



Update

March 2010

A Newsletter for Parents and Friends of

THE FIRST OCCUPATIONAL CENTER OF NEW JERSEY

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 4

A Message from the President

The First Occupational Center of New Jersey has helped individuals who are disadvantaged and disabled for over 55 years. I believe that we will continue to facilitate great change and success for our clients as we enter this new decade.

The past few years have been difficult times in our nation and notwithstanding, OCNJ too has been impacted by the state of the economy. Our agency has endured some challenging events:

- 1) our dedicated employees accepted furlough days since February of 2009;
- 2) there have been cutbacks and changes in funding from our State, County, and municipal grants and contracts (for example, funding from the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation decreased 10% and the Division of Mental Health decreased 20%);
- 3) cuts in program grants and contracts translates into staff layoffs and reduction;
- 4) costs for insurance continue to rise for our many staff; and
- 5) the inevitable stress among staff and clients is quite evident as funding for our programs continues to decrease.

However, even with the bleak portrait of the reality OCNJ has faced, we have analyzed all programs to ensure that our organization will continue to operate efficiently and that our clients will continue to be served through our job training and placement initiatives.

Most importantly, we have put together a plan to reorganize our services and continue to provide the best services to our clients; hire and maintain as many staff as is feasible; and support our social entrepreneurial efforts - our businesses in recycling, building services, security, and production - will continue to grow and whose income will provide them with the ability to obtain more statewide contracts and bring much needed revenue back into our training and rehabilitation programs.

I write this as a message of hope and possibilities. We are resilient and we are determined to continue on the path to provide services for our clients to move from "dependence to independence."

We hope that your support will continue as we go through a reinvention of sorts...your continued belief in what OCNJ is all about is why we will see positive outcomes throughout 2010! Thank you.



*Rocco J. Meola,
President/CEO*



**We are now on
Facebook.**

**Find us at First Occupational
of New Jersey, Inc.**

Consider supporting our work through a monthly donation. A donation of any amount monthly will ensure that our clients with disabilities/disadvantages continue to receive the best possible service and care.

Donate through Facebook CAUSES or on our website, at www.ocnj.org.

Look out for OCNJ's Open House coming this Spring 2010!



Why OCNJ Matters

by Dr. Laurie Anne Roemmele, non profit consultant and OCNJ Donor since 2000

Many years ago, I sat in a county-wide forum for non-profit organizations that provided assistance to individuals seeking employment. That program continues to impact me to this day as I work with social service agencies all over the State of New Jersey. The truth is, I never saw anything better than what I observed happening at The First Occupational Center of New Jersey. I have always come back to realizing that the innovation, professionalism, and the success achieved by The First Occupational Center of New Jersey (OCNJ) are not often found and its entrepreneurial and practical approach to helping people find jobs makes it a national model for how non-profit organizations can survive in the 21st century.

OCNJ provides a path for individuals to move from dependence to self-sufficiency. It aggressively seeks out employment for its clients so they can achieve a level of independence and self-confidence.

That, in and of itself, may not seem unique among non-profits. However, unlike other organizations, OCNJ, the state's oldest and largest vocational training and job placement agency, utilizes a different approach to provide training and employment. Where many non-profits rely on government grants to support their services, for over 25 years OCNJ has employed a strategy that enables individuals to receive occupational training and obtain competitive employment through OCNJ's ability to establish its own viable businesses. OCNJ earns more than 70 percent of its budget through

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Businesses On The Move

Through the revenue obtained through its businesses (recycling, building services, packaging/assembly, security, grounds-keeping), OCNJ can provide necessary support to its vocational training, placement, and rehabilitation services.

In this issue, we feature the continuous growth of our recycling business, FORWI (First Occupational Recycling and Waste, Inc.)

FORWI currently serves 22 municipalities where you will see our trucks collecting recyclables, including newspapers, bottles, cans, and solid waste. Most recently, FORWI has begun to also provide street sweeping, assisting private and public employers in achieving and maintaining compliance with the new state regulations regarding street sweeping and storm water regulations. This business has an impeccable record of outstanding customer service, and exceptional performance that has been recognized by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and Energy, with both the Outstanding Achievement in Recycling Award and American Public Works Association Award.

FORWI offers municipalities in New Jersey state of the art, safe, efficient, and affordable curbside collection of recyclable materials, all customized according to customer needs and budgets. The business also works on building awareness, interest, and commitment to the tremendous benefits of recycling, especially during this time when so much emphasis has been placed on communities and individuals to be more environmentally conscientious.

The goal for 2010 is to continue its progressive growth by accessing capital funding that will enable FORWI to purchase additional trucks, maintain and repair the fleet, and provide continuous training and skill-building to the professional, high quality staff. FORWI is a wonderful opportunity for individuals who come to OCNJ for job training and placement services. Those who obtain the CDL license drive our trucks and other employees will readily advance through their good and proficient performance. As part of its non-profit Mission, OCNJ seeks to facilitate a path for individuals to move from dependence towards self-sufficiency. It aggressively seeks out employment – like FORWI – for its clients so they can achieve a level of independence and self-confidence.

For more information on how FORWI can assist you, please contact John Cox at 1-800-747-6265



A Lakeside School Culinary Arts student prepares dishes for the Annual Holiday Party. (See story, page 4).



OCNJ Completes Neighborhood Works Project

“I am happy to finally have a good job with good pay so I can now take care of my family,” stated James P., who completed OCNJ’s Commercial Drivers License Training Program.



