A Champion Is Named!

JoAnne Spoto Decker, the Director of Community Service Programs at the Onondaga County Office for Aging, has always been a champion in our minds and hearts here at AURORA, but now the whole community knows it! A huge congratulations goes out to JoAnne at being named the 2018 WellCare Grand Champion. She competed against four other worthy leaders in the field of senior adult services in a contest that designated AURORA of CNY as the beneficiary of a $10,000 winning award.

JoAnne was the top vote-getter in a community-wide competition that names a champion who exemplifies excellence through what they give back to our local community and how they are making a difference in the lives of older adults. WellCare, a provider of Medicare Advantage plans, sponsors the competition each year. Other nominees were: David Pasinski for Sarah’s Guest House; Richard Synek for Feed our Vets; Kimberly Townsend for the Loretto Foundation; and Douglas Wagner for Oswego County Opportunities Nutrition Services.

JoAnne received the award at a public ceremony during the New York State Fair. She summed up the experience: "It was such a thrill to be named the WellCare Grand Champion. I am very appreciative of WellCare and the support they give to our community. I was especially pleased to be able to showcase the wonderful work of AURORA of Central New York. They are 101 years strong and stay true to their mission of assisting people with sensory loss to live life with dignity, autonomy and respect. I believe that AURORA and the people they serve are the true champions."

Congratulations and THANK YOU, JoAnne!
KeyBank Grant Supports Mission

We are happy to announce the receipt of a $5,200 grant to assist AURORA to serve individuals within our Deaf community to find and keep good jobs and learn the skills necessary to achieve maximum self-sufficiency. While deafness itself is not considered a disability, society can put up barriers. Access to good jobs and opportunities can be a challenge when proper communication, such as sign language interpreters, is not provided.

The purpose of the project is to equip individuals, especially those who are resettled deaf refugees, with the information and language skills they need to be self-sufficient and successful citizens.

KeyBank Foundation supports organizations and programs that prepare individuals for thriving futures. Their funding priorities focus on neighbors, education and workforce. Through grants and sponsorships, KeyBank makes dreams a reality. We are proud to partner with them.

Jim and Juli Boeheim Foundation Supports Children’s Program

The Jim and Juli Boeheim Foundation recently awarded AURORA of CNY with a special grant to fund a model program of American Sign Language (ASL) Instruction for Children of Deaf Adults, also known as CODA’s. The program will serve children between 5 and 12 years of age from throughout Central New York. Some of the children are resettled from other countries due to war or poverty and need to learn ASL to communicate with their parents or extended family. Communication between children and parents is crucial at any age. The sooner that the family members can use the same language with one another, the stronger the family will be.

Two class modules of six weeks each (class meets once a week) will be delivered within the next year. Classes are limited to 10 students each. If you are interested in learning more or to register your child for the class, contact Kelley Cooper at 315-679-4168.
Women of AURORA - Reach Out Honors a Special Friend

The 6th annual Women of AURORA - Reach Out event will take place on Wednesday, October 24, 2018 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Century Club at 480 James St., Syracuse, NY. This event brings together women who are sincerely devoted to AURORA and our mission for an inspirational and informative evening to support our work on behalf of people with vision and hearing loss.

This year will be a special one as we will be honoring a woman who has been an outstanding advocate for people with vision and hearing loss as well as a decades-long supporter of AURORA.

Laura Smith has served as a past member of the Board of Directors and has been a wise counsel to AURORA’s President, Debra Chaiken. She is currently on our Honorary Board and assumed the leadership role as President in 2002 of the Oswego County Visually Impaired Network, a social network for people with vision loss that has been thriving for over 20 years.

Laura served the greater community throughout her career as the Assistant Dean in Student Services at SUNY Oswego. She developed, along with others, the Non-Traditional Student Union there. In 1999 she received the Emeritus Award from the Association for Continuing Higher Education in recognition of her dedicated leadership and service.

