Beginning July 1, 2005, the Regional Center for Autism at the University at Albany will begin providing services in an additional 38 school districts and 148 schools in Albany, Rensselaer, Columbia, and Greene counties. The Center currently serves 50 school districts and 178 schools in Warren, Washington, Saratoga, Fulton, Montgomery, and Schenectady counties.

Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and State Senators Hugh Farley, Elizabeth Little, Stephen Saland, and James Seward assisted the Center in securing $500,000 in the 2005-2006 New York State budget to continue and expand the activities of the Regional Center for Autism. “This is an important step forward, and a recognition of the benefits which the Center provides to children with autism and their families, and also school districts which serve them,” said Majority Whip Senator Hugh T. Farley, University at Albany President Kermit Hall noted.

“The support of the New York State Senate has helped us better serve and treat children with autism, and this new funding will allow us to expand the numbers of families and schools we can serve through the Center.”

The Regional Center for Autism at the University at Albany - the only one of its kind statewide - was created in response to a statewide and national plea from school districts concerned with the remarkable increase in number of children diagnosed with autism. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found prevalence rates for autism spectrum disorders between 2 and 6 per 1,000 individuals. Therefore, it can be summarized that between 1 in 500 (2/1,000) and 1 in 166 children (6/1,000) have an autism spectrum disorder.

(Article continues on page 3)

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**Siena Students Raise Money for Summer Fun Programs**

As part of Assistant Professor Deborah Kelly’s marketing and management class (MKMG 211) offered through Siena College School of Business, five groups of students each completed a semester-long project to raise money for the Center for Autism’s summer recreation program.

On May 4, 2005, Dr. Kristin V. Christodulu, attended class to learn about the activities students participated in to raise the $1,405.23 that was given to the Center. Projects included a bottle/can drive, a Texas Hold’em Poker Tournament, a raffle, and a bowl-a-thon.

As part of the project, students learned valuable lessons in leadership, communication, motivation, conflict resolution, groups and teams, and many other important managerial concepts!

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Positive Family Intervention Project

The Center for Autism is excited to announce their involvement in a large study funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

The Positive Family Intervention Project is a research study that has been designed to evaluate an approach to parent education which has been proven to be effective in improving children’s behavior. Parents participating in this study will learn to deal with their children’s behavior more positively and effectively.

The study is being conducted as a collaborative effort involving the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, the University at Albany’s Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, and the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities in Tampa.

To be considered for participation in this study:
1. Your child must be between 3-5 years of age and have an identified developmental disability.
2. Your child must be experiencing significant problem behavior (e.g., aggression, self-injury, tantrums).
3. You must not have received extensive training or support in positive behavior support prior to starting the study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Dr. Kristin Christodulu at (518) 442-2574.

Genetics and Autism

The Center for Autism was delighted to present Dr. Michael Cuccaro as guest speaker for both a parent talk and professional symposium on genetics and autism. Both events were free of charge. The parent talk was held at the Price Chopper Community Room in Schenectady on April 27th. The professional symposium was held the following night, April 28th, and co-sponsored by Four Winds Hospital in Saratoga. There was an overwhelming turnout for both events, with approximately thirty parents and one hundred physicians and related professionals in attendance.

Dr. Cuccaro is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University Medical Center (DUMC) and Associate Research Professor in Medicine. A clinical psychologist by training, Dr. Cuccaro combines an extensive background in autism and related neurodevelopmental disorders with applied expertise in behavioral genetics. He is the clinical director of the DUMC Autism Collaborative Team with a particular emphasis on identifying the unique attributes of individuals with autism. Dr. Cuccaro is involved in several ongoing efforts to identify genes in autism and related neurodevelopmental disorders. He is Principal Investigator on a project aimed at defining the nature and path of repetitive behaviors in young children with autism.

For more information or to enroll your family in one of the genetic studies in autism and related disorders, please contact the Autism Patient Coordinators toll-free at 888-DUKE-AUT (888-385-3288).

Fun For the Kids!

With the winter enduring, the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities was pleased to offer another series of recreation programs. The Summer Fun program was such a hit last summer that CARD decided to provide the program throughout the school year.

The purpose of the ‘Spring Fun’ activities is exactly that; to have fun. CARD Albany wanted to give children with autism the opportunity to participate in recreation programs just like their peers. The plan is to provide these children with the chance to try something they have never had the opportunity to do as well as give the parents a few hours of respite.

The first activity planned was an afternoon of ice skating at the Clifton Park Arena. Children arrived bundled and ready to skate. It was two of the boys’ very first time on the ice and they did their best to stay on two feet! Some of the other children were old pros racing around the rink. Pizza, donated by the Clifton Park Pizzeria, was on the menu for lunch. The children and staff chatted about school, vacation, and dinosaurs. After lunch there was more time for skating and playing video games.