This program, Neighborhood Works, was supported by a three-year grant through the Prudential Foundation. During a time of economic challenges and increasingly high unemployment, many individuals are reevaluating their career path and searching out employment in labor demand occupations. Today, in Northern New Jersey, a career in transportation continues to be a growth industry where employers are continuously seeking drivers of trucks and buses.

Individuals who participate in this initiative enter the program with a valid driver’s license, are over 18 years of age, have a current driving history from the Department of Motor Vehicles (driver’s license abstract), and are able to pass the Department of Transportation physical. OCNJ prepared enrolled students to pass the state-administered commercial driver’s license exam and drive a truck successfully, and helped each participant get a job through OCNJ’s employment placement service. Forty-three individuals who participated obtained their CDL license and were able to find competitive employment, making an average of \$15 to \$18 an hour.

“There is nothing more meaningful and worthy for an organization than when it can contribute to our communities – to assist individuals learn a new skill, find a job, and make a new and independent life for themselves. That is our vision for every person that comes through our doors, and thanks to the Prudential Foundation, we helped our clients realize that goal,” states Rocco J. Meola, President/CEO of The First Occupational Center of New Jersey.

Why OCNJ Matters *(continued)*

its five operating businesses – recycling/waste management, building services/maintenance; security; assembly/packaging; and groundskeeping – which provide employment for hundreds of men/women.

As I see it, OCNJ has always enhanced the dignity of all individuals who seek an opportunity for a better life and the ability to overcome insurmountable odds and achieve infinite possibilities.

OCNJ supplies them with the rope that transports them out of danger, eliminating obstacles and helplessness, then, compassionately helps them drop an anchor that solidifies their newly found position of change, opportunity, and a path towards something better. That is true empowerment.

Lakeside School

Lakeside is a Private School for Students with Disabilities approved by the New Jersey Department of Education, and includes an Extended School Year Option. The High School Program is aligned with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Areas.

The school offers: 1) full-time enrollment where students receive both project-based, hands-on academic instruction and vocational/career exploration and training; and 2) shared time where students attend their home district for academics while experiencing a half-day experience in vocational and occupational programs, including training, internships and/or job sampling.

Most importantly, students learn through hands-on learning activities, which always place each student’s unique learning styles at the forefront of their experience. The school has been unsurpassed in working with the diverse population of students, preparing them for viable and competitive employment in occupations or for continuing education upon their completion of the graduation requirements.

Principal Marilyn Alfes enthusiastically states, “Lakeside staff is serving our students, parents, community partners, and other school districts to ensure students can truly be prepared with life skills, vocational and academic training that will make them ready for the 21st century workforce!”



Real learning takes place for Lakeside students in the community.



Special Events: OCNJ Annual Holiday Party

On December 17, 2009, 250 OCNJ clients participated at the Annual Holiday Party. This year, clients were pleasantly surprised by donations and gifts from local businesses, giving even more cheer to the festivities. Hudson City Savings Bank in Orange donated 400 totes filled with personal essentials. The United Way of Essex and West Hudson also contributed products from Avon, DKNY, and others. As a spectacular partnership, Culinary Arts students from Lakeside School – New Jersey’s private school for students 13 to 21 – catered the event.

Good News for OCNJ Staff

- **Lauren Benna has been promoted to Coordinator of Vocational Programs.**
- **Zinnia Johnson has been selected as the new Coordinator of Placement Services.**
- **Marie DesJardins has been promoted to Production Supervisor.**



OCNJ clients enjoying the holiday party with Santa

OCNJ Dr. Diener Awards 2009

Dr. Harry Diener was a friend and Board member to OCNJ. As a consultant to the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Dr. Diener was dedicated to the disadvantaged individuals and those with disabilities. After his death, an award was established to recognize an OCNJ client who has demonstrated extraordinary performance and great improvement, including successful job placement. This year’s award recipients were Denise Jackson and Jesus Mattei.

Jesus Mattei: Award Recipient

Jesus Mattei has been a client at OCNJ since 1995. After being an extended employee for approximately 12 years in production work, Jesus began training in building services. A great desire for something more, and the attainment of competitive employment were consistently demonstrated. On September 16, 2009, Jesus obtained part-time competitive employment as a maintenance worker at the Veteran’s Administration Building in Newark. A continual effort and apparent determination make Jesus an optimal candidate for the Dr. Diener Award.



Jesus Mattei accepting the Dr. Diener Award

Denise Jackson: Award Recipient

Denise is a 21-year-old African American. As a young girl she watched her mother suffer from HIV. As a child she took care of her mother by changing her diaper because none of her other siblings would take the time to do it. By the time Denise was 10, her mom went into a coma, and she lost her father at the same time. When Denise was 13, her mother died, and this is when she gave up on life or achieving goals, and dropped out of school. She did not have anyone to really guide or direct her at this crucial point of her life. From this point on and throughout her teenage life she was in and out of Juvenile Detention Centers and experiencing drugs.

Denise realized she had to change her life when she began to realize a lot of her “friends” were dead, and so were members of her immediate family due to the same life she was living. She now refuses to go down the same path and wants more for herself and out of life. To date she has gone through and completed her training here at The First Occupational Center of New Jersey. She has been working at the Essex County Hospital since May 2009.

The First Occupational Center of New Jersey is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit agency, moving disabled and disadvantaged individuals “from dependence to independence” through job training and education.

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