

Dinner of Hope

***"Employers, the Key to
Aspie Success"***



***October 7, 2022
10th Annual Dinner of Hope***

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Registration and Cocktails

6:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Opening Remarks	Tim Coco, Master of Ceremonies
Welcome Message Introduced by Tim Coco	Daniel Rajczyk, President, ED

Dinner

Keynote Address Introduced by Tim Coco	City Councilor Joseph Bevilacqua
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Awards Presentation

The Bryan Noble Award	“Spectrum Chris” Robbins
The Asperger Works Award	Lisa S. Rajczyk
The Community Service Award	L’Arche Boston North

Entertainment

Magic Show Introduced by Tim Coco	Stephanie Beach Magic Show
50/50 and Silent Auction	AWorks Directors/Advisors
Music by	DJ Decibel

Dancing

DINNER COMMITTEE MEMBERS

M. Eva Rajczyk, Event Coordinator
Adam Rajczyk, Daniel R. Rajczyk, Lisa S. Rajczyk, Thomas “Woody” Wood

Cover artwork by Eva Rajczyk

Message from our Executive Director

Daniel R. Rajczyk



Welcome to the **Dinner of Hope**. This year's theme is "*Employers, the Key to Aspie Success!*" We hear

in the news that the rate of unemployment in America is the lowest it has been in decades. But this is not true for adults in the Autism/Asperger community. Consistently, year-in and year-out only twenty percent of Aspie adults are gainfully employed. It is not because Aspies don't want to work. It is because there are too many employers who will not hire them.

We decided to try to mitigate this situation by bringing this issue to employers. This Spring, we hired as our Business Outreach Coordinator Kim Boudrot from Wenham, MA. Through her efforts, we were able to connect with several employers who indicated that they were willing to hire members of the Autism/Asperger community.

But, at the same time, you need to know that there were too many companies that were closed to the idea of even participating in a presentation that had to do with Asperger's Syndrome.

Because of the good will of people like you who donated through Facebook fundraisers and by other means, and our sponsors, Pentucket and Enterprise Banks, we are gathered here tonight to celebrate AWorks' tenth anniversary. And, with your generous support, we plan on being here for as long as it takes 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.

Finally, there is much awareness of Autism/Asperger's not only in the United States but also throughout the world. But awareness is not enough! Acceptance is what all Aspies are longing for. Being recognized for their talents is what they are hoping for. Yes, we have our quirks. Yes, we

have needs that neurotypicals (people not on the Autism Spectrum) do not. But we are valuable to companies that are willing to take a chance on us because we bring our talents and our passion to the jobs we are hired to do! Hiring an Aspie is a win-win. Aspies win because they become productive members of society and companies win because they have employees who often go above and beyond what is expected of them.

So, we thank employers who are willing to take a chance on us, Aspies. And we celebrate them tonight.

And we thank all of you for coming tonight! 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. As Daniel likes to say, "You were born an Aspie and you will die an Aspie."

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. In the last year, there have been many advances made in the study of autism. The latest studies have concentrated on the brain development of autistic people. For instance, an almond-shaped structure in the brain called amygdala is enlarged in people on the Autism Spectrum. The amygdala is involved in processing emotions such as feeling afraid or interpreting facial expressions. It was also recently discovered that the faster the rate of growth of this part of the brain in children between six to twenty-four months, the greater the severity of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) symptoms.

In 2013, the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome 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. It remains within

the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as of 2019, but only as a subtype of ASD. Asperger's manifests itself differently with each individual. It was only recently noted that women may also be Aspergian. This revelation came about as a result of the discovery that female Aspies present differently than males. No two Aspies are alike, making diagnosis difficult. Some have spatial deficits often exhibited 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 been Aspies, including naturalist Charles Darwin, poet Emily Dickinson, chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer, author Lewis Carroll, Steve Jobs (former CEO of Apple), poet William Butler Yeats, film director Stanley Kubrick, artist Andy Warhol,

Jim Henson of Muppet fame, Physicist Albert Einstein, and sculptor / painter / architect Michelangelo.

Other famous Aspies include comedian Jerry Seinfeld, rapper Eminem, Satoshi Tajiri (creator of Nintendo's Pokémon), animal scientist Temple Grandin, movie director Tim Burton, actress and environmental activist Daryl Hannah, climate activist Greta Thunberg, singer Susan Boyle, actor, comedian Dan Aykroyd, and Olympian Breanna Clark.

Asperger Works Connection

Although the people mentioned above prove that those with Asperger's Syndrome could live successful lives, a large percentage are not so lucky. According to the latest report from the CDC, 80 to 90 percent of adults with Asperger's are either unemployed or under-employed and are unable to support themselves. They rely on their families and the government for their livelihood.

Contrary to claims by some politicians and lay people, Aspies hate being thought of as "takers." Their goal is to find jobs that reflect their talents and education – jobs that will allow them to live independent, productive lives. It is this that

Asperger Works was formed to facilitate through employer education and client job-skills preparation.

Although there are many organizations that help people with high-functioning autism or Asperger's, the truth is that today the only organization in the Merrimack Valley whose *sole* mission is to help adult Aspies with employment issues is **Asperger Works**. Members of the Board and Advisory are either Aspies themselves or have Aspie family members. It is important to us that people who join our organization have a vested interest in our mission to help adults with AS lead productive lives through gainful employment. It is also part of our mission to educate employers about the positive side of hiring people with Asperger's Syndrome.

"What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool? You would have a bunch of people standing around in a cave, socializing and not getting anything done."

Dr. Temple Grandin



The Bryan Noble Award

“Spectrum Chris” Robbins

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 Christopher Wood-Robbins, who prefers to be called “Spectrum Chris” when working on his writings and art. He was born in Boston on September 27, 1965 and graduated from Whitman-Hanson High in 1984. He has volunteered for such causes as The Jane Doe Walk for Women’s Safety in the 1990’s and Women’s Lunch Place from 2000 to 2003. He has also written poems and short stories since the mid-eighties. In 2007, he was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. He joined the Asperger’s Association of New England (AANE) from 2007 to 2013, during which time he met and married his wife, Julie. An essay he wrote on Asperger’s was

recommended by the South Shore Writer’s Club and published in the Boston Sunday Globe Magazine on October 4, 2009 under the title “***Connecting the Dots.***” He has also marched for Black Lives Matter and Black Women’s Blueprint from 2014 to 2018. Some of his poems can be found in the Barking Sycamores anthologies, Volumes 1 and 2, available on Amazon and barnesandnoble.com.

The Asperger Works Award

Lisa Sara Rajczyk



The Asperger Works Award is given to a person in recognition for their commitment to individuals and/or nonprofit organizations, like

Asperger Works, that try to make life better for all in their communities.

This year, we are honoring Lisa Sara Rajczyk, AWorks’ volunteer coordinator and board member. Lisa is also a founding member of the organization. Lisa’s passion and enthusiasm when it comes to Aspergians and other people with mental, neurological, or physical challenges are infectious. She is a

crusader for social justice and is not afraid to share her strong feelings regarding political issues. Lisa is the loudest cheerleader for politicians and causes she supports and believes in.

It is a testament to her kindness, caring, and bubbly personality that she was recognized as an exemplary employee at Chili's not only by the management but also by customers and fellow employees.

In her spare time, Lisa writes poetry that is profound although at times can be very dark. She is a woman who loves music and dancing. Her culinary prowess is celebrated by members of her family and anyone else who has been lucky enough to partake of her meals. And her "Lisa cookies," as her grandfather called them, are out of this world!

Community Service Award

L'Arche Boston North

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 L'Arche Boston North, a community that supports people with development disabilities.

L'Arche Boston North is committed to transforming the world, one life at a time, by creating spaces of inclusion and belonging with and for people with disabilities. L'Arche is an international organization that provides supports to people with disabilities in a variety of settings around the world.

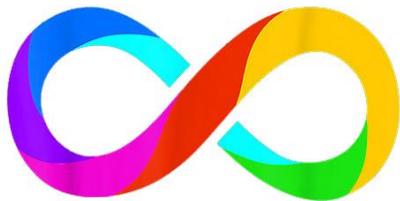
L'Arche Boston North is home to 20 individuals with disabilities and the caregivers who share life with them, learning and growing together through mutually transforming relationships across difference. L'Arche Boston North also provides culinary vocational training through the Homemade Hummus program, which produces fresh hummus for local farmers' markets and online sale. They also make delicious homemade meals for takeout and also cater select events.

L'Arche impacts our local Haverhill community through their culinary program's service to local food pantries. They also host **The Longest Table**, a popular local event that brings together local restaurants and invites our neighbors to come together to share a meal at one table.

L'Arche community members are part of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, the Haverhill Exchange Club, the Hometown Heroes project, and local faith communities including All Saints Parish, Sacred Hearts Parish, St. Michael Parish, and West Church.

They partner with a variety of organizations to share their message of inclusion and belonging. As Judith Longval, a resident of L'Arche Boston North since 1992, says: "I belong here, most certainly do! Everybody does here in this world. Yup. Everybody does." And we heartily agree.

LOVE NEEDS



NO WORDS

Angels are flying (to Adam & Eva)

by Sassy Sara

Angels are flying under the moon light towards heaven's gate!!!!!!!!!!!!

As the sunrise begins to appear through the darkness, sudden rays of sunlight appear, and doves begins to awaken in each other's arms.

They gaze into eyes of their beloved while holding each other as they watch the years fly by. Whispering sweet nothings through open cracks of yesteryears.

Wake up to the sound of chirping birds!

They look at their true loves and he strokes her soft velvety hair, staring into hypnotizing soft warm, ocean-blue mysterious eyes.

She strokes his soft white hair and gazes into his gentle sparkling brown eyes.

Holding each other, as the years go by....

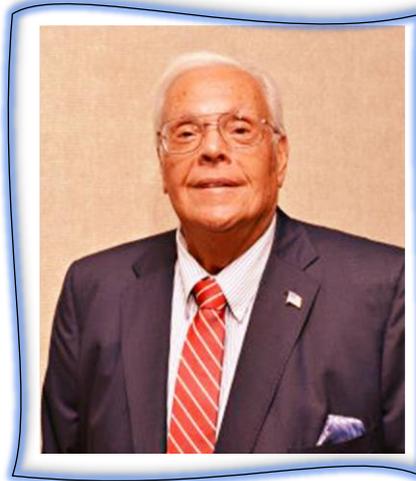
Each passing day their love grows as flowers begin to bloom one spring after another.

Listen to cries of sadness as darkness returns and the heavens creep down back to the bottom of ocean.

"Farewell my love," they chant, "until the sun rises once more tomorrow."

And they promise each other. "I will never stop loving you."

After 50 years together, they still have the spark that started it all.



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Haverhill City Councilor Joseph

Joseph (Joe) Bevilacqua is the CEO and President of the Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce (MVCC) and is a second-term Haverhill City Councilor. Until his election to the City Council, Joe served on the Haverhill School Committee for many years. He has been married for forty-one years and is the proud father of two sons, one of whom (Michael) is the vice-president of the Chamber. He has a master's degree in public administration and has done some post graduate work at Harvard.

Over the years, Mr. Bevilacqua filled many positions both in the area and the state. He is the past chairman of MassHires Merrimack Valley Workforce Board and currently serves as its director. He is the past chairman of the Massachusetts Economic Development Council (MEDC), the past chairman and current director of the North of Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Merrimack Valley Advisory Board for the United Way, the past chairman of both the New England and Massachusetts Associations of Chamber of Commerce Executives, former City of Haverhill Planning and Economic Development Director, Founding Committee member and former director of the Essex Heritage Commission. He has also been a speaker at various national conferences and is a multiple award recipient.



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.

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