



# Listening to More Voices



**EMPOWER**

*support services to help you live your best life*

**ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

# Listening to More Voices

Throughout 2019, Empower engaged more intentionally than ever with the people we support and with our community to understand how we can be more effective.

We created the Empower Advisory Council, a group of 35 professionals who inform us on gaps in the areas of early childhood services, community health, and employment for people with disabilities. As you will read later in this report, our first Advisory Council meeting led to an exciting new partnership with the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA.

Empower also received several notable recognitions in 2019, including the prestigious Partnership Coalition Award and the Robert Schonhorn Direct Support Professional of the Year Award, a statewide award given to our own Ernestine Gayle at the annual conference of the Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State. These honors show that Empower's profile is truly growing.

This report is organized according to the three sections of our strategic direction statement, which reflects our commitment to listening to more voices. 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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*Enrolled Agent/Tax Practitioner*

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*Integrated Customer Account  
Manager, Eisai US*

Richard Sawicki, DPM  
*Doctor of Podiatry*

## Giving Back to the Agency that Supports Us

**Jackie McGrath:** *I like helping people, and being a part of the hiring process*

Jackie McGrath is a shining example of what is possible for people with disabilities. In 2019, she began helping during interviews with prospective staff and during new hire orientations. According to Empower Director of Staff Development and Learning Brandon Jerla, "Having the added perspective of someone who is supported by the agency has improved our hiring and training processes immensely. It provides job seekers with a better understanding of the nature of the work. Jackie relies on her gut instinct in determining if someone is a good fit for the agency. More often than not, she is right, and I have learned to defer to her judgment."

McGrath echoes Brandon's remarks. "My favorite part about interviewing people is the time I told Brandon not to hire someone," she says. "I didn't think they were a good fit. That person was hired anyway, and two weeks later, they didn't work out. Now, Brandon listens to me!"

McGrath also traveled to the Council on Quality and Leadership annual conference in Baltimore with Jerla and Director of Managed Care Readiness Eric DesSoye to talk about her role in the hiring process. She says the experience strengthened her self-confidence. "I feel like I am more a part of Empower," says Jackie. "I am more comfortable speaking in front of a group now."

**LEFT:** Empower Director of Managed Care Readiness Eric DesSoye, Empower Director of Staff Development & Learning Brandon Jerla, Karen Nowak (Jackie's sister), Jackie McGrath and Empower CEO Jeff Paterson at Empower's 2019 Living the Values Luncheon where McGrath received the People Power Award. **CENTER:** DesSoye, Jerla and McGrath presenting at the CQL conference. **RIGHT:** Kendalynn Goeddert preparing for a Minor Incident Review Committee meeting.

**Kendalynn Goeddert:** *Serving on an Empower committee has made me a better reader*

Empower's internal committees, which monitor agency operations, are made up of a diverse group of members – staff, family members and people supported – to ensure all perspectives are represented. Kendalynn Goeddert, who is always smiling, especially while working at the Empties for Empower bottle return center, joined the Minor Occurrence Committee in 2019. Each month, Goeddert is accompanied to meetings by Empower Direct Support Professional Paulette Rinker. Along with the rest of the committee, they review and determine action steps for noteworthy incidents – not considered to be serious or reportable – that happen to people, who, like Goeddert, are supported in Empower programs.

Goeddert says that she enjoys attending meetings, particularly the opportunity to read out loud to the group. She hopes that her input improves Empower services for people supported. According to Empower Director of Program Operations and Quality Assurance Administration Diane Baehre, "Kendalynn is an asset to the committee. She is always punctual and adheres to confidentiality."

The committee service experience has other benefits too. Rinker reports that she has been able to incorporate positive behavioral strategies discussed during committee meetings into her own work with people supported by Empower's Job Training & Day Programs division. "It has improved my relationships with the people I support, and made me a better worker," says Rinker.



