

# Easter Seals to hold fundraiser Oct. 22

Anysa Holder, Easter Seals New Jersey 11 a.m. EDT September 28, 2015



(Photo: Kevin Weber)

NEW BRUNSWICK Easter Seals New Jersey (ESNJ), a nonprofit that helps children and adults with disabilities and special needs, will host its 45th Annual Employment Services Awards Dinner & Dance 6 to 11 p.m. Oct. 22 at Pines Manor in Edison.

The fundraiser celebrates Disability Employment Awareness Month by bringing light to the more than 200 program participants engaged in Employment Services at their Raritan Valley Workshop (RVW) in New Brunswick, and the community of businesses and individuals who help support them.

Guests will enjoy an evening of dinner and dancing, a gift auction, 50/50, and awards presentations.

Mayor Jim Cahill of New Brunswick will serve as the keynote speaker, while Mitchell (Micky) Landis is this year's special honoree for his legacy of support of RVW and his overall advocacy for employment for people with disabilities. Landis is also the past chairman of the board for RVW, and has helped to carry on his family's tradition of support that began with his uncle, Sam Landis, decades ago.

In an official proclamation in support of the upcoming event New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said, "For more than 65 years, Easter Seals has been dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with special needs by providing them with opportunities to learn, work and integrate with their communities. I applaud the incredible commitment of all those involved with the Easter Seals' mission and commend those who will expand the organization's legacy into the future."

The month of October was designated "National Disability Employment Awareness Month" by Congress in 1988 and it has become ESNJ's kick-off month for year-round programs recognizing social and cultural contributions made by people with disabilities while, increasing awareness of the changes still needed to create equal opportunities and community inclusion.

Landis' expansive career as a volunteer has focused on empowering people with disabilities to achieve greater independence. In addition to his dedicated work with the RVW, he also serves as chairman of the board of New Brunswick Tomorrow and is director on several other charitable boards in the community. Landis lives in Highland Park with his wife Linda and their four children, and they founded and continue to run Highland Park Buddy Ball, an organization that teaches sports to children with disabilities. He also had an active business career as regional manager of the Princeton regional office of Boston Properties.

The RVW fundraiser is made possible through staunch volunteers like Ronald Sr. and Deidra Conurso, parents of Ron Jr., a program participant, who have also served on the RVW Advisory Board since 2011. The family is actively involved in Easter Seals events throughout the year with their son Ron acting as an event ambassador for the non-profit's Spring Walk for four years in a row.

"My son has been at the Raritan Valley Workshop for the past 20 years and it has been a great experience for him to feel like a productive individual contributing to society and part of a group that counts on him to contribute as a team member," says Ronald Sr.

Last year's gala attracted 185 people and collectively raised close to \$25,000 toward the mission of employment for individuals with disabilities.



The Conurso family pictured alongside two staff members of Easter Seals Raritan Valley Workshop (Photo: Raritan Valley Workshop)

“Employment opportunities provide the chance to fully participate in and contribute to society,” said Brian Fitzgerald, CEO and president of Easter Seals New Jersey. “It provides the ability to say, ‘Yes, I can!’”

The local community is encouraged to show their support by purchasing tickets to the event for \$135 per person. Donations of auction items for the fundraising event are also needed. Corporate tables and advertising opportunities are available.

Tickets or further information can be obtained by contacting Donna Speizer at [dspeizer@nj.easterseals.com](mailto:dspeizer@nj.easterseals.com) or by calling 732-828-8080.

#### About the Raritan Valley Workshop

The Easter Seals' Raritan Valley Workshop has supported individuals on their road to independence since 1967 by promoting employment resources and opportunities for adults with disabilities. Easter Seals job training and employment services help people with disabilities develop skills to successfully enter the workforce and independently earn an income, or to return to work after an illness or injury.

The lives of many individuals with disabilities are positively impacted by the employment opportunities presented to them through a flow of sub-contract work handling packaging and fulfillment services for area businesses. Recent cuts in funding for social service programs means the workshop now has to rely even more heavily on subcontract work in order to keep its participants employed.

#### About Easter Seals New Jersey

Easter Seals New Jersey is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that has enriched the lives of people living with disabilities and special needs, and those who care about them, by providing opportunities to live, learn, work, and play in their communities since 1948. Annually, nearly 8,000 people or families in New Jersey affected by developmental disabilities, including autism, physical disabilities, mental illness and other special needs participate in our programs designed to help them address life's challenges and achieve their personal goals on the path toward independence. For more information on Easter Seals New Jersey and its statewide disability services, contact 732-257-6662 or visit [www.eastersealsnj.org](http://www.eastersealsnj.org) (<http://www.eastersealsnj.org>) or [www.facebook.com/eastersealsnj](http://www.facebook.com/eastersealsnj) (<http://www.facebook.com/eastersealsnj>).

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