“When Laura sees a need, she meets it!” remarked Debra Chaiken. “She tackled the hard issue of transportation in Oswego County for visually impaired residents, approached the legislature and effected positive change.” Laura also initiated the Oswego County Book Club for people with low vision and has worked tirelessly and generously to promote AURORA and our services.

The evening will also feature two speakers who will share their stories of how AURORA has helped them. For more information or to make a donation, contact Mariah at 315-422-7263.

Thank you to our sponsors: Geddes Federal Savings & Loan, MacDonough Enterprises, and Maximum Wine + Liquors.
SPOTLIGHT ON PROGRAMS
STRIVE Pre-College Program - Five More Years!

AURORA is proud to announce that we have been awarded a contract to continue to offer the STRIVE Pre-College program for students who are legally blind for the next 5 years. The contract was awarded by the New York State Commission for the Blind through the Office of Child and Family Services. Beginning in 2013, AURORA partnered with Le Moyne College to offer the program for high school juniors and seniors to assess their readiness for college through a four week in-residence program. Many students have gone on to successful college careers following their completion of the Pre-College program.

Among many other activities and accomplishments, students are expected to complete a college level essay as part of their coursework. They often contain inspiring stories full of wisdom and determination. Here’s a sampling:

“I was a shy, scared little girl that thought that being different was the worst thing you could do, but now I’m proud to say that I am a strong outgoing independent woman that isn’t afraid to be different, stretch the norms of society and think outside the box.”

“Even though you get pushed down in life...you need to get back up...With perseverance you learn courage because you are standing up to the things that are hurting you and trying to impede your success...you just put your head down and chug through the hardship or the obstacle and come out better on the other side.”

“You do not need vision to see the world for what it is, you do not need vision to go out and have a good time, you do not need vision to be able to learn and obtain a degree, and you especially do not need vision to share knowledge and obtain knowledge from others. The only vision that you need is the one that tells you to follow your dreams and don’t give up--to strive for greatness and don’t stop until you reach those dreams.”

We look forward to offering the program in partnership with Le Moyne College for the next five years!
Deaf Events Build Community

An Ice Cream Social and Clothing Give-Away drew a crowd recently to AURORA, put on for Deaf community members as a way to hang out and connect with one another. “It’s an opportunity to build our community and let people know that AURORA is here when people need us,” explained Kelley Cooper, Director of Deaf Services. The monthly events started in July with a breakfast gathering prior to the Americans with Disabilities March where Children’s Health Home Care Coordinator, Grace Cogan, was a featured speaker. A generational storytelling event, among others, is planned for the future.

A special thank you to Wegmans for supporting these events. Check out AURORA’s Facebook page for upcoming gatherings!

SPOTLIGHT ON TECHNOLOGY

Aira App Makes Shopping Simple

Wegmans recently announced that they are the first grocery store chain in the country to provide the Aira app at all of their locations for shoppers with low vision. Aira has been on the market for three years and functions like a personal navigation assistant. It is available through a subscription with users purchasing minutes, but Wegmans is making it available FREE of charge.

Here’s how it works: Users download the app to their phone. When activated, it connects the user to a live operator who is able to use the smartphone camera to view the perspective of the client. Agents serving the user also have direct access to the host company’s own app, in this case Wegmans, at their work station during their interaction with the client. The agent guides and functions as the “eyes” for the client.

Lucy Marr is an operator at AURORA’s VA Switchboard operation and was recently featured in a news broadcast announcing the arrangement with Wegmans. She was shown navigating a busy store independently with her guide dog, Jayden. She remarked on how well trained the agents were and the versatility of the app. She even uses Aira when she is in her own home or at other locations in the community.
In Loving Memory – Gloria Hooper-Rasberry
We lost a dear friend earlier this year when former board member and honorary board member Gloria Hooper-Rasberry passed away. She was a vibrant force in our community for good: a mother, wife, educator and woman of faith who always worked toward a solution for any problem with creativity and grace. Gloria served on our Board of Directors from 2006 to 2013 and then joined the Honorary Board until her passing. She was a member of our strategic planning committee. But what we will remember most about Gloria is her quiet presence and steadfast support. She made a point of coming to our events and letting people in the community know all about AURORA and our mission. We will miss her and are better for having known her.