# PEOPLE LIVING THEIR BEST LIVES

## Retirement Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony

Building on our commitment to seek out and to help realize the ideas of the people we support, Empower staff worked with service recipient and self-advocate Dan Cecere to create the Empower Retirement Hall of Fame. Cecere got the idea from watching wrestling, and felt it was a great way to reconnect with and to recognize longtime employees such as former Chief Executive Officer Joe Mineo for their service to the agency.



*Empower CEO Jeff Paterson and service recipient and self-advocate Dan Cecere making their opening remarks during the Retirement Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony*

Cecere worked with Empower Director of Job Training & Day Programs Kim Kiely to plan the induction ceremony. Together, they developed

inductee parameters, coordinated attendance, and practiced remarks. In all, 12 Empower retirees were inducted in a ceremony that took place at Empower's administrative offices on July 23. It was a wonderful day that accomplished just what Cecere envisioned: celebrating the contributions of past employees and carrying on their legacy of service.



**FRONT ROW:** John Pitonyak, Joe Mineo, Dan Cecere, Sherri Kaminski, Irene Frosolone, Marilyn Morreale, Sandy Worthington, Susan Drabczyk, Lyda McGarvey, Kathleen Curione, Kimberlee Farmer and Dean Hangen  
**BACK ROW:** Jeff Paterson

## Brooklyn S.: Blossoming Through the Help of Empower Children's Academy

Like many Empower Children's Academy students, Brooklyn blossomed while at our preschool. During one-on-one time with special education teacher Ms. Shaila, Brooklyn progressed from using pictures to communicate her needs, to speaking in full sentences. Brooklyn had difficulty sitting still when she began attending our school, but through her classroom routine and support from staff, she developed the ability to focus and see activities through to completion.



*Brooklyn reading with her teacher, Shaila Kokil*

From her time spent with our occupational therapist, Brooklyn improved her fine motor skills and is better able to glue, cut, color, and manipulate puzzles. Brooklyn also made great strides in her social skills, forming friendships with her classmates, learning to share and take turns. Brooklyn writes her name and can count to 20. She now is ready to move up to kindergarten in the fall.

According to Brooklyn's mother, "From the outset, Empower Children's Academy created a two-way dialogue about Brooklyn's needs and progress. We were able to have input into her learning, and received guidance on what to do at home to help her progress. We cannot thank you enough for your willingness to listen and support our daughter."

Empower Children's Academy is the perfect environment for students like Brooklyn, offering them a full range of supports needed to maximize their progress. Then, caring teachers and staff engage with students, families and school districts to make sure students are ready to achieve their full potential in elementary school.

# CONTRIBUTING TO OUR COMMUNITY



*Completed Grab 'N Go Cart that will operate at the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA when the mall reopens later in 2020*

## Anthony Salvo's Coffee Cart Dream Becoming a Reality

When Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA Senior Property Manager John Doran accepted an invitation to serve on Empower's new Advisory Council, he expected the experience to be rather dry. At the first meeting, John was part of the breakout session on employment that was facilitated by Empower Director of Job Training & Day Programs Kim Kiely.

"Instead of debits and credits," says Doran, "Kim told us about Anthony, whose dream to open a coffee cart was on its way to becoming a reality thanks to a grant obtained by Empower. It was such a breath of

fresh air. And I thought, okay, how can I help fulfill this young man's dream? I introduced Anthony to my colleagues at Macerich (the company that owns and operates the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA) using a video about him created by Empower. They were as enthusiastic about wanting to help as I was. We agreed to offer a no-cost lease to Empower so that they could locate the coffee cart at the mall temporarily until they find a more permanent home. It was perfect, and it has been an absolute delight to work with Kim and Anthony on realizing this cart."

Since 2018, Doran has been instrumental in collecting and donating the returns of cans and bottles collected at the mall's food court which are processed at Empties for Empower. Doran also serves on the selection committee for grants awarded to community organizations, including Empower, by the Town of Niagara. "These activities are rewarding," he says. "I love being part of them. But with this coffee cart project, which we renamed the Grab 'N Go Cart based on the idea that customers can grab snacks/drinks and go, I feel like I am working for Anthony. It's awesome!"

## Tower Advisory Group: Incorporating Perspectives of the People You Are Trying to Help in the Grant Review Process

In 2019, people supported by Empower as well as Empower staff were invited by the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation to participate in a unique grant-review process. According to Mike Frail, an Empower staff member and father to Anthony who is supported by Empower, this was the first time that a funder has asked his son, "How do you feel?"

Over the course of three sessions, participants got to know each other, reviewed and made recommendations on grant requests, and celebrated the experience together. Anthony says, "I learned so much about other organizations in the area and the people they serve. It was a wonderful experience."

During grant review discussions with Tower Foundation staff, participants drew parallels between their own experiences and those of grant request beneficiaries, bringing to life the challenges and needs of those impacted. Their insights were brilliant and illustrated the value of including everyone's perspective in any activity.

Increasingly, Empower is being sought out by our community to participate in such initiatives, underscoring that our outreach efforts and improved reputation - whose ultimate goal is to lead to more opportunities for the people we support - are working.



*Marshawn Walton and Anthony Salvo let off some steam during a Tower Foundation Advisory Group celebration at Buffalo RiverWorks*

## Steps to Work: Helping Students with Disabilities Learn Job Skills and Obtain Employment



*2019 Dr. Salvatore Passanese Leadership Award recipient Lisa Lindamer and Empower CEO Jeff Paterson at the 2019 Empower Living the Values Awards Luncheon*

Another way in which Empower has helped our community is through Steps to Work, a ten-week work readiness program for high school age students with disabilities that is administered by Adult Career and Continuing Education Services within the New York State Education Department.

In 2019, Empower provided classroom instruction, internship placement assistance and follow-along services to 21 students at Niagara Wheatfield High School, Niagara Academy, and North Tonawanda High School. At least six of these students com-

pleted their internships at Empower, and others went on to secure jobs with benefits in the community.

According to Niagara Wheatfield Central School District School Counselor Lisa Lindamer, who received Empower's Dr. Salvatore Passanese Leadership Award in 2019 for helping to make the program so successful at her school, "Empower has been wonderful to work with. They are extremely accommodating, adjusting staff numbers according to class sizes and doing whatever it takes to help our students."

Empower is proud to partner with Niagara County school districts and to support individual students in transitioning from school to work.

# SUPPORTED BY A TRUSTED AND EFFICIENT AGENCY

## Ernestine Gayle: Selected by CP of NYS as the Direct Support Professional of the Year

At the Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State 2019 annual conference, Empower Direct Support Professional (DSP) and superhero Ernestine Gayle was honored with the statewide Robert Schonhorn Direct Support Professional of the Year Award. Ernestine was selected for this honor because of the love and care that she shows each person she supports who live in one of Empower's homes. She is driven by the relationships she has built.

Her greatest satisfaction comes when she teaches the people she supports to do something for themselves. Beyond this important work, Ernestine also is a role model for her co-workers, uplifting them with her positive outlook and showing them the importance of infusing love into the care they provide. Ernestine's influence is reflected in the fact that the home where she works has the highest employee retention rate of any of Empower's 10 homes. Ernestine is one of the reasons why Empower is increasingly regarded as a provider of choice in the Western New York region.



*The following group from Empower cheered on Ernestine Gayle as she received the Robert Schonhorn Direct Support Professional of the Year Award at the CP of NYS 2019 annual conference: CEO Jeff Paterson; Director of Program*

*Operations & Quality Assurance Administration Diane Baehre; Board President and CP of NYS Board Member Tom Caserta; Ernestine Gayle; CP of NYS Past President, Empower Board Past President and Current Board Member Bob DiFrancesco; former employee Jackie Davis; Director of Community Housing Bill Krayss; Coordinator of Community Support Services Robin Stevens; and Assistant Education Supervisor Amy Scott*

## Empower Awarded the Partnership Coalition Award at the 2019 Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day

Empower was awarded the 2019 Partnership Coalition Award by the Western New York Partnership Coalition, a group of leaders representing self-advocates, family members, providers, community members, and New York State's Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

Empower's creation of programs that provide more opportunities for the people it supports to get involved in our community are among the reasons we were selected to receive this award. In 2019, Anthony Salvo, service recipient and Grab 'N Go Cart inventor, became the first person with an intellectual and developmental disability to be part of a Leadership Niagara class, which is a year-long development course for professionals. In addition, Empower implemented an inclusive golf program funded by the National Alliance for Accessible Golf and the Empower Foundation where people supported learn golf basics alongside people without disabilities.



*Outgoing New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities Deputy Director Kevin Penberthy presented the Partnership Coalition Award to service recipient and self-advocate Dan Cecere, Empower CEO Jeff Paterson and Empower Board President Tom Caserta*

The Partnership Coalition Award was presented to Empower by outgoing OPWDD Deputy Regional Director Kevin Penberthy, who spoke at length about the positive cultural shift toward inclusion that has occurred at the agency in recent years.

# SUPPORTED BY A TRUSTED AND EFFICIENT AGENCY

## 3 Lanes of Day Habilitation

When people offer feedback on gaps in services, Empower listens. In 2019, we began offering a program called Day Habilitation Without Walls, in which participants spend the majority of their day in the community, rather than in a center. This service provides an alternative for people who need fewer supports than those offered at the traditional center-based day program on Buffalo Avenue. Day Habilitation is now considered the “fast lane” in Empower’s three lanes of day services.

Shortly after this new service began, some participants expressed the desire for a third, more leisurely lane alternative: one in which the majority of the day is spent in one place with some outings. Luckily, Empower already had a program in place that fulfilled this need: Empower for Elders. Empower for Elders (E4E) was created as a social model adult day program for older adults who live at home in the community. E4E participants spend most of the day at the Porter Road site.

Co-locating a day program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at the Porter Road site answered the need for a slower-paced program, and created another opportunity for people with and without disabilities to get to know one another. According to David Merlino, who began attending the program in 2019,

“I like coming here because I didn’t want to stay at home all day because I was staring at walls, so I joined it so I have something to do during the day.”



*Porter Rd. Day Hab participant David Merlino discusses why he enjoys coming to this program*

The Buffalo Avenue day habilitation program provides more supports for participants such as Mikey Rowland who enjoy drawing portraits, socializing and coloring. In addition, when Mikey indicated that he wanted to volunteer, Empower made sure that he was included on outings such as delivering Meals on Wheels and Niagara Beautification projects. In that way, the three lanes of day hab are even more individualized because even once a person chooses a program, they are able to participate



*Buffalo Avenue Day Hab participant Mikey Rowland proudly shows off a tie-dye shirt that he made*

in the activities of another program if they would like. It is truly a person-centered design that benefits everyone.

Day Habilitation Without Walls’ participant, Becky Rae, has come out of her shell thanks to greater time spent in the community. Shy by nature, Becky now makes eye contact and says hello to cashiers at stores, which according to Empower Day Habilitation Coordinator Jamie Zimmerman is because of

confidence gained as a result of the program’s integration component.

Socialization, person-centered attention and accommodation, and confidence-building are just some of the many benefits experienced by people supported by Empower’s three lanes of day habilitation programming. For more information about Empower and its day programming, please contact Jamie at (716) 371-0728 or [jjzimmerman@empower-wny.org](mailto:jjzimmerman@empower-wny.org).



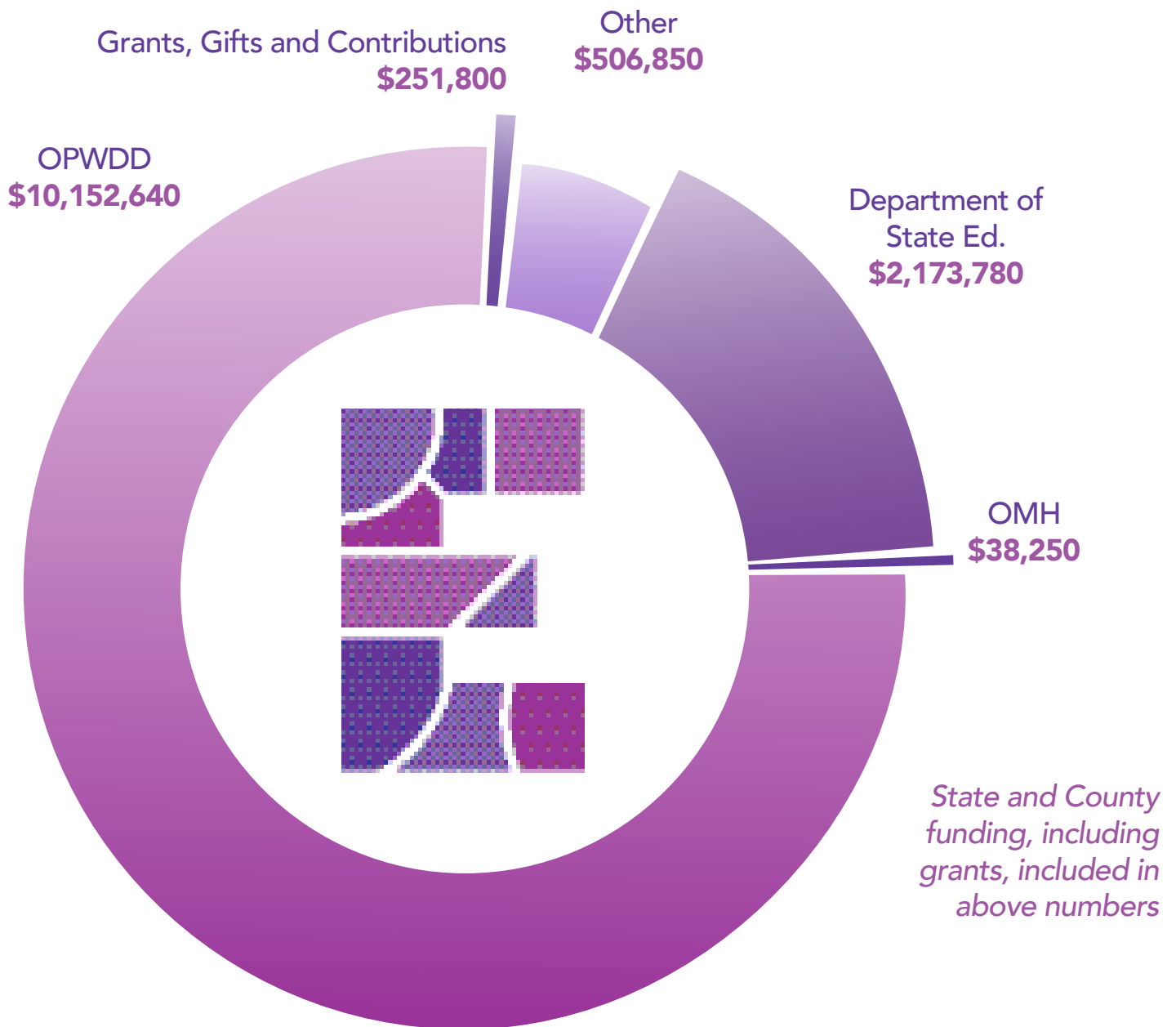
*Becky Rae (second from right) during weekly baking lessons at the YWCA of the Niagara Frontier*

Day Hab  
Without  
Walls

Empower  
4 Elders

Buffalo  
Avenue

# 2019 FINANCIAL REPORT





# 2019 FACTS AND FIGURES

Our two **Empties for Empower** redemption centers processed 1,852,618 containers – a **30% increase** from 2018

We dramatically increased our respite services, providing **45% more units of respite service** in 2019 than in 2018

We increased our community habilitation services, providing **10% more units of service** in 2019 than in 2018

We implemented a **new partnership** with our Elmira-based cerebral palsy affiliate, Able2, for smoother operation of our Article 28 clinic

We recruited **35 subject matter experts** for our new Advisory Council, to guide us on service delivery

We have **improved our external reputation by 216%** since 2015, with steady growth on every reputation indicator

We inducted 12 retirees into the inaugural class of the **Empower Retirement Hall of Fame**

# 2019 CONTRIBUTORS

## \$1-\$249

Lori Argo

Karen Bailey

Bare Bottom Wholesale

David Barry

John Battaglia

Black & Blue Steak & Crab

Born'n Raised Tattoo Gallery

Buffalo Bandits

Buffalo Bills

Buffalo Harbor Cruises

Buffalo History Museum

Buffalo Sabres

Dawn Buono

Kevin Burgess

Buzzy's Pizza

Canvas Crashers

Capitol Cleaners

Laura Capizzi State Farm

Maria Cardamone

Carpet Mill Outlet

James Carrier

Carrols Corporation

Tom & Jude Caserta

Carson's Deli

James Catanese

Mary Ann Cheney

Nicholas Chervenak

Christmas Tree Shop

Kim & Ed Clark

Community Beer Works

Como Restaurant

Dr. Maria Crea

Darlene Cutonilli

Dairy Queen

Delta Sonic Car Wash Systems

Eric & Michelle DesSoye

Dicamillo's Bakery

Christina DiPaolo

Amy Duell

Mayor Paul Dyster

Enterprise Fleet Management

Anthony Eugeni

Evans Agency

Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls

Favorites

Fortuna's Restaurant & Banquets

Four Points Sheraton

Irene Frosolone

Mark Gabriele

Steve Gaertner

Tammy Gansworth

Angela Gantt

Lee Gath

Gary & Barb Geitter

Giacomo

Gi-Ro Cleaners

Grandma D's

Kathleen Harrill

Janet Heffernan

Herschell Carrousell Museum

Michael Hines

Mary & Mike Hoffman

Maura & John Hoffman

Rich & Mary Holroyd

Patricia Hutton

Anna Iannarelli

Ilio DiPaolo's Restaurant

Inspirations on Canvas

Joe Cecconi's

Maurice Johnson

Sherri Kaminski

Kim Kiely

Annette Kilgour

Dr. Alice Kozen

Kwik Klean

Patricia LaCourse

Jolene Lambert

# 2019 CONTRIBUTORS, CONTINUED

## **\$1-\$249** *continued*

Mary Lostracco  
Mackenzie's Auto  
Marguerite MacPhee  
Clara Martin  
Masiello, Martucci, Calabrese  
& Associates  
Clyde Mayer  
Philip McCluskey  
Patricia McIntosh  
Michael's Restaurant  
Mighty Taco  
Marjorie Milleville  
Moms Restaurant  
Mrs. & Mrs. Joe Moran  
Mr. Ventry's  
Napoleon Family  
Jolene Nearhood  
Network for Good  
Niagara Barber Co.  
Niagara County Central Rotary  
Niagara Honeymoon Sweets  
Karen Nowak  
Maria Olan  
Kathie Olsen  
Papa Leo's Pizzeria  
Thomas Patrick  
Melissa Payne  
Ponderosa  
Carol Rae  
Romana's Pizza & Grill  
Russell's  
Saint Gobain ADFORS  
Salon Jule  
Salvatore's Italian Gardens  
Karen Schweitzer  
Petrina Sciandra  
Scotts Furniture  
Cheryl Seelbinder  
Seneca Niagara Casino  
Sevenson Environmental

Kristin Sherry-Miller  
Christina Smith  
Lee Stadler  
Terri Steinjan  
Marty & Lois Stevens  
Maria Stevenson  
Todd Stopa  
Supermarket Liquors & Wines, Inc  
Sandra Switzer  
Rita Tweedie  
Diana VanHise  
Anna Wadlinger  
Robin & Charles Warren  
Diane Wasieczko  
Wedge Liquors  
Patrice Wells  
Sally Wells  
Why Coffee Shop  
Vicky Wideman  
Denise Winger  
Youngstown Village Diner

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

Autism Society of America/  
WNY Chapter  
Stanley Fera  
Susan Kuznik  
Tod Main  
Mason's Mission  
Jeffrey & Michele Paterson  
Carol Pelletier  
Russ Polvino  
Randy's Smokeshop  
Solidays Bar and Grill  
Spaulding Hardware  
Spicey Pickle  
Robin Stevens  
Sue's Frame of Mind  
Teds Jumbo Red Hots Inc  
The Pet Stuff Store  
Tim Hortons

Tops Markets LLC  
Village Goldsmith  
Viola's  
Volare Lodge  
Wagners  
Wegmans

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

Tom & Jude Caserta  
James Catanese  
Robert & Sheila DiFrancesco  
Elizabeth Hoke  
Ronald Miller  
Joseph & Sandy Mineo  
Good Riddance Pest Control, LLC  
KeyBank Foundation  
Smokin Joes  
Michael & Janice Vitch  
Wal-Mart

## **\$750 & Up**

Crown Benefits  
Bond, Schoeneck and King, PLLC  
The Evans Agency  
KeyBank  
National Alliance for Accessible Golf  
Niagara County Central Rotary  
Neil Gruppo  
Gary & Fran Hall  
Marcus Latham  
Mackenzie's Automotive  
New York Elks Major Projects, Inc.  
Parkview Health Services, LLC  
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Funds  
Schlaak Enterprises, LLC  
Stuart Sports  
C.T. Young Mechanical  
Univera Healthcare  
Verizon Community Benefit Fund for  
Niagara County, Inc., Empire State  
Development

## 10th Annual Snowflake Basket Auction

Large crowds attended 10th annual Snowflake Basket Auction in March 2019, raising \$22,000 for the agency and the people we support. Over 250 themed baskets, gift certificates to attractions, and large drawing prizes are donated each year, helping to draw attendees and generate such significant proceeds. The basket auction committee does a fantastic job assembling baskets, organizing the event and ensuring that everything runs smoothly. Most of all, everyone involved from people supported to community members enjoys the chance to see one another and come together for the shared purpose of empowering people to live the lives they choose.



## Living the Values Awards Luncheon

Empower held its fourth annual community awards luncheon at the Four Points by Sheraton on Friday, October 25. Five awards were given to individuals, businesses and organizations that embody Empower's core values. Empower is proud to work alongside and honor these amazing awardees, and wishes to thank everyone who attended.



*LEFT: Suburban Adult General Enterprises (SAGE) Manager Donald Souder accepting the Exceptional Employer Award from Empower CEO Jeff Paterson*

*RIGHT: Empower CEO Jeff Paterson presenting the Faithful Funder Award to Univera Healthcare President Art Wingerter*

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

A record number of golfers and dinner attendees joined us at this year's event. We have a loyal group of supporters who attend every year, and their spirit of generosity and friendship is so appreciated.



The Mary and Neil Gruppo Service Award was given to Evans Agency Vice President Ron Miller for his expertise and generous support both in the provision of many different health insurances and in his service on Empower's Safety Committee. Congratulations to Ron on this well-deserved award.

Our emcees Keith Radford and John Murphy did a wonderful job auctioning off some great items.

In total, \$39,000 was raised, which will fund services and supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are supported by Empower.

### Living the Values Award Recipients

*Empower Values Excellence: 2019 People Power Award*  
Jackie McGrath

*Empower Values Accountability: 2019 Faithful Funder Award*  
Univera Healthcare

*Empower Values Dignity: 2019 Exceptional Employer Award*  
Suburban Adult General Enterprises (SAGE)

*Empower Values Inclusion: 2019 Priceless Partner Award*  
Leadership Niagara

*Empower Values Leadership: 2019 Dr. Salvatore M. Passanese Award*

Lisa Lindamer, M.S.E.D (School Counselor, Niagara Wheatfield Central School District)

# WAYS TO GIVE

# CONNECT

**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**



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



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