



Chris Tuosto and Lakisha

Eagle Scout Inspