



**EMPOWER**

*support services to help you live your best life*

*Sowing the Seeds of*

**INCLUSION**



**ANNUAL REPORT 2018**

# Sowing the Seeds of Inclusion



Throughout 2018, Empower kept finding more ways for the people we support to participate in the life our community.

In January, the final step in our three-year workshop transformation plan was completed with the closure of our sheltered workshop and the opening of a second Empties for Empower bottle return center in Wheatfield. This location also serves as a hub for another community-based program called Day Habilitation Without Walls.

Empower also earned three-year quality assurance accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL). This distinction confirms that we embrace person-centered solutions to improve the quality of life for people receiving supports and services.

People supported by Empower now serve on agency committees, interview prospective hires, and participate in programs such as Leadership Niagara.

This report is organized by the three sections of our new strategic direction statement, which reflects our commitment to inclusion. We hope you enjoy reading these success stories.

**Jeff Paterson**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

**Thomas Caserta, Jr., Esq.**  
*President, Board of Directors*

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*Attorney-At-Law*

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Niagara University*

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*Doctor of Podiatry*

## Staff Leadership

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*Director of Managed Care Readiness*

Kim Kiely  
*Director of Job Training & Day  
Programs*

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*Director of Program Operations &  
Quality Assurance Administration*

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*Educational Services Supervisor*

William Krayss  
*Director of Community Housing*

Rita Tweedie  
*Chief Financial Officer*

Brandon Jerla  
*Director of Staff Development &  
Learning*

Kristin Minervini  
*Director of Human Resources*

Elizabeth Cardamone  
*Director of Communication &  
Development*

# PEOPLE LIVING THEIR BEST LIVES



## Developing Leadership Skills

Anthony Salvo was selected as the first person with an intellectual or developmental disability to be part of a Leadership Niagara class.

Leadership Niagara is a year-long leadership development program for Niagara County-based professionals. During each session, students hear from real-life leaders and then learn successful leadership strategies. Several Empower staff have gone through the program, but this is the first time that a person who is supported by the agency has participated.

Empower obtained grants from the New York State Elks Special Projects Fund and the Empower Foundation to enable Anthony to attend

Leadership Niagara along with a mentor.

Anthony's mentor is Dr. Joseph McDougall, whose accomplishments include earning a doctorate in microbiology and owning small businesses. Joe and Anthony attend the monthly Leadership Niagara sessions together. They bring a new level of diversity to the Leadership Niagara program, enriching discussions from their unique perspectives of having a disability.

Anthony's dream is to open a coffee shop that employs people with disabilities. Leadership Niagara is preparing Anthony for this goal.

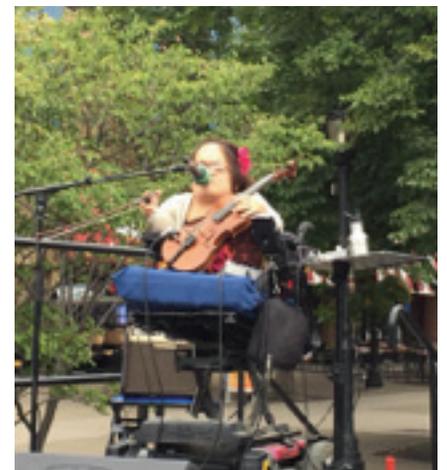
## Inspiring Success

In September, thanks to a grant from the Arts Services Initiative of Western New York, Empower brought musician Gaelynn Lea to Niagara Falls. Gaelynn is a classically-trained fiddle player and singer-songwriter who won NPR's Tiny Desk Contest in 2016.

Gaelynn performed before a crowd of 150, including people supported by Empower. On stage, you can't help but notice her disability, but her pure voice, inspirational lyrics and haunting fiddle playing expands your impression to include something you are not used to seeing: a person with a disability who is very talented as an onstage performer, which is exactly the effect Gaelynn wants to achieve.

Throughout her performance, Gaelynn encouraged the audience to challenge the corporate standard of beauty, to achieve more equal representation in the media, and to make sure people with disabilities are included on issues such as health care and human rights.

Gaelynn demonstrates the power of people with disabilities to achieve their dreams.



# PEOPLE LIVING THEIR BEST LIVES



## A Welcome Break Through Respite

Empower has been steadily expanding its in-home and overnight respite programs. Respite gives caregivers a much-needed break to attend to their own health and personal needs.

The Evchichs are a family whose two sons with developmental disabilities receive in-home respite. On Thursdays, Empower staff work with the boys while Jennifer Evchich takes a break to do chores.

“My son Matthew, who is five years old, likes to be held all of the time,” says Jennifer. “He cries when I put him down. So I can’t do simple things like emptying the dishwasher. What other people think of as chores, I think of as my me time. I look forward to Thursdays when I can do house work or have dinner with my daughter, who refers to our Thursday night dinners as ‘date nights.’ She wears a dress and has me put on her earrings. It’s our special time together. I am so grateful to Empower for giving my husband and me a break from caregiving.”



In 2018 alone, Empower provided 5,540 hours of in-home and overnight respite to families. Further, overnight respite sessions are held at area hotels, affording participants a chance to experience a new adventure.

## A Trip to NYC at the Holidays, Part of Empower’s Community Support Services

Stacey is one of approximately 150 people who receive community support services from Empower each year. Stacey’s dream trip was to visit New York City and see the lighting of the Rockefeller Center holiday tree. In November, Empower made this dream a reality, taking Stacey and four other people to the Big Apple.

As with any trip, things didn’t go exactly as planned. It was cold and too crowded to get as close to the tree as the travelers would have liked. But Stacey wore a huge grin the entire time because she was living her dream, thanks to Empower, and nothing could take away from her experience.

Whatever it takes to empower people to live the lives they choose, Empower helps facilitate these experiences for the people it supports.

# CONTRIBUTING TO OUR COMMUNITY

## Volunteering in Our Community



The recent \$3 million sale of properties along Main St. signals that things are looking up for this area. Equally important in Niagara Falls' resurgence are collective community cleanups such as the one in which Empower Day Habilitation Program participated last spring.

On a chilly March day, people supported by Empower and staff donned their gloves and hit several areas around Main Street, including the train station and the small business district, to pick up trash. It is an activity that Empower volunteers look forward to every year, because they connect with residents and businesses who are so thankful for their efforts. As a token of appreciation, DiCamillo's Bakery provided free donuts, and the director of a local community kitchen, where this group also volunteers, recognized them and stopped to thank them for their time.

Empower's Job Training and Day Programs division connects people who want to be of service with nonprofits in need of volunteers. Whether it's serving meals at a community kitchen or participating in city-wide cleanups, Empower volunteers brighten the lives of the people they touch and help strengthen our community. In 2018 alone, people supported by Empower volunteered 351 hours to the Niagara community, valued at \$8,473.00.

"I love to volunteer," says Robin, one of the volunteers. "It makes me feel good, knowing I am making a difference, and I love all of the people I get to meet."

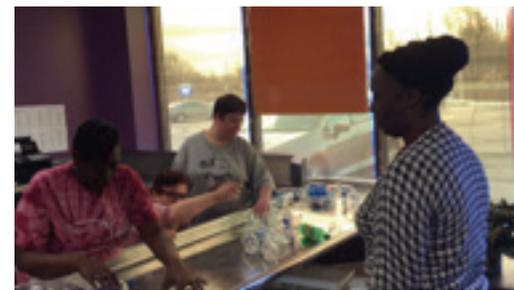
## Turning Empty Bottles into Fuller Lives

When people hear about the dual purpose behind our bottle return centers, named Empties for Empower, they immediately want to bring in their bottles and cans. Empties for Empower provides free bottle and can sorting to the public. It also provides on-the-job training for workers, most of whom have disabilities. Workers develop confidence and people skills when they greet customers, and gain math and money skills as they count containers, calculate returns, and sort the containers to be picked up by distributors.

Empties for Empower began in 2016 at 4701 Military Road in the Town of Niagara. Empower's second center, located at 3571 Niagara Falls Boulevard in the Town of Wheatfield, also serves as home base for another community-based program called Day Habilitation Without Walls.

Over the past few years, 3.3 million containers have been processed, generating \$144,500.00 (Empower receives back \$.035 per container processed) for the agency. This revenue is important because of ongoing funding cuts from New York State.

Customers still receive their full deposit back, just as they would at any other bottle return center.



Beyond its public service and job training benefits, Empties for Empower is a meeting place where people with and without disabilities interact, something that our customers tell us did not exist before.

"This place is amazing and all of the staff do an incredible job," says Naomi, an Empties customer. "All you guys are amazing. Keep it up!"



## Performing in Artpark's Production of "The Odyssey"

More and more, Empower is being approached by partners with inclusion opportunities. When

alongside professional actors and people from other community organizations.

Artpark asked Empower to participate in a community performance of "The Odyssey," our response was a resounding YES. Participants received theater instruction leading up to the production and were able to perform

"Just to see Becky on stage was an absolute thrill," says Empower board member Don Napoleon, whose daughter was one of the community performers. "She wore a huge smile the whole time, so excited to be included and have the experience of performing in a professional production. It was awesome."

# SUPPORTED BY A TRUSTED AND EFFICIENT AGENCY

## CQL Accreditation

In April 2018, Empower earned a three-year quality assurance accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL).

Empower staff and board members, service recipients and their families and community partners came together to support this effort. It was an uplifting experience that celebrated Empower's evolution from its humble beginnings serving children with cerebral palsy into one of the region's 60 largest nonprofits with more than 300 employees supporting 1,000 people each year.

Empower continues to expand internal and external opportunities for the people it supports to be more involved. People now serve on committees and interview staff. Jackie is one of the people who sits in on interviews.



"Jackie is awesome," says Brandon Jerla, Empower's director of staff development and learning. "She has progressed so much and even accurately

predicted that a new hire would not be a good fit for the organization. Now I take her input more seriously, and give her as many questions to ask as she wants."

Several other new initiatives aimed at greater community inclusion are now being implemented thanks to grants procured by Empower. In a time when disability providers are being challenged to achieve full inclusion for the people they support, Empower is stepping up to the plate and delivering a home run.

## Affordable Pre-K

Empower's Children's Academy is an affordable option for all children, not just preschoolers with a disability. WKBW Channel 7 visited on a bright morning in early June to do a story on the school's affordability and integration benefits to typically-developing children.



As the news camera rolls, Ms. Shaila, a 20-year veteran teacher, leads her integrated class in a song while one child flops down on a mat and starts crying. Ms. Linda, one of Ms. Shaila's aides, immediately sits down next to the boy and asks him to join her in the balloon game. As Ms. Linda breathes in and raises her arms like a balloon expanding, the boy follows along.

"This student has come such a long way," Ms. Shaila explains to the news reporter. "He really responds to the balloon game, which is a technique I learned at a workshop. He knows it by heart which helps calm him down."

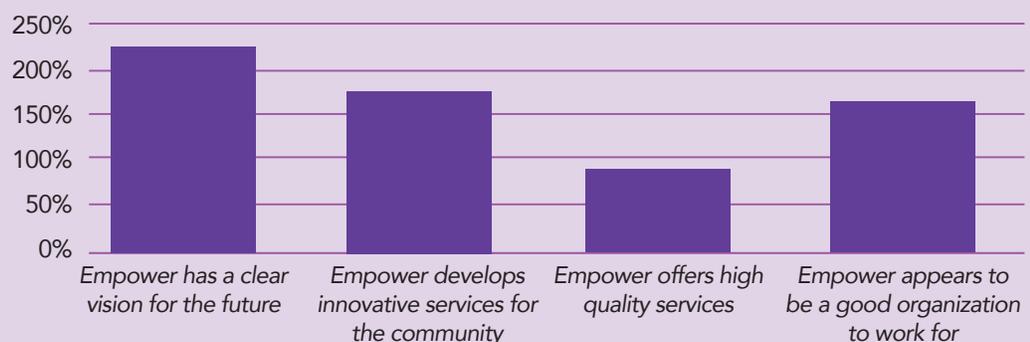
Ms. Shaila is passionate about her students. She attributes her students' success to the low student-to-teacher ratios that exist at Empower Children's Academy (Ms. Linda is one of three aides available to the six students in Ms. Shaila's class, there to give them individualized attention.)

But, she says, the most important lesson that her students learn while attending Empower Children's Academy is the empathy and acceptance that they teach each other.

With these benefits and compared to traditional preschools, Empower Children's Academy is a more affordable option for families.

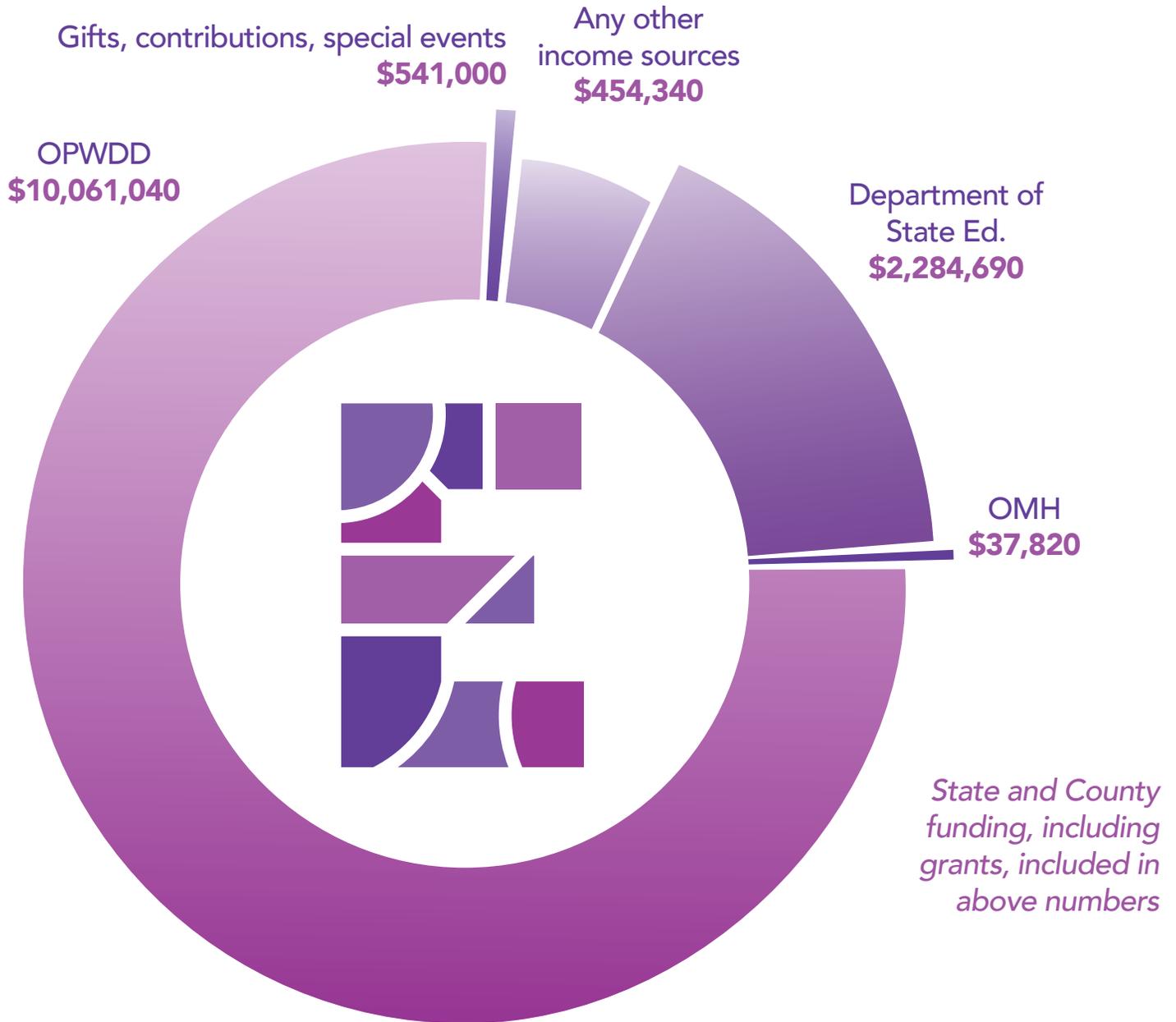
## Empower's Reputation Increases 216%

Each year, Empower administers a reputation survey to external constituents, including community leaders, service providers, business owners and oversight agencies. Respondents rate Empower on such indicators as trust, quality of services and community contributor standing. From the initial survey in 2015 through 2018, Empower's overall rating has increased 216%, which signals that the agency is succeeding in its efforts to deliver top-quality programs and to engage more with the community.



REPUTATION SURVEY: CHANGE FROM 2015 TO 2018

# 2018 FINANCIAL REPORT



**INCOME: \$13,378,890**

# 2018 FACTS AND FIGURES

Empower started a **new shredding business** as another work opportunity at our Military Road redemption center.

Empower worked with the Niagara Wheatfield School District to create the **Steps to Work** program, which offered paid summer internships to students throughout our community.

Through a partnership with Niagara University, staff from the **Empower Children's Academy** are learning about the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children.

Empower joined a **telemedicine collaborative** that is reducing emergency department and urgent care visits by people who live in our certified Community Housing sites.

Empower increased the number of insurances that we accept in our clinic so that we can **expand community usage**.

Empower received a **\$50,000 grant** from a national foundation to work with a group of partner agencies on improving transportation access for underemployed populations.

Empower changed the name of our foundation to the **Empower Foundation** and started reorganizing it to be a more effective partner.

Empower prioritized staff recruitment and retention, allowing us to dramatically reduce the number of open positions **reduce overtime costs by 20%**.

Thanks to a **\$300,000 state grant**, Empower replaced the roof and the obsolete cooling tower at our administration and preschool complex, which will improve health and safety.

Empower took a board seat with the **Person Centered Services Care Coordination Organization** and worked to provide a smooth transition from Medicaid Service Coordination to Care Coordination.

# 2018 CONTRIBUTORS

## \$1-\$249

Advanced Care Fitness Center  
Adventure Landing  
Always A Party  
Audio One  
Be Moved Fitness  
Bob O Link Golf Club  
Born'n Raised Tattoo Gallery  
Buffalo Bandits  
Buffalo Bills  
Buffalo Bisons Baseball  
Buffalo History Museum  
Buffalo Sabres  
Buzzy's Pizza  
C.T. Young Mechanical  
Capitol Cleaners  
Carrols Corporation  
Carson's Deli  
Chelsea Salon & Day Spa

Christmas Tree Shop  
Como Restaurant  
Compu-Mail  
Confer Plastics Inc.  
Darien Lake  
Delta Sonic  
Deltex Electric  
Disney  
John R. Drexelius, Jr. Esq.  
Joan Dugan  
El Cubilete  
Empower Job Training  
& Day Programs  
Enchanted Florist  
Enterprise Fleet Management  
Fashion Outlet Mall  
Favorites  
Firths Jewelers  
Four Points Sheraton

Geiter's  
Gi-Ro Cleaners  
William Goodband  
Barbara Hanel  
Alexandra Haninec  
Herschell Carrousell Museum  
Inspirations on Canvas  
Joe Cecconi's  
Johnson Estate Winery  
Linda Kay  
Kim Kiely  
Kiwanis Club of Lewiston, Inc.  
Kwik Klean  
LaGalera  
Latina  
Laundry Lounge  
Mary Lostracco  
Mackenzie's Automotive  
Maid of the Mist

# 2018 CONTRIBUTORS, *continued*

## **\$0-\$249, *continued***

Maria Cardamone  
Marketside Restaurant  
Denise Markiewicz  
Michael Marra  
Martin's Service Station  
Annette McMahon  
Michael's Restaurant  
Mighty Taco  
W. Graham Miller  
Mom's Restaurant  
Assemblyman Angelo Morinello  
Mount St. Mary's Hospital  
Don Napoleon  
Niagara County Sheriff's Office  
Niagara Falls Bridge Commission  
Oogi Games  
Orange Cat Coffee Co.  
Palm Beach Garden's Chapter 1471 -  
Women of the Moose  
Pane's Restaurant  
Papa Leo's Pizzeria  
Pellicano's  
Piccirillo's Florist  
Ponderosa  
Carol Rae  
Reid Petroleum Corp.  
Relentless Tattoo  
Rock Solid Tattoos  
Royal Café  
Russell's  
Rust  
Sagemark Consulting/  
Lincoln Financial  
Salvatore's Italian Gardens  
Scotts Furniture  
Seneca Niagara Casino  
Shamus Restaurant  
Shatter I.T.  
Shawnee Country Barns  
Sheraton at the Falls

## **\$0-\$249, *continued***

Ricky Sirianni  
Smokin Joes  
Solidays Bar and Grill  
Solution Development (SDF)  
Spaulding Hardware  
Spicey Pickle  
Steve's Meats  
Anna Stickney  
Stuart Sports  
Sue's Frame of Mind  
Supermarket Liquors  
Teds Jumbo Red Hots Inc  
The Giacomo  
Third Street Retreat  
Lisa Thorburn  
Tim Hortons  
Tops Markets LLC  
Victorias Family Hair Care  
Vincenzo's Pizza House  
Vito's Horseshoe Club  
VSCO  
Wagner's Farm Market  
WalMart  
WB Mason  
Webber's Window & Gutter  
Cleaning  
Wedge Liquors  
Wegmans  
Why Coffee Shop  
Youngstown Village Diner  
Zoladz

## **\$250-\$499**

A. Kranitz Associates, Inc.  
BluPax Pharma Inc.  
Vincent Cancemi  
Bob & Sheila DiFrancesco  
Susan Kuznik  
Dr. Michael Marrone  
Joseph & Sandy Mineo

## **\$250-\$499, *continued***

M.J. Colucci & Son Niagara  
Funeral Chapel  
Jeff & Michele Paterson  
Patricia Wrobel

## **\$500-\$749**

Tom & Jude Caserta  
Stanley Fera  
Greenwood Group  
Elizabeth Hoke  
Randy's Smokeshop  
Univera

## **\$750 & Up**

Accessium Group  
AmerisourceBergen  
Bond, Schoeneck and King, PLLC  
ComDoc  
Crown Benefits  
Elks Lockport Lodge #41  
Elks Major Projects, Inc.  
Elks Niagara Falls Lodge #346  
Integrity Auto  
Kessler Foundation  
KeyBank  
Mackenzie's Automotive  
National Alliance for Accessible Golf  
New York State Council on the Arts  
Decentralization Program  
Niagara County Central Rotary  
Parkview Health Services, LLC  
Schlaak Enterprises, LLC  
Sertoma Inc.  
The Evans Agency, LLC  
Town of Niagara, Give Fashionably  
Program  
Univera Healthcare

# SPECIAL EVENTS

## 26th Annual Matthew J. Murphy, Jr. Memorial Drive fore Empower Golf Tournament

Going into the 2018 tournament, we had the most sponsors ever, who donated a combined total of \$21,000.00! Wow! Bob O'Leary from Parkview Health Services joined the organizing committee and brought many new ideas and opportunities to the table.

Even when thunderstorms forced golfers to return to the clubhouse, they patiently waited out the weather before heading back out once the skies cleared.

Buffalo Sabres alumnus Darryl Shannon joined us and offered attendees the benefit of his athletic excellence by taking a shot on their behalf.

The Mary and Neil Gruppo Service Award was given to longtime Empower employee and golf organizing committee member, Mike Marra. Over the years, Mike has helped hundreds of people with an intellectual or developmental disability find and keep jobs in the community as coordinator of Empowered to Work, our job placement program. Mike also is active in his church and has served the Town of Lewiston as an

elected official. Congratulations to Mike on this well-deserved award.

Our emcees Keith Radford and John Murphy did a wonderful job

auctioning off some great prizes, including a Sabres suite which drew big dollars.

In all, a record-breaking \$31,441.00 was raised, making this year's tournament the most successful in its twenty-six year history!



## 2018 Basket Auction

Empower's Snowflake Basket Auction is a truly wonderful event because it's free and open to everyone. Crowds come in droves to try their hand at winning some great baskets, most of which are lovingly donated and assembled by our rock star organizing committee chaired by Annette Kilgour and Cheryl Seelbinder.

This year's event, held March 9-10 at the Volare Lodge in Niagara Falls, raised a record-breaking \$22,442. which is spent directly on activities and projects that benefit the people we support.

We at Empower are grateful to the community for supporting this wonderful event for the past nine years. To our generous sponsors and donors, you make this success possible, so we thank you.

# SPECIAL EVENTS, *continued*

## Living the Values Awards Luncheon

Empower held its third annual community awards luncheon at the Four Points by Sheraton on Friday, October 26. Nine awards were given to individuals, organizations and businesses that embody Empower's core values. Videos about each awardee were shown in advance of award presentations and remarks. Empower is proud to work alongside and honor these amazing awardees, and wishes to thank everyone who attended.

## 2018 Living the Values Award Recipients

### **Empower Values Excellence:**

*2018 People Power Award*

Santino Bax

### **Empower Values Leadership:**

*2018 Dr. Salvatore M. Passanese Leadership Award*

Kirk M. Maurer, Regional Director &

Kevin Penberthy, Deputy Regional Director

New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Region 1

### **Empower Values Accountability:**

*2018 Faithful Funder Award*

Elks Lodges #41 and #346,

Niagara County Central Rotary Club, &  
Sertoma Club of Niagara Falls

### **Empower Values Collaboration:**

*2018 Priceless Partner Award*

Riester Physical Therapy

### **Empower Values Dignity:**

*2018 Exceptional Employer Award*

The Conference & Event Center of Niagara Falls



# WAYS TO GIVE

ONLINE [www.empower-wny.org/donations](http://www.empower-wny.org/donations)

BY MAIL *Make checks payable to  
Empower*

Empower  
9812 Lockport Rd.  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304

**ALL DONATIONS ARE  
TAX-DEDUCTIBLE**

# CONNECT



[www.empower-wny.org](http://www.empower-wny.org)



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