

## ARI Artists' Initiative Art Show

The ARI Artists' Initiative, founded by volunteer Don Axleroad, worked hard to prepare for its first exhibition—a month-long Art Show, “Reaching for Independence Through Art,” which opened Sunday, April 4th, at 4 PM at the

Stamford Art Association Gallery. The Gala Opening was preceded by a Meet the Artists Sponsors' Preview and Reception at 2 PM.

The Artists' Initiative weekly art classes began early last summer. Since then the ARI artists have been developing their drawing and painting techniques, working in many different mediums. Don has worked closely with each individual to encourage his or her own interests, skills and styles.



Marie Kerr finishes a sketch before painting

ARI individuals are now being recognized for their outstanding artistic and creative talent.

The work emerging from the class was so compelling, that when Don showed the work to the Board of Directors of the Stamford Art Association, they took one of their own shows off the gallery schedule and offered a month long show to the ARI Artists' Initiative instead.

The Art Show also served as a fundraiser for ARI's programs and services—a new kind of collaboration in the

non-profit arena. SAA Co-presidents Tara Kovach and Christine Ranhosky, and all the members of the SAA Board, along with the ARI Board supported the event in many different ways, including seeking sponsorships for the event and offering services. SAA member Peter Howard, for example,

photographed the group and its work for publicity purposes. ARI is grateful to the SAA and its Board for their support of this exciting event, one that has become a memorable and enlightening experience for many people.

Artists Marie Kerr, Kevin Chang, Mark Combrinck Hertz, Charles Hill, Tommy Gallagher, and poetess LaToya Hunter exhibited at the

ARI/SAA Art Show. Nancie Bauman, ARI Recreation Director constantly encourages new individuals to join the art class and other arts activities.

*ARI and the SAA wish to thank these Art Show Sponsors at the time of this publication:*

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Don Axleroad, standing, discusses painting techniques with (left to right) Tommy Gallagher, Charles Hill and Mark Combrinck Hertz.

The art classes have evolved into much more than anyone could have imagined. Deep friendships have developed between the students and Don—together they have moved into a realm of exploration and achievement that is inspiring to everyone involved. These



Kevin Chang prepares to sketch a figure.

# A Letter from A. Jane McEwen



Dear Family and Friends:

Our first ever ARI, Stamford Art Association Gala and Art Show was held on Sunday, April 4, 2004. What great alliances can be forged when talented people agree to collaborate! We are so excited to be talking about what we CAN do and how we can share our talents with the art world! When we are able to concentrate on abilities and decrease the importance of disabilities, we are really making great strides.

We want to personally thank Don Axelroad and his lovely wife, Genevieve, who are two of our most ardent supporters. They have been exceptionally generous to ARI. They know how to discover and nurture creativity, and they have helped us recognize and appreciate talent. Thank you, Don and Genevieve. You are very special to all of us.

This month we are asking consumers, their families and many community members for feedback on how our service can be improved and expanded by asking for your participation in our consumer and family survey. In planning for the future, ARI would like to obtain thoughts and ideas that will help us construct the services and supports that our community needs and wants. We are asking many people for their input and feedback. If you are not contacted, but would like to participate, please give me a call. We would love to know what you think.

Please mark your calendar for our Annual Lotstein/Martin Golf Tournament on June 24th. More information will be available very soon, but we want you to know that, after golf at Sterling Farms, we will be having an exciting luncheon, auction and raffle at the Italian Center for our golfers and for all our friends and supporters. Stay tuned for more details . . .

In the Governor's budget proposal for 2004-2005, he has recognized the need to provide residential and day programming opportunities for people on DMR's waiting list and for new graduates moving from high school to the adult world of work. There are also some exciting bills on the legislative floor that will help us improve wages for direct care staff.

Two bills are before the legislature. S.B. 555 would require the state to increase the compensation rate to private providers funded by DMR and other state agencies. S.B. 546 would provide for rate increases to private providers, like us, that we might increase salaries to staff. There is a growing wage discrepancy between Connecticut State workers and private provider staff who may do the same job. We are hopeful that some action may be taken this year to reduce this huge discrepancy. If you would like more information, I would be happy to provide it. We could use your support in this endeavor.

We are very busy and we have many things to be thankful for . . . but we still have much to do. Our staff and volunteers have provided exceptional service to ARI these past few months. We work hard to make sure we get things right. We thank you for thinking of us, and we thank you for all you do for ARI.  
—Jane McEwen



Photo by Lee Patine

Bea Grabell poses with the Finance Department at a party held in her honor celebrating her 25 years with ARI. Bea serves as ARI's Manager of the Finance Department. L to R: Bea, Elizabeth King, David Merkle, and Gloria Clark.

# ARI'S HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION PROGRAM



Han Tan

ARI's High School Transition Program, coordinated by Nicole Smart, plays a critical role in the lives of many young people. It provides a specialized program that helps these students gain skills and make informed choices which will influence the rest of their lives.

High School Transition Services begin at age 15 and can continue until age 21. During that time, parents and staff help the students build functional skills in math and reading, as well as other skills needed to become independent adults. Students work on mastering *new* skills, such as learning to travel independently, and earning and managing money by exploring different kinds of jobs.

ARI contracts with area school systems to provide the vocational exploration piece of the program. Students experience jobs, often in volunteer venues like *Meals on Wheels* and area day care centers. Students work with a job coach and may experience two different kinds of jobs a year, from age 19 on.

A student may be referred to ARI through the student's PPT (Placement and Planning Team.) ARI establishes what the student has done, where they have done it, what skills they have, and, most importantly,



Michele Bernardo

what the student *wants* to do and learn in the future. We support *person-centered planning*—incorporating the individual's skills and needs.

