

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED SAYS THANK YOU AT 28TH ANNUAL GALA

Elizabeth, NJ – Celebrating both those who give unlimited support and those who feel unlimited in what they can achieve, **Community Access Unlimited** (CAU) held its 28th Annual Gala Dinner Dance October 22 at L’Affaire in Mountainside.

More than 500 guests honored awardees and celebrated the achievements of CAU members, staff and board, and representatives of the community who support the agency. Commerce Bank, a CAU Community Network partner active in supporting people with disabilities, in-need children and affordable housing, was the primary sponsor of the event.

Among those being celebrated were the 2009 honored guests: Linda Maggio of the Westfield United Way with the Public Leadership Award; The Linden Foundation with the Humanitarian of the Year Award; and Paula Long of the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs with the Geller Award. The awards are given each year to individuals and organizations that help improve the lives of people in need throughout the community, as well as assist Community Access Unlimited in its efforts to advocate for people with disabilities and at-risk youth.

“If you were to walk in the shoes of some of our members, you would not have to walk very far to see their great potential and commitment,” said Robert Griffin, president of the CAU board of trustees. “Some of them have their own businesses. Some are consultants in the disabilities arena. Some have been able to become homeowners, which is unheard of in other organizations like ours. There are some very big hearts in this room.

“Whether you receive support, deliver programs, support us financially or volunteer for us, you are making a difference in a very personal way. You are changing lives.”

Maggio was among those recognized in 2008 for changing people’s lives. She is executive director of the Westfield United Way, where she has served for 33 years. The Westfield United Way supports CAU in helping people find affordable housing and people with disabilities obtain employment training.

“Watching the people dance (at the gala), the disabilities they are dealing with and how much they are enjoying living, what Community Access does for their clients through their services, it is a wonderful experience,” Maggio said.

The Linden Foundation funds non-profit organizations that support disadvantaged and homeless families by helping to provide them with the skills and support systems needed to become cohesive, internally supportive and self-sufficient. The foundation helps CAU support parents with special needs children in learning how to become better caregivers.

Tom Kelsey, president and co-founder of The Linden Foundation, along with his wife, Liz, and their children, accepted the award. "We thank Community Access for the great work they do with the little bit we give them," he said. "We've made it our cause to help families. We are fortunate to have a very close family and we'd like to see everybody have the strength of family we have."

Long has long been deeply enmeshed in volunteerism in Union County, including Friends of the Westfield Symphony, the Westfield Historical Society and Kids Hope, USA. She has served as arts program coordinator for the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs since 1998. Long has enabled CAU to offer an arts program to adults with disabilities and at-risk youth, including expansion of the program in 2008 to include dance.

"Community Access believes in promoting the arts as a part of lifelong learning," she said. "The experience allows students to express themselves and their personal worth."

The value of personal worth is not limited to just CAU members, according to Anthony Penta, senior vice president at Sovereign Bank, whose employees in 2008 were the top grossing team at the CAU annual Walk-A-Thon for the second consecutive year.

"Being affiliated with an organization like this is important to Sovereign Bank," he said. "The bank looks to partner with the best of the best and support their efforts."

Such external support may be tougher to come by in 2009, warned Sidney Blanchard, CAU executive director, noting that the state budget is facing a \$400 million shortfall that is expected to negatively impact human services efforts and organizations in the coming year. Blanchard called for all those committed to furthering the causes of people with disabilities and at-risk youth to work more closely together to achieve their collective goals.

"It's going to be tough this coming year and the only way we're going to get through it is by looking to one another," he said in thanking the crowd for their continued support and efforts. "However, we've been doing that since we started Community Access out of the back of my car in 1979. Looking around this room and seeing the commitment of our members, staff and all those who give so freely in their support, I know our torch will stay bright and held high."

About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU) supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have had little support and no voice in society. CAU helps people with housing, life skills, employment, money management, socialization and civic activities. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. CAU serves more than 3,500 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at www.caunj.org or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07207.

Photo Attached – [TBD]

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