As per many requests, the second activity scheduled was bowling. We spent the afternoon at Clifton Park Bowl during the April vacation. The children had a great time learning to throw the ball, talking with other children and eating snacks. Everyone had a winning game with plenty of spares and strikes!

This summer, CARD Albany is excited to provide the Summer Fun program once again. The planning is currently underway; check your mail for activity registration this June.
Program Expands to Cover 10 Counties (continued)

While it is clear that more children than ever before are being classified as having an autism spectrum disorder, it is unclear how much of this increase is due to changes in how we identify and classify autism spectrum disorders, or whether this is due to a true increase in prevalence. However, using current standards, autism spectrum disorders are the second most common serious developmental disability after mental retardation/intellectual impairment.

The drastic increase in the prevalence of the autism classification presents a major challenge to special education service systems.

A pioneering approach to serve the needs of children with autism, their parents, and school professionals, the Regional Center for Autism provides a comprehensive means to deliver a variety of specialized services. Through this initiative, high quality, cost-effective services are provided by professionals with an expertise in the area of autism and related disabilities. Over the past three years, the Regional Center for Autism has provided training at no cost to over 2,000 individuals across the Capital Region saving school districts nearly $3 million dollars.

"The Center is thankful for the critical support being given to the project by New York State Senators Bruno, Farley, Little, Saland, and Seward,” said Dr. Kristin V. Christodulu, Director of the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities. “We believe this new funding is not only an acknowledgement of the success of the program in addressing the limited availability and rising costs of specialized services related to the education and treatment of children with autism, but also an essential step toward implementation of regional centers for autism throughout New York State."

Wine and Food Tasting

The Center for Autism hosted its 2nd Annual Benefit on Friday, April 8, 2005. A wine and food tasting event took place from 6 to 10 pm at Sargo’s Restaurant on Saratoga National Golf Course. Mistress of ceremonies, Ms. Benita Zahn (WNYT NewsChannel 13), began the evening by introducing the Honorary Chairperson for the event, Senator Elizabeth O’C. Little (45th Senate District), who highlighted the importance of specialized services for children with autism. Guest speakers for the evening included University at Albany President Kermit Hall and Columbia-Greene Community College President James Campion.

Among the excellent selection of wine and food pairings created by Executive Chef Larry Schepici, C.E.C. were Clams Amalfi, Garlic Basil, Sundried Tomatoes and Lemon (Piggin Pinot Grigio) and Sargo’s Housemade Lamb and Juniperberry Sausage with Duck Proscuitto (Joseph Phelps Le Mistral).

Rose and Kiernan Insurance, Inc.; Kobrand Premium Wine and Spirits; ACS Printing; Exit 9 – Wine and Liquor Warehouse; Golub Foundation; and Ginasbar designs were all sponsors of the event.

Local restaurants and area businesses were extremely generous in helping make the silent auction an overwhelming success. Some of the most popular items included a round of golf for four at the Sagamore, a Scrimshaw wine dinner, and a night at the Albany Symphony Orchestra. Live music for the evening was provided by pianist Scott Bassinson.

Planning for the 3rd Annual Benefit will begin soon. If you are interested in participating on the fundraising committee, please contact us at 518-442-2274.

In honor of Autism Awareness Month (April), the New York State Senate passed a resolution recognizing April 8th as the official day of the University at Albany Center for Autism and Related Disabilities.
WELCOME ALAINA!

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities is pleased to announce that Alaina Forrest (Education Coordinator) has joined the staff. Alaina is a graduate of the University at Albany where she studied psychology and worked as a crisis hotline counselor. She brings with her a variety of professional and clinical experience, and is working toward a Master’s Degree in Social Welfare.

WE'RE ON THE WEB!!!
Visit us at:
www.albany.edu/psy/autism/autism.html

Did You Know That...

- In the United States during the 2000-2001 school year, more than 15,000 children 3 through 5 years of age and more than 78,000 children and adults 6 through 21 years of age were classified as having autism under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has written a guide to help parents, teachers, and education agencies put Individualized Education Programs (IEP) in place for children with disabilities.

- Autism is the most common of the Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD), affecting approximately 1 in every 250 births.

- The National Information Center on Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) has written a guide for parents on how to get early intervention services for children ages birth to 3 years and special education services for children ages 3-5 years. The guide is in both English and Spanish.

- Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups and occurs more frequently in boys than in girls by a ratio of four to one.

- Each state has a Children’s Health Insurance Program that provides free or low-cost health insurance for eligible children. Go to the Insure Kids Now website!

- On the New York State Department of Education website, you can find contacts for students with special needs in degree granting universities and colleges.

- Medicaid Service Coordination (MSC) is a program provided by The Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) which assists persons with developmental disabilities and mental retardation in gaining access to necessary services and supports appropriate to the needs of the individual.

- You can visit www.cdc.gov, www.omr.state.ny.us and/or www.nysed.gov for more information.