

fly ON THE WALL

Spitzer: More Albany help for people with disabilities



From left: Mohan Mehra, president of Westchester Arc; state Attorney General and gubernatorial hopeful Eliot Spitzer; and Richard P. Swierat, Westchester Arc's executive director.

As their lives have progressed from wasting away at institutions to living and working in communities, people with developmental disabilities have found most helpful an array of career-planning, financial-planning and other self-help programs emulating those of the disability-free world.

Albany must support that effort by supporting successful programs, including those of White Plains-based Westchester Arc, statewide, Eliot Spitzer told an audience of people with developmental disabilities and their supporters.

"It is often said that New York is a family. Those with disabilities are members of this family and it is our obligation as a state to offer them the same opportunity, independence and empowerment that we aspire to for all members of our family," the state attorney general and front-running Democratic gubernatorial hopeful said April 21, addressing Westchester Arc's Employer Recognition breakfast, held at the Westchester Marriott in Greenburgh (Tarrytown address).

Asked by the Business Journal after his talk how the state should support the new wave of programs, Spitzer left open whether that could mean subsidies, or management from Albany: "The state at a minimum can find those programs that work and make sure that they are replicated elsewhere, sometimes by private not-for-profits, sometimes within the state programs that already exist. But the first thing you have to do is

find the programs that work and integrate them into what exists and that's what we hope to do."

Spitzer's remarks followed talks in which Westchester Arc reps discussed with his reps the importance of state support for the new wave of programs, executive director Richard P. Swierat said.

Whoever becomes governor next year, Swierat said, must avoid the mistake Albany typically makes when it funds social services.

"Oftentimes we create these large bureaucracies around funding systems that are so governed by regulation and organization that we lose track of the individual," Swierat said. Medicaid is a good example, he continued, given administrative costs reported at 25 percent of the state's \$46 billion-a-year program: "I could do life planning for a heck of a lot less than a lot of the things that I'm providing support services for under Medicaid. We're doing it for no money right now."

Westchester Arc spends about \$100,000 a year on its life planning center, Swierat estimated, while the guardianship program supports more than 150 people for \$150,000 a year. Money for both, he said, is raised privately without government support. Westchester Arc operates on an annual budget of \$42 million.

POLL WATCHING

Spitzer's Westchester Arc address came at a time when his campaign has all but left rivals in the dust.

Late last month, Spitzer trounced Democratic challenger and Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, 74 percent to 11 percent, in a Siena (College) Research Institute poll. On March 29, Quinnipiac University tallied 69 percent for the attorney general and 14 percent for Suozzi — who on April 25 challenged Spitzer to hold two debates a month from May through primary day Sept. 12.

Quinnipiac's poll found Spitzer capturing 66 percent against each of three GOP potential rivals — former Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, former Assembly Minority Leader John Faso and ex-Secretary of State Randy Daniels, now out of the race.

Spitzer has also won the endorsement of Donald J. Trump: "Eliot will make an amazing governor and he will bring business to New York like it has never seen before," he told the real estate publication *The Real Deal*.

JOBS IN MOTION

Over the past year Peter Herrmann's business has joined the 300-plus employers that employ more than 600 individuals or "consum-

ers" placed by Westchester Arc in community jobs.

Herrmann is plant manager and co-owner of Motion Laboratories Inc., a Cortlandt maker of electrical distribution and motor control products for the entertainment industry. He came across Westchester Arc years back when he used to do air conditioning work at the group's White Plains facility.

"I remember being in the facility and seeing that they did some light-duty manufacturing and assembly work. So when our business got to the point where we were looking for that type of help, I remembered them and called them up," Herrmann said.

Motion Labs employs five consumers who carry out duties ranging from shipping-receiving, maintenance and cleanup to mechanical prep work on the production floor, such as tightening and loosening screws.

"We're looking forward to continued success. It's been working out very well for us," Herrmann said.

AWARD WINNERS

Motion Labs was one of six employers honored for first-time hiring of Westchester Arc consumers. The others were Doral Arrowwood Conference Resort in Rye Brook; Emilio's Ristorante in Harrison; The Home Depot; Starbucks Corp. of Westchester; and Starbucks of Mount Kisco.

Other winners:

- Special Partnership: Michele Tombini of the Elmsford law firm Papalardo Tombini & Wolff L.L.P.

- Educational Partnership: Tuckahoe Union Free School District and White Plains Public Schools. Tuckahoe was also honored at the event by the New York State Rehabilitation Association.

- Special Advocate: Armonk-based bond insurer MBIA Inc., The Pet Company store at Jefferson Valley Mall in Yorktown, Pronto Printer in Cortlandt and Mechtronics Corp. of White Plains.

- Civic Partnership: Westchester County Surrogate Court.

- Employment Development: Stop & Shop and The Food Emporium.

- Employment Opportunity: ShopRite, T.J. Max and Red Lobster.

- Long-Standing Employer: Zodiac restaurant within the Neiman Marcus store in White Plains; Old Navy; and Super Stop & Shop supermarkets in North White Plains and Port Chester.

- Anthony Cannata Memorial Employee: Raymond Frost Jr., a nine-year employee at the PETCO Animal Supplies Inc. store in Hartsdale.