

# OUT & ABOUT



Out & About is a publication  
of the Office for the Disabled

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Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive

Evan Latainer, Director, Office for the Disabled

## Westchester Starts Special Needs Registry

Anyone who is elderly or disabled and would have no way of leaving their home quickly in an emergency should sign up for Westchester County's new Special Needs Registry.

The registry is a list of residents who may need additional assistance, transportation or a place to stay should a major emergency or disaster occur. The database would be made available to emergency responders who would want to know who is in need and where they should focus their

resources.

"This is a think-ahead program the county is starting to further ensure the safety of its residents," said County Executive Andy Spano "It should give people some peace of mind to know that in an emergency situation someone would know where they were."

Note that while this  
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**A new registry would list residents who may need additional assistance in a major emergency or disaster.**

## The Miracle League - A Young Man's View

BY AJ BARBARIA

I am a fourteen-year-old freshman at New Rochelle High School. Sports play a big role in my life, especially baseball. My love of baseball brought me to the Miracle League.

I first heard about the organization on News12. My family and I were watching television when a segment came on about a baseball league dedicated to children

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**The love of baseball brought buddy AJ and player Nicholas together on the Miracle League's Field of Dreams.**

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## The Miracle League

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with disabilities. When the segment was over, my family talked about responsibility and civic service (Little did I know that a community service project would turn into my second family). My mother went on the computer to find the Miracle League website.

The following Sunday, we drove to Miracle League's Field of Dreams to see what it was about. During the car ride, I had no idea what to expect, and to tell you the truth, I was a little intimidated. I have no regrets about getting in the car that morning and signing up to be a buddy. It has been a life changing experience.

Good first impressions are important. The first thing I remember seeing is how professional and "big league" the field appeared. There are bleachers for the fans, and proper equipment for the children. All of the players were wearing uniforms; there were donuts and coffee or water for the players, buddies and fans. The board members, organizational leaders, and coaches greeted me and quickly went over tips to being a buddy.

At that first game, I was the only unpaired buddy. If it wasn't for the Seitz family being fashionably late, perhaps I wouldn't have met my best friend. Nicholas was the last player to arrive and I was the last buddy, so naturally, we were paired. Everything happens for a reason. To me, it doesn't matter how or why, it matters that it happened.

Ever since that first day, I am proud to say that Nicholas and I have always been player and buddy and we have only missed one game in two years.

It goes further than that.



**The Office for the Disabled wishes you a very happy 2009.**

We email each other; we always talk about baseball and motorcycles. Nicholas and his family have attended some of my baseball games and our parents go out to dinner with each other.

Nicholas understands me and loves baseball as much as I do. We have built a true friendship. He knows when I am tired and I know when he is thirsty. We practically read each others mind. There are many different ways to be a buddy and I realize I'm lucky that I have this kind of friendship. A relationship like this is something that cannot be promised if you are a buddy. We have learned to love each other like brothers, and that has made all of the difference.

Being a buddy has impacted my attitude and outlook on life. Being a buddy is a way of directly helping someone. You assist and talk and watch over your player. It is quite a feeling of accomplishment because you know that you touched that person's life. That I've allowed a parent to sit for an hour and watch their child play a game and cheer for their kid from the bleachers just like any other parent makes me happy. Giving money to an

organization, such as the Miracle League, is great but giving an hour a half a week is even greater. The reason I chose to give back to this organization is because I do what I love. I love baseball and I love to help anyone who would want to play the game, even if it is not exactly the same way I play it.

When I am on the Miracle Field, I pretend that I am invisible. The buddies, like me, are there to help shine the spotlight on the young man or lady playing the game of baseball. In order to succeed at being invisible, you must learn patience. This is one of the most powerful things I have learned from Miracle League. Some days, your player needs more help than others, or the game takes a really long time, or your player hasn't gotten a ball in a while. By acquiring a sense of patience, one may know that being a buddy is more than about helping your player, it is about understanding, it is about being their friend. It is about knowing that they are just like you, and in many ways they have an inner strength greater than us.

## County News

### Help for Home Heating Costs!

If your home heating bills are more than you can handle, you may be eligible for assistance from HEAP – The Home Energy Assistance Program.

HEAP can help low-income residents pay for electricity, oil, gas, wood, kerosene, propane or coal heating. To find out if you meet income guidelines, or for more information, call the Westchester County Department of Social Services at (914) 995-5619 or visit [Westchester.gov](http://Westchester.gov).

### Program Helps Residents Get Income Tax Refunds

Last year, Westchester County helped 4,860 low- or moderate-income residents get income tax refunds of more than \$4 million. Qualified residents can also take advantage of free preparation services through the county Department of Social Services.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a tax credit available to people with maximum household incomes of \$42,000. Eligible people could receive a credit of up to \$6,512 on their 2008 tax returns. The amount a family gets varies depending on the number of children in the household and the amount of earnings.

All returns are electronically filed and if the taxpayers have direct deposit, the taxpayer will receive their refunds within 10 days. These services will be available from January 30 to April 15, 2009.

People should call 2-1-1 for exact locations and business hours.

Appointments or walk-in are acceptable.

### County Government: Good Value for Your Dollar

When it comes to property taxes, Westchester County government is getting a bum rap. Did you know that county taxes account for only 15-18 percent of your total tax bill?

What do you get for your county tax dollars? Police protection and training, a bus system, dispatching of emergency calls, free health clinics, services for the disabled, the elderly and the disadvantaged, not to mention one of the finest parks systems in the nation and hundreds of other services.

When national surveys say that Westchester County taxpayers have the highest (or second highest) taxes in the country, many people blame the county government. But those surveys are based on every taxing jurisdiction, not just the county government. This includes taxes to schools, towns and villages, fire and sewer districts.

Having said that, Westchester County government is concerned about keeping the county portion of your taxes as low as possible.

County Executive Andy Spano just released a 2009 budget that actually cuts spending for 2009 – despite an increase of more than \$20 million in energy costs and mandated expenses. The county also faced a loss of \$26 million in revenue due to the economic crisis. Spano cut spending by eliminating vacant jobs, cutting overtime, equipment and supplies and by ending a subsidy to Playland, among other things.

### Recycle Your Medications and Plastic Bags

Westchester County has expanded its Household Recycling Day program and is now accepting old or expired medications and used plastic bags as well as other household waste.

Find the recycling day schedule and see what else you can bring (household chemicals, personal documents for shredding, tires and e-waste like computers, TVs, etc) by calling (914) 813-5425 or visiting [www.westchestergov.com](http://www.westchestergov.com).

### Job Assistance

Are you looking for a job? Do you need to sharpen your computer skills? The One Stop Employment Center offers the following services for job seekers: job search, job placement, introduction to computers and office programs such as Excel and Word, resume writing workshop, and help using the Internet. Westchester One Stop Employment Centers are located at:

White Plains at  
120 Bloomingdale Road .

Peekskill at  
201 James Street

Mount Vernon at  
100 East First Street

Yonkers at  
20 South Broadway, Suite 1209

For more information,  
call (914) 995-3910.

## Partners for Success

Individuals with disabilities who want to better understand themselves and eventually pursue productive employment should consider Partners for Success, a Vocational Rehabilitation Readiness Training Program designed by the Westchester Independent Living Center.

The Partners for Success program consists of two parts. The first consists of 24 hours of mandatory classroom training that covers subjects ranging from identifying one's strengths and weaknesses to time planning and management. The second part offers up to 16 hours of one-to-one peer mentoring and follow up services, and includes referrals to other agencies/programs.

This is not a job search or resume writing program. It is about setting realistic goals and accepting responsibility and accountability for achieving them.

Training sessions are held on a monthly basis. For a current schedule or more information, call (914) 682-3926 (Voice) or (914) 682-0926 (TTY).

## Peer to Peer Mentoring Program

Looking for work and think you would benefit from having a mentor?

Join the Peer to Peer program at Westchester Disabled on the Move and learn more about available employment and vocational rehabilitation services.

Attend a weekly workshop series on how to negotiate the

VESID and CBVH systems successfully. Learn the skills that you need to know to be successful on the job and discuss other interesting subjects involving employment.

For more information contact Scott Barber, peer mentoring coordinator at Westchester Disabled on the Move, 984 North Broadway, Suite L-01, Yonkers, NY 10701. (914) 968-4717 or [www.wdom.org](http://www.wdom.org).

## Disability Breakfast

Celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month, Westchester County honored disabled employees and employers at the annual achievement awards breakfast at the Doral Arrowwood Conference Center on Oct. 30.

This year's event honored 78 employees and 74 employers. The keynote speaker was Ken Kunken, deputy bureau chief of the Nassau County DA's office, who shared his wonderful story of challenge and triumph. Despite being paralyzed from the shoulders down for more than 34 years as a result of a spinal cord injury, Kunken has not let his injury keep him from realizing his goals and dreams. He said everyone possesses certain innate abilities and even the most difficult obstacles can be the springboards to the most satisfying success.

Patty Polacek of Ossining received the prestigious Employee Longevity Award.

The breakfast celebrates Disability Awareness Month and is sponsored annually by the Westchester County Office of the Disabled, the Westchester Employment Network (WEN), Doral Arrowwood and Diana Gould Ltd.

## Feel Depressed?

Everyone feels down at some point or another, but clinical depression is more than that. It's a serious illness that can leave an individual feeling intense sadness and hopelessness, and interfere with every aspect of life.

If you think you may need help, call the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health's Depression Support Network, Monday -Friday 9-5 p.m. at (914) 995-5236 to speak to a mental health professional. Referrals are also available.

## We Need Your Email Address!

This will be the last printed issue of Out & About. If you would like to continue receiving news and updates from the Office for the Disabled, please go to [www.westchestergov.com/outand-about](http://www.westchestergov.com/outand-about) and sign up for our electronic newsletter. If you'd rather sign up by mail, please send in the form below.

**Please fill out and return:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Email Address**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Confirm Email Address**

Mail to:  
Westchester County Office  
for the Disabled,  
148 Martine Ave., Room 102  
White Plains, NY 10601.

## Football Passion Brings Boy with Autism out of his Shell

BY ROBIN MORRIS

The NFL draft is a machine, hardly designed for the faint of stamina. Fans line up at the doors of such landmarks as Madison Square Garden, or Radio City Music Hall on a first-come first-served basis and hope to hear the name of their choice player scooped up by their favorite team. It is a day of promise for young talent and fodder for the fans; another vehicle that creates heroes.

What's interesting about the coveted results of the NFL draft is that ultimately it is simply a list. Lists are food for individuals with autism. Lists provide comfort and stability. Lists are a constant; once announced, they do not change. Lists have been the fruit of our child's steadiness in a world of uncertainty. A devout sports fan, our son Paul, 15, thrives on athletic minutiae with precise notation.

One dreary Saturday in spring 2003 marked an event that diehard football fans might appreciate, but it is the families of autism who will truly comprehend. It was raining – a cold and bitter kind of weather that chills your bones. The doors had closed, denying entry to the hundreds of hopefuls who wanted to witness football history. Disappointment prevailed as the mob began to disperse. Paul, plagued by the rigidity of autism, could not reconcile his frustration. So there he wailed in the rain, right at the door of Madison Square Garden, heartbroken. How could we explain to the gawking crowd that autism vandalizes the social and neurological systems of those

who suffer from it? How could we explain what drives a child tormented with such behaviors? It is foreign to those who navigate the social world within the customary guidelines. The disappointment for Paul was so tangible that his body was visibly shaken. The only way that he could articulate his pain was to repeat a mantra that he hadn't "been good enough to go to the draft."

Words failed us. We who love this boy beyond words could not alleviate his agony. But we vowed to help him learn flexibility, a daunting challenge for those on the autism spectrum.

Time and intervention were

our partners. It is an arduous task to usher children with autism into the typical social world. Every nuance must be taught to a child with autism. There is no natural progression for understanding idiom or banter. Words are meaningless without comprehension. We made Herculean efforts with little response, fully aware that hard work does not necessarily glean success. That explains the complexity and mystery of autism.

A year later, Paul again began to fixate on the NFL draft. Perhaps it was simple fear of the inevitable or a last-effort idea, but we encouraged Paul to write a letter to Jeff Lurie, owner of the

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## Westchester Network for People with Disabilities Event Schedule

**Saturday, January 17, 2009**  
Shubert Performing Arts Center  
New Haven, CT

### "CATS"

Transportation provided  
Meet at the JCC at noon,  
return 6:30 p.m.

Cost: \$28 per person includes  
play and transportation

### February date – to be determined

Westchester Broadway Theater  
"MESHUGGAH"

Meet at the theater at  
11:30 a.m. for lunch  
Show 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Cost: \$38 per person includes  
play, lunch, and gratuities

### Sunday, March 29, 2009

West Point Eisenhower Theater  
"HAIRSPRAY"

Transportation provided  
Show begins at 2:00 p.m.  
Meet at the JCC at noon,  
return 6:30 p.m.

Must bring photo ID  
Cost: \$36 per person includes  
play and transportation

### Sunday, April 19, 2009

**MS WALKATHON AND  
PICNIC/BARBEQUE**

Rye Playland

Meet at Playland at 9:00 am  
Lunch at 11:30 a.m.

Cost: \$10 per person

### Sunday, May 17, 2009

**NYACK STREET FAIR**

Vendors, food and music

Transportation provided

Meet at the JCC at noon,

return 6:00 p.m.

Cost: \$5 per person  
for transportation

### June 13, 2009

Glen Island Park and Beach

**SWIMMING AND PICNIC**

Pelham Road, New Rochelle

Meet at the park at noon.

Cost: \$5 per person  
includes lunch

### QUESTIONS?

Call Project Director, Tricia Gressel  
914-366-7898 Ext. 144

NPD is made possible through a  
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Butler Foundation.

## Special Needs Registry

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registry is confidential, it will be shared with local, state and federal agencies that might be involved in an emergency response. While registrants are not guaranteed assistance, the registry is a first step as well as an essential tool that would help in emergency management efforts.

The registry is for people who live on their own and do not have family to rely on.

You can register by calling 211 and signing up over the phone. You can also register yourself online at [www.westchestergov.com/specialneeds](http://www.westchestergov.com/specialneeds). Just signing up, however, does not mean you will be listed. Rather, applicants will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

## Football Passion

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Philadelphia Eagles whose brother suffers from autism.

Slowly and deliberately, he

typed a short note on his computer. This was equivalent to volumes in our eyes. One day Paul received a call from Lurie's office asking how many tickets he would like to attend the 2004 NFL draft. What generosity of spirit and thoughtful consideration! Jeff Lurie simply knows.

And so, on that Saturday, Paul, accompanied by his father and brother walked down the bleachers at Madison Square Garden, and sat surrounded by broadcaster Chris Berman and Bob Shoop, then football coach of Columbia University. The exhilaration for Paul was electrifying, and we silently planned to tackle new vistas. That day, our boy transcended the pitfalls of autism. He socialized, fraternized, verbalized and clearly triumphed in the day. That Saturday cemented another kind of hero: Paul.

Time provides a unique perspective in separating the forest from the trees. Sometimes, when we live in a small world of chaos, we are totally immersed in the now, rather than the look where we've been. Autism is so consuming, for parents, children, family and friends. It does not matter

how significant the impairment; our personal pain is not measured by degrees.

Our struggle with autism continues, but Paul has employed his enthusiasm for the NFL draft and used that skill to converse with others. Following the 2004 draft, he emailed Shoop at Columbia and forwarded statistics about one of our high school players. The senior was then called for an interview. Go figure!

Most compelling for his family is that Paul has learned that he can be flexible. In subsequent years, he has watched the NFL draft on TV and been able to report to us his passion with the usual gusto. That is Paul's plan for Saturday. For parents, how sweet that is!

*Robin H. Morris is a parent advocate for Revolution Health at [revolutionhealth.com/advocacy/robin-morris](http://revolutionhealth.com/advocacy/robin-morris). Her article was reprinted with permission from The Philadelphia Inquirer.*