

# THE AABR ADVANCE



FALL | 2019

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## MATTITUCK STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

AABR's Arthur Russell Residence is located in Mattituck, Long Island and for over 25 years our individuals have gone out and embraced being part of that community. This summer, like in many previous years, people with disabilities supported by AABR were able to enjoy the annual Mattituck Lions Club Strawberry Festival. First held on June 16, 1955, this alcohol-free four day event has grown into Long Island's Largest Strawberry Festival and Fundraiser.

Our individuals experienced foods from around the world, a strawberry shortcake eating contest, and specialties such as

chocolate dipped strawberries and daiquiris. After eating, they had a ball riding on the giant Ferris wheel, a roller coaster and many of the other 25+ rides. As live music filled the air, Nature Nick offered animal exhibits, Jester Jim juggled and the individuals walked through over 120 arts and craft booths featuring unique jewelry, candles, knitwear, glass items and other artisan goods, which all helped to raise funds for those in need. There was a Big Bucks Winner, a Strawberry Queen was crowned and each night our individuals marveled at the firework displays which culminated in a Grand Finale Spectacular. We can't wait to go back!





# CHRIS WELDON'S 80th BIRTHDAY



September 12th was a special night as AABR's Board President and Agency Directors celebrated our Executive Director, Chris Weldon, on the occasion of his 80th Birthday! For over 40 years Chris has dedicated his life to enhancing the lives of people with disabilities, as well as, AABR Employees who work tirelessly to help provide much needed education, support and inclusivity in the community. Kathryn Flood, AABR's Assistant Executive Director offered a toast that spoke to what was in our hearts when she said that Chris had offered his endless support and that we truly love this father figure of a man who, no matter what, works side by side with us.

The group reminisced about the pranks we played on him, like filling his office with balloons one morning before he arrived and he continued to work as if they weren't there! Many stories were shared amidst the laughter including one about a time in the early 1980's when Chris had "moved in" to Cromwell Avenue to get it up and running when the residence was first opening! There's absolutely no one like you Chris! Happy Birthday with many more to come!



# SUPER SOCCER STARS

For over five years, every Friday a special event occurs at Wellington Hall thanks to the Round Star Foundation. Coach Braulio and an AABR staff person provide soccer lessons for people who are supported at Wellington Hall.

Willowbrook, exhibits challenges in the area of carrying paper in his pockets and socks. However, during soccer practices he independently removes the paper in order to emulate Coach Braulio and the other players.

The soccer program started with 8 participants and has now grown to over 25. There is such excitement around these weekly sessions. One Individual, who is blind, uses an auditory soccer ball and wears his homeland Columbian soccer shirt to the lessons each week. One Individual gets off the bus each and every morning with a kicking motion saying, "Soccer?" Another participant, originally from

Recently, the Wellington Hall team played a game against participants from another agency. They earned the victory by utilizing communication skills, sending each other signs, and playing as a team. Michele Danowitz, AABR's Assistant Director of Wellington Hall noted, "Coach Braulio loves the guys as much as they love him. He really has made a difference in their day-to-day." Thanks Coach Braulio, for all you do!



# FLORA FRIED ROOM DEDICATION

AABR recently dedicated the Human Resources Reception Room to Flora Fried, AABR's Long Time Benefits Administrator, who passed away in December 2018.

In honor of the work she did and the lives she affected, AABR dedicated the room at the Agency's Main Office in College Point, Queens in her memory. For over 30 years, Flora made it her business to go above and beyond to help countless staff with both their benefits and their lives.

On August 16, 2019, her husband Jack, daughters Heidi and Amy, and grandchildren, Ian, Cara, Hailey, Evan, Connor and Logan joined AABR Directors and Staff at the unveiling of Flora's portrait and plaque commemorating her years of unwavering service and dedication. Touching words were said by those coworkers especially close to her, Eileen Keegan, Debbie Van Cura and Shelly Morgan. When Flora's loving husband Jack spoke, the entire room was moved to tears. Flora will remain in our hearts forever.



# COMMITMENT CEREMONY

This summer, Andrea Cramer of AABR's Klamar Residence and longtime boyfriend, John Fox celebrated their love in the presence of their families and friends in a Commitment Ceremony. Ms. Cramer was ecstatic as she described the treasured event, "We tied the knot. We're together. We see each other every Sunday. The ceremony was so beautiful! I call him Mr. Fox and he calls me Mrs. Fox. We are joined together. I loved my dress that my cousins helped me pick out. I wear my ring every day. And we're happy. When I get my hair done, he says, 'You're a 10 to me.' 'On his birthday I ask him what can I get you and he says, 'You're my gift. You're all I need.'"

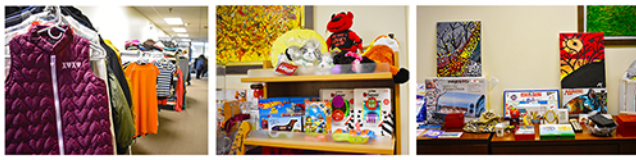
Her eyes sparkled as she stated with pride, "He's the gentleman I love. He's always happy to see me. Some day we hope to have a little house and for someone to come in and help me to learn how to cook." When asked how she felt after the ceremony, Ms. Cramer responded, "It's so different. I don't know how describe how it feels. It's a beginning. I think about him 24/7. I feel good when I'm with him. It's like heaven on earth."

Talking about the ceremony she exclaimed, "There was a white runner and I walked down the aisle. My uncle Reese is a Pastor and he did the ceremony. John and I slow danced, kissed, cut the cake and exchanged rings."

She then gushed as she recited his vows to her, "You've been my best friend for a longtime and I'm glad you are my wife-to-be. I've been there with you for so long, for 30 years. It's time for us to be together. I love you so much that I would love to be in your family'."







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