk factors, AURORA’s consumers have the added burden of poor vision or hearing. A misplaced electrical cord or a grandchild’s toy on the floor can lead to a fall for someone whose vision is affected by blind spots or poor peripheral or central vision,” Debra noted. “The coalition is helping to bring about this awareness to the community.”
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In return for your gift you received no material goods or tangible services for supporting AURORA. Your membership donation to AURORA is tax-deductible.
We at AURORA bid a very fond farewell to our friend and colleague Frieda Heckman, director of Deaf Rehabilitation Services, who has retired after 25 years with AURORA.

The Deaf Rehabilitation Services Department expanded its services to an amazing degree under Frieda’s leadership, providing social work, outreach, education and employment services to the Syracuse Deaf community. In 2008, the Deaf Advocacy Council presented her with its Community Service Award.

“Frieda was accepted by the Deaf community because she truly listened; she didn’t tell people what to do. Frieda had the wisdom, talent and skill to know how to guide and support people to develop independent living skills. She respected their abilities and was a friend to the Deaf community,” said Deb Chaiken, executive director of AURORA.

Although Frieda is looking forward to relaxing, traveling and spending time in Florida, she will be coming back to AURORA to help with special projects. “I will always have a hand in AURORA. I can’t see closing that door,” she said. Before she left, we presented her with a token of our appreciation: A statue of a hand that says “I love you” in sign language. And that’s no exaggeration -- We Love You, Frieda!