

On ADA's anniversary, Easter Seals celebrates successes



Jim Collier credits Easter Seals NJ with helping him regain stability and independence. He credits his love of art as being a positive coping technique. (Courtesy photo)



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on July 31, 2015 at 2:17 PM, updated July 31, 2015 at 2:26 PM

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Easter Seals New Jersey has been celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act this week. The events included an "Accessibility through Art" event showcasing the artistic abilities of program participants living with disabilities, and one of those artists is from Hunterdon.

"About 10 years ago, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder," says Jim Collier, a former program participant of Easter Seals NJ. "Although it was difficult to hear at the time, it helped me understand a lot the troubles and instability I'd had in my life."

Jim was introduced to Easter Seals NJ where he was assigned to a case manager who provided him with supportive counseling and assistance in other areas to help him regain his stability and full independence.

He credits his love of art as being a positive coping technique.

"I've always had painting, drawing and writing to help express myself and perhaps gain some clarity," he says. "I find that painting is an act of meditation, and I am not so concerned with the end result. It's a way to look at the world, a way to appreciate and



Jim Collier says painting is an act of meditation. (Courtesy photo)

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pay homage to what's around me."

Jim has since donated several of his paintings to the Easter Seals office in Hunterdon County, where they hang as a token of his gratitude. "It's my way of saying thank you for all Easter Seals has done to help me."

Celebration in Clinton

The Hunterdon Easter Seals office is celebrating the ADA's anniversary in an event set for Friday, Aug. 7, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Clinton. It's being funded by a bequest from the family of a former participant in the Hunterdon program.



After working with an Easter Seals job coach, Walter has passed the two-year mark working for Walmart. (Courtesy photo)

The program has lots of success stories to share, including that of Walter, who joined Easter Seals NJ's group home in Hunterdon for people struggling to overcome the challenges of mental illness. He set a goal of not only getting a job, but keeping it. He had been able to get jobs in the past, but always had difficulty maintaining them for more than a few months.

His job coach at Easter Seals worked closely with him and he was able to secure employment as a cashier with Walmart. That was two years ago — a record achievement for Walter. This success has spurred his confidence to further his talent in photography. He was invited to display his art at the library and county arts and craft show, and he sold several of his photographs.

For more on Easter Seals' early advocacy campaign in the 1990s, visit <https://goo.gl/fDE3Yq>.

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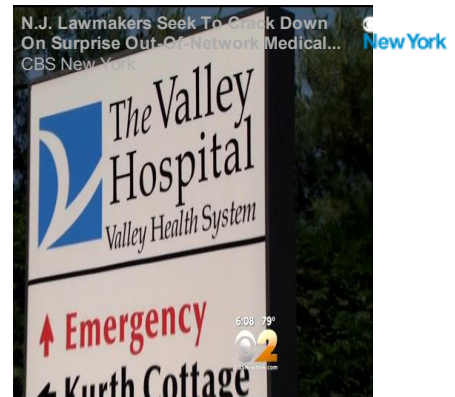
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