After undergoing a thorough assessment and creating an individualized plan, the student is placed in a job for up to six months, or sometimes longer depending on their interest. ARI makes sure that students have the adaptive equipment they need to be successful in any vocational setting, such as a motorized wheelchair, special computer keyboard, specialized hearing device, and/or specialized



Sara Russo

lighting for low vision people.

ARI provides socialization avenues for many of these students as well. Peer group acceptance and inclusion is very important to these young people, just like everyone else. Typically they don't drive, however they do want to get together and enjoy their friends.

ARI provides advocacy and support for the student's parents who are trying to negotiate the often difficult and confusing systems that are providing services for their child.

Nicole says about this year's Transition class: "My students are reflective of our world—these are young people who get up every day and work with their strengths and weaknesses to be a better person. I hope they get what they want out of life."



Michael Fox

*Congratulations and Good Luck to the Class of 2004:*

- **Han Tan** (above left) is a soft-spoken young man who really enjoys computers and going to New York City. He likes to bake and hopes to work at a bakery one day. Han also looks forward to having a roommate in the future.
- **Sara Russo** (above right) is a friendly young lady who loves magazines, especially the hip ones that feature celebrities. She also loves clothes and socializing. Her ideal job would be at a clothing store.
- **Insley Pinder** (middle left) is a pleasant young man who loves playing basketball and watching television. Insley is eager to continue his job exploration upon graduation. He wants to work or volunteer at a place where he interacts with lots of people.
- **Michael Fox** (lower right) is an outgoing young man who loves watching wrestling on television. Although his dream job would be to become a professional wrestler, for now he will focus on jobs in customer service, such as bagging groceries or light stocking. He also hopes to have an apartment with a roommate.
- **Michelle Bernardo** (lower left) is a friendly young adult who enjoys shopping and going to the beach in her spare time. Michelle's vocational interest is working with toddlers. Her ideal job would be to work as a childcare assistant. She also hopes to one day have her own apartment.

# Recreation Programs

The Recreation Department had one of its most exciting events ever in January—a trip to the Bahamas for 17 of ARI's individuals, accompanied by four staff and volunteer chaperones.

There were many challenges to planning a trip this size, such as finding enough funding for all participants and finding qualified chaperones to be responsible



Eric Norgren and his favorite dolphin.

for the health and safety of individuals 24/7. Direct care staff and managers had to scramble to help individuals obtain passports and necessary travel papers. They had to make sure that medications were properly labeled and that everyone brought enough seasonally-appropriate clothing.

When departure day came, getting all 21 of us to the chartered bus in the ARI parking lot—at 4:30 a.m.—was a challenge in the freezing cold rain.

But it was all worth it when our plane landed in Nassau (where it was 80 degrees) in time for us to have lunch on the beach, complete with non-alcoholic exotic drinks!

One day of the trip was spent at Blue Lagoon Island exploring the exotic fish, another day at the Dolphin Encounters where those who chose to participate squeezed into wet suits and got into the dolphin tank with the dolphins. Although they were initially skeptical, several people touched, hugged and even got kissed by the dolphin!

The next day we went to the Pirate Museum where a *genuine* pirate gave us a tour, took pictures with us, all followed by a lively lunch. We spent a day visiting the famous Atlantis Hotel, and another day walking around the Straw Market, haggling with vendors over handmade baskets, bags, clothing and other souvenirs.



Steve Dichter and a pirate!

It was a memorable trip for everyone! Of the 17 ARI individuals on the trip, 7 (and some chaperones) received financial assistance from a grant from Friends of ARI. Erin and Stan Kontogiannis, Darlene Booker and I were the chaperones. On behalf of everyone who enjoyed this

trip, I want to give a huge thank you to Friends of ARI, fellow chaperones, staff, and family members who made this trip possible *and* so successful. —Nancie Bauman

Eight athletes represented ARI at the final Special Olympics Bocce Tournament in Vernon, CT. Volunteer Coaches Lisa Gates and Marie DeRubis, along with Director of Case Management/Medical Susan Parisi and volunteer Ambriana Bodner Parisi chaperoned the overnight trip. Coaches Gates and DeRubis prepared for the main event by practicing more than fifty hours with the athletes.



The ARI Bocce Team: (l – r) Marie DeRubis, Maggie Fiore, Lisa Gates, Libby Ryan, Karen DeRubis, Marie Kerr and Betty Quick.

The competition rules for Special Olympics of CT (SOCT) must be followed to the letter. One of the athletes said, “The coaches can be tough with us, but they are just trying to get us ready for the *real* games.” Special Olympics emphasizes that athletes do their best. Winning is not the highest priority. The Special Olympics motto summarizes the tone of the day: “Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.”

SOCT now features a Unified Sports® Program which combines athletes with and without developmental disabilities, such as mental retardation, on the same teams to compete in a variety of sports. For ARI, that meant that Libby Ryan's sibling and parent played as partners right along with her. The notion of incorporating all types of players onto the SOCT field broadens the opportunities for everyone to be included.

*For more information about ARI's recreations programs and events please call Nancie Bauman at 324-9258, ext. 3023*

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*We apologize for any inadvertent omissions.*

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## UBS Grants \$5,000 to ARI



Lee Paine, ARI Director of Development, and Judy Katzen, ARI Director of Day Services and grant writer, accept a \$5,000 grant from Steve Baird, Managing Director, UBS.

ARI received a \$5,000 grant from UBS Investment Bank, located in Stamford, to help fund the High School Transition Program for students with developmental disabilities. UBS has a focus of youth development, and awarded the grant to Judy Katzen, ARI Director of Day Services and grant writer, and Lee Paine, Director of Development, at a special ceremony honoring all UBS grant recipients and their organizations. ARI is grateful to UBS for this grant and others it has given in the past for programs related to youth development.

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