Accessible Movies In Cayuga County
Thanks to the persistence and advocacy of board member Susan Gray and the members of the Cayuga County Support Group for those with vision loss, movies are now accessible in that county for citizens with sensory impairment.

Now available at the Auburn Movieplex 10 in Auburn are closed captioning devices that display the dialogue of a movie on a tiny screen for people who are deaf. They also have assistive listening devices that amplify audio for people with hearing impairments. The audio description devices provide narration of what’s happening on-screen for people who are blind or visually impaired in a quiet and inconspicuous manner. “It’s a little thing that means a lot,” explains Susan. “Now I can go out and have a normal experience without having to have my husband describe everything to me.”

An amendment to the Americans with Disabilities Act dictated that by June 2, 2017, all multiplex movie theaters needed to be accessible for patrons with sensory loss. In December of 2017, Susan Gray wrote a guest column for the Auburn newspaper The Citizen pointing out that none of the theaters in Cayuga County were compliant with this law.

Rochester Theater Management, which owns several theaters across upstate New York, stepped up and purchased the equipment.

“They did the right thing and it is a real gift!” Susan confirmed. The movie theater is located at 360 Grant Avenue in Auburn.
Join Our Mission— Without the generous support of our donors, we would not have been able to serve this community over 100 years. Donors like you provide much needed funds for programs such as our support groups, social work services, and skills training.

We appreciate donations in any amount and thank you for your assistance.

Please complete & mail this form to:

AURORA of CNY, 518 James St., Suite 100, Syracuse, NY 13203-2282

AURORA of Central New York 2018 Donation Form

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City __________________ State ___________ Zip ___________
Phone ___________________________ Email ____________________

I would like to make a contribution to AURORA of Central New York at the following level:

☐ $25  ☐ $50  ☐ $100  ☐ $250  ☐ $500*  ☐ Other $ ___________

☐ Please send me information about AURORA's Planned Giving Program

I am paying by: ☐ Check (please make checks payable to AURORA of CNY, Inc.)
    ☐ MasterCard  ☐ Visa  ☐ American Express

My account # ________________________________ Expiration Date ____________

V-Code (three digit code on back of card) _______________

Name on account (if different from above) ______________________________

Billing address (if different from above) ________________________________

I am aware and allow AURORA of Central New York to charge my card for the above purposes.
Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

*Gifts may be acknowledged in our newsletter; if you wish to remain anonymous please check here  ☐

In return for your gift you receive no material goods or tangible services for supporting AURORA of Central New York. Your donation to AURORA is tax deductible.
United Way Is A Vital Link

“The United Ways of Central New York, Oswego and Cayuga Counties are a vital link to supporting the day to day operations of our organization,” remarks Debra Chaiken, President, “and our core services are funded by them.” AURORA’s United Way funded programs together serve close to 1000 people a year in our community who have vision or hearing loss. This year’s campaign is already in full swing with each of the counties getting the message out to the community about the value of United Way.

In Cayuga County, AURORA’s Cayuga County Support Group for People with Vision Loss will be featured in the United Way campaign video. Board Member Susan Gray, Nancy Anderson and Outreach Specialist Donna Reese spoke of the importance of peer support. In Oswego County, the Speaker’s Bureau has been resurrected and our Honorary Board Member Laura Smith will be presenting at several area companies. Also, the United Way of CNY is featuring Monica Johnson in a television commercial to share how the Community Living Skills Program impacted her personal and professional success.

A United Way Agency of Central New York, Oswego & Cayuga Counties
Onondaga County Dept. of Adult & Long Term Care Services