



Dinner of Hope

*Believe in what
makes you shine*

October 8, 2021

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Registration and Cocktails

6:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Opening Remarks	Tim Coco, Master of Ceremonies
Welcome Message Introduced by Tim Coco	Josiah Morrow, President

Dinner

Keynote Address (Video) Introduced by Tim Coco	Congresswoman Lori Trahan
---	---------------------------

Awards Presentation

The Bryan Noble Award	Yvonne Christian
The Asperger Works Award	TBA
The Community Service Award	The Professional Center for Child Development

Entertainment

Magic Show Introduced by Tim Coco	Stephanie Beach Magic Show
50/50, and Silent Auction	AWorks Directors/Advisors
Music by	Acoustically Speaking

Dancing

DINNER COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Eva Rajczyk, Event Coordinator
Josiah Morrow, Christle Rogers, Linda Thomson, Andrea Watson, The Rajczyk Family

Cover by Qingquan Li, Senior at Shanghai University, Shanghai, China

“When I design a picture, I am always thinking [about] the theme for our dinner: ‘Believe in what makes you shine.’ Holding the sun means I believe. The OK gesture holding the sun means because I believe, everything can be OK. The sunrise scene means a bright future. The sunrise scene also is connected with the word ‘shine’ in ‘Believe in what makes you shine.’”

Message from our Executive Director

Daniel R. Rajczyk



Welcome to our **Sixth Dinner of Hope**. Our theme this year is "Believe in What Makes You Shine!" Many of you may be wondering why we chose this to be our theme. We believe that everyone, especially Aspergians, should believe in themselves and the value they bring to their families and communities.

This year's event is especially important to all of us at AWorks. As you all know, we, like most for-profit and nonprofit businesses were forced to shut down operations due to COVID-19. For our small organization, this was a financial disaster. We could not afford to remain in our office in Lawrence and our finances were dwindling fast as we attempted to honor our financial obligations. There was even talk of closing our door for good. But like the little engine, we decided to continue our journey against all odds with the help of some very generous friends like Pentucket and Enterprise Banks and some of you

who are here tonight. But we still had one problem: no office. Thanks to the wonderful people at the First Presbyterian Church of Haverhill, that problem was solved when they offered us office space.

Because of the good will of people like you who donated through Facebook fundraisers and by other means, we are gathered here tonight to celebrate AWorks' ninth birthday. And, with your generous support, we plan on being here for a long time to ensure that Aspergians receive a fair chance for success in their quest for, and maintenance of, appropriate employment that will allow them to lead independent and successful lives.

One of the positives in today's world is that there is much awareness of Aspergian people living amongst us. Many schools provide wonderful services to children with Asperger's, services that did not exist when I was a child. However, statistically, we still have the distinction of having the highest unemployment and underemployment rate in the entire disability community!

Why? It is difficult to say. One problem may be that most of us look like everyone else. Our

disabilities are varied and often hidden and become obvious only with certain interactions. Most of us have problems with social skills. Some of us have sensory issues. Others of us have difficulties coping with stress and anxiety and lash out or have meltdowns. We cannot be quantified like people with other types of disabilities, so employers' expectations of us are either too high (think Einstein) or too low. But all of us are different with our own quirks and it is important to accept us just the way we are.

So, we are asking employers to look past our idiosyncrasies and not judge us by our oddities. Many of us are indeed the untapped experts that America needs. And employers willing to hire us would soon discover that they made the right choice. We are great workers - loyal, honest to a fault, hard-working. All we need is a chance.

Thank you all for coming! We appreciate your support and your belief in us. We will not disappoint your trust in the coming months and years.

Asperger Syndrome (AS) is a developmental disorder characterized by significant

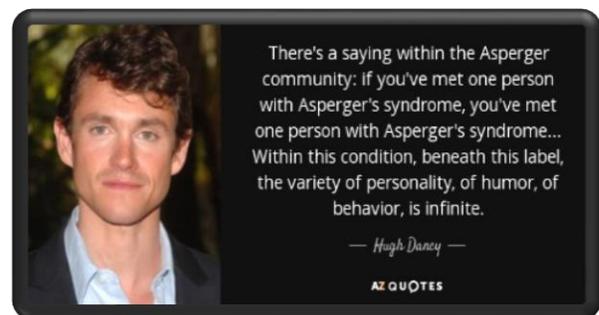
difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. It is a milder form of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), with most Aspies having average or above average IQs. It differs from other ASDs in that most Aspies have relatively normal language skills and intelligence. Although not required for diagnosis, physical clumsiness and unusual use of language may also be common. For boys, signs usually begin before the age of two. Diagnosing girls is much more difficult since girls tend to be very social at an early age. It is not until their preteen years that it may be noticed that something was amiss. There is no cure for Asperger's and it lasts for a person's entire life.

The exact cause of Asperger's is unknown. It is believed that it is probably partly inherited, but the underlying genetics have not been determined conclusively as the diagnosis of Asperger's in the United States was not available prior to the 1980s. Environmental

factors are also believed to play a role. In 2013, the diagnosis of Asperger's was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), and people with these symptoms are now included within the autism spectrum disorders along with autism and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). It remains within the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as of 2019, but only as a subtype of autism spectrum disorder. Asperger's manifests itself differently with each individual. No two Aspies, as they refer to themselves, are the same, making diagnosis difficult. Some have spatial deficits often manifested by invading another person's space. Some have heightened sensitivity and become over-stimulated by loud noises, lights, or strong tastes, smells, or textures.

On the plus side, adults with Asperger's have the tendency to pay close attention to detail and to focus on their interests that can result in success in higher

education and careers (if given the chance). Although Aspies are often associated with careers in technology, there are a number of historical figures thought to have had Asperger's, including naturalist Charles Darwin, poet Emily Dickinson, chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer, animal scientist Temple Grandin, film director Stanley Kubrick, movie director Tim Burton, author Lewis Carroll, actress and environmental activist Daryl Hannah, former CEO of Apple Steve Jobs, comedian Jerry Seinfeld, rapper Eminem, creator of Nintendo's Pokémon Satoshi Tajiri, inventor Nikola Tesla, artist Andy Warhol, poet William Butler Yeats, and sculptor/painter/architect Michelangelo.



“Imagine a world where Aspergers was the norm, and non-autistics or neorotypicals were the minority. Let’s try it: Those who feel the need to constantly be with a variety of friends are considered fickle. Those with no propensity for computers and science are called geeks. Those with no special interest are thought to be ungrounded and lost. Those with no obsessive focus have to take classes to cultivate it.”

Rudy Simone (Advocate and author)

AKA "Opposite world."

Changes things a complete 360.

But a great point.

So many challenges for people with Asperger's are socially manufactured:

* **Eye contact** - Is it really SO important?

* **Having lots of friends** - Should it be a good measure of social success? (For that matter should social success even matter that much at all?)

* **Being an "all-rounder" at school** - Aspies like certain topics of interest. Struggle if they can't see the point of something. If the school system reflected this - instead of a need for covering everything; would likely reduce problems.

* **Selling yourself at job interviews** - Interviews are false and manufactured. Why not test applicants with a real practical test of skills instead of the social merry go round of traditional interviews? Methinks ASD employment rates may improve.

* **Test academic skills all year NOT just an isolated exam** - Pressure. Pressure. Pressure. Can be unbearable for someone with ASD yet they may have showed the skills required all year [and] failed miserably on that 1 exam day.

* **Celebrate REAL knowledge** - If having an in-depth interest in animals, history, math, science, trains and other such topics was seen as a great attribute; this would up the average Aspie's cred. In a celebrity obsessed world, it seems such "bookish" knowledge comes a poor 2nd to gossip, triviality and scandal.

* **Looking a certain way** - If we could all look how we like, the world may be a more honest place. Less need to follow certain fashions, trends and rules. Aspies often ignorant to such trends would definitely do better in this type of world.

I could go on. And on . . .

Dave Angel, British author, founder and editor of *Parenting Asperger's Community*.



The Bryan Noble Award

Yvonne Christian



The **Bryan Noble Award**

was created in the memory of Paul Bryan Noble, who died way too young, but who lived a full

life despite his medical problems and other challenges. This award is presented yearly to a person who has strived to show that disabilities do not define or limit a person.

This year, we are honoring Yvonne Christian, blogger, author, artist, and advocate, who grew up in the suburbs of Maryland where she attended public school. Yvonne was as an undiagnosed autistic child who had many sensory issues and very sensitive emotional feelings. She had numerous meltdowns that labeled her as different and prompted many people to bully her without mercy. Although they thought they were trying to help Yvonne, her parents and her older siblings bullied her too hoping she would just “toughen

up.” Actually, it only ended up with them having a very difficult relationship with her.

After graduating high school in 1982, Yvonne moved to Boston and attended Emerson College. The culture of the college was more accepting of her. She did well at Emerson and graduated in 1986 with a disc jockey job just outside of Boston. However, the general manager who promised to pay her a salary lied to her. This lead her down a path of problems with employment and relationships. Yvonne was and still is interested in being a writer and an artist (being a disc jockey was never her idea).

In 2002, Yvonne went to a doctor and was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and Non-Verbal Learning Disorder. Later she was also diagnosed with Sleep Apnea. It is then that she started her first blog, *Outside In*. In August 2007, she joined the *Boston Now Newspaper* as a volunteer blogger and named her newspaper blog after her pen name *Uncommon Bostonian*. The newspaper printed many of her posts until their investors

decided to end the paper in April 2008.

Encouraged by her fellow autistic friends, Yvonne decided to put her posts with the newspaper blog into a book including her personal essays and artwork. This put her intended memoir on the back burner – a memoir that she was planning to write long before her autistic diagnosis.

In December 2008, Yvonne joined a writers group called, Writers Anonymous, a group that published **Seven at the Sevens**, an anthology of seven-word memoirs, under their pen names. Yvonne was one of the contributors, donating both an essay and artwork. **All the Weight of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism** by The Autism Women's Network was published in 2017.

In March 2017, Yvonne published her book, **The Outside in View of Uncommon Bostonian: What an Autistic Black Woman Sees**. Currently, she is planning to write a mystery novel and a memoir.



The Asperger Works Award *TBA*

Community Service Award

The Professional Center for Child Development



The **Community Service Award** is given each year to a local organization

that provides unwavering support for people with disabilities, including those on the Autism Spectrum.

This year we honor Professional Center for Child Development for their ongoing support of all children.

The Professional Center for Child Development is dedicated to providing children, of all abilities, with a solid foundation for life-long learning through their educational programs. With the support from their highly-skilled professionals, children are able to achieve their full potential.

Their Mission is to provide educational and therapeutic services for children of all abilities and their families, working with each child to develop to his or her full

potential. They strive to eliminate barriers to growth and development for children with disabilities and families coping with health issues and other challenges.

The Professional Center for Child Development places children on a path leading to achievement by providing support services so that children of all abilities may remain in a secure environment, teaching parents and caregivers to be successful advocates for children, working to transition children into settings beyond their classrooms and educating public organizations on how to provide continued community-based support for children with and without special needs.



SPEAKERS



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

United States Congresswoman Lori Trahan

Ms. Trahan could not be with us in person since she needed to be in Washington. She arranged to address us via a special video.

The first in her family to graduate college, Trahan earned a scholarship to play Division 1 volleyball at Georgetown University. Her four years as an NCAA athlete were rewarding yet challenging. Like many, she was introduced to public service as a college student in Washington D.C. After completing her Bachelor's in Comparative and Regional Studies in International Relations, she joined former Congressman Marty Meehan's staff as a scheduler, eventually working her way up to Chief of Staff. She deeply enjoyed working to serve the people of Massachusetts and was inspired by Congressman Meehan's leadership and resilience.

Trahan successfully ran for Congress in 2018. Sworn in alongside a historically diverse class of new members, Lori immediately got to work for the Third District: she enacted legislation adding the Nashua River to the National Wild and Scenic River System to protect the river for generations to come; she secured over \$30 million in funding increases for Massachusetts-based businesses that develop defense materials to keep servicemembers safe; and she established a Veterans Advisory Council to ensure our veterans receive the highest degree of attention and expertise.



MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Tim Coco, our Master of Ceremonies, first entered communications in 1978 as an intern at WHAV AM and FM in Haverhill and within a few months landed a job there in the news department. He would remain in news throughout the 1980s – serving as City Hall reporter for the then-daily *Haverhill Gazette*, regional reporter for the *Daily News* of Newburyport, and editor of an environmental trade publication based in Manchester, New Hampshire. He was later tapped to create the communications department for Ogden Corporation, Fairfield, New Jersey.

He founded COCO+CO., an advertising agency, in 1991. In 2004, coming full circle, Coco acquired the WHAV name and founded Public Media of New England Inc. Today, the non-profit corporation operates 97.9 WHAV FM, the only Haverhill-based news source.

Coco is also a commissioner of the Haverhill License Commission, past president of the Trustees of the John Greenleaf Whittier Homestead, and a commissioner of the Essex National Heritage Commission.

Coco holds an associate degree from Northern Essex Community College and a Bachelor of Science in Management from Lesley University School of Management.



*Former State Senator Barbara L'Italien with
Former Congresswoman Niki Tsongas
Dinner of Hope, 2016*

THE GALLERIA BANQUET ROOM
85 ESSEX STREET
HAVERHILL, MA 01832



*Event Dining in a Beautifully Restored Building once part
of Haverhill's Shoe Manufacturing History*

<http://www.thegalleriabanquetroom.com/>
mariasfamilyrestaurant@verizon.net

978-521-1472

Stephanie Beach Magic



**Make your event Magical with Stephanie Beach Magic.
Visit StephanieBeachMagic.com or call 978-486-4242**



The Professional Center for Child Development

We are proud to be
recognized by
Asperger Works
for supporting
children and
families in
the community.

Our Quality Programs Include:

Developmental Day School
Early Intervention Program
Regional Consultation Program
Toddler Interactive Playgroups
Woodbridge Early Childhood School

Call us today for more information!



Nurturing the Growth and Potential of EVERY Child

32 Osgood Street, Andover, MA 01810 | 439 S. Union Street, Lawrence, MA 01843
978.475.3806 (A) | thepccd.org | 978.688.5070 (L)

GOLD SPONSOR



SILVER SPONSOR

Enterprise Bank

proudly supports
Asperger Works and the
annual Dinner of Hope

Thank you for the work
you do in our community.

25 convenient locations including:

LAWRENCE | 290 Merrimack Street

978-656-5756 | 877-671-2265

EnterpriseBanking.com

EB Enterprise Bank
CREATE SUCCESS

Member FDIC