



Autism Communities holds its First Annual Gala at The Garden City Hotel

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Shown (from left) are: Autism Communities board member Paul Pedretti; Bruce Mosler, chairman of global brokerage, Cushman & Wakefield, Inc., and Autism Communities founder and chairman Charles Massimo.

Photo Credit: Autism Communities

Deer Park, NY Autism Communities, a not-for-profit agency that was formed to provide housing for individuals with autism that facilitates an independent, safe and inclusive living environment, recently held its First Annual Gala at The Garden City Hotel, where it honored Bruce Mosler, chairman of global brokerage at Cushman & Wakefield, a leading global real estate services firm. The 175 attendees enjoyed an exquisite evening of dining and world-class entertainment provided by the internationally renowned recording artist, John McDermott, a founding member and participant in the PBS phenomenon, The Irish Tenors. McDermott performed songs from his popular album, Danny Boy among others.

Mosler, who has no direct connection to Autism, has been very supportive of Autism Communities' mission and how it helps families impacted by autism. He said, "Autism Communities is an organization that is doing something uniquely innovative – something that no other organizations are doing. They are thinking outside the box."

According to Autism Communities chairman and founder Charles Massimo, CEO of CJM Wealth Management, the father of 19-year old triplets; a daughter and two sons, both of whom have autism, "Long Island has the second largest cluster of children on the Autism Spectrum. These thousands of children will grow up and need a place to live. The number one concern parents of children with autism have, where will my son or daughter live when they can no longer live with us?"

Massimo noted that there is currently a ten year wait list on group homes for which state funding is being cut dramatically.

Moreover, he said, most parents don't want their children to spend their adult lives in a group home, which can become very isolating.

"Before Autism Communities, the options for Long Island families with children on the spectrum

were few,” said Massimo. “They could build extensions on their homes for thousands of dollars, or have their child continue living with them until they die. And, then what happens. We are giving adults with autism the opportunity to live, work, volunteer and participate in the community, residing in safe, supportive and integrated communities where they can live meaningful, purposeful lives.”

Massimo, who founded the organization in 2015, noted that Autism Communities is now accepting applications for residents in its first community which will be located at Westbrook Village in East Islip, a Greenview Properties luxury apartment complex, built by developer Larry Gargano. Locations are also planned for additional communities initially in Suffolk County. Individuals across the spectrum, over 21 years of age and who are not medically fragile, will be screened for their ability to live within the communities’ setting. Since announcing that applications are now being accepted was made in September, more and more families are learning about the organization and getting involved. The gala was an opportunity to raise awareness of the need for this housing and Autism Communities’ mission.

Serving as dinner chairman for the event was Tom Higgins, executive vice president of Fiserv Corp. Others who were very instrumental in the success of the event include former NYS senator Michael Balboni, now founder and managing partner of Redland Strategies Inc., a consulting firm aiding companies and government agencies, and Autism Communities board member Paul Pedretti, a real estate and marine consultant.

Pedretti said, “This was one of our organization’s most successful events, coming at a critical time as we now launch into the next phase of our development – accepting applications for our first community. The success of the event was made possible by all of our loyal supporters, volunteers and generous sponsors that included Fiserv, AFD Contract Furniture, Cushman & Wakefield, CJM Wealth Management, Mutual of America, RXR Realty, CBRE, Red Apple Group, Con Edison, and Greenway USA.”

Long Islanders and Long Island businesses interested in supporting Autism Communities, should visit: www.autismcommunities.org to learn more and see how they can help participate in coming events.

Autism Communities is a privately-controlled and funded 501(c) (3) not for profit. The organization’s mission is to develop privately-controlled, person-centered, supportive, supervised living arrangements on Long Island for adults with autism. The goal is to help adults with autism live fulfilled lives as fully-assimilated members of the community. The first charter is located on Long Island.

The planned housing solutions will be designed and developed to give each individual a sense of belonging, a purpose, and a connection to their greater community. The vision is that adults with autism can be fully-integrated into the larger community, where they can engage with others and attain satisfying, productive and happy lives.

Individual needs will be addressed across multiple domains from family, daily living and vocational

interests to health and safety, behavioral and emotional development, as well as social and recreational growth. To learn more about the organization, volunteer and donation opportunities, and upcoming events, visit <https://autismcommunities.org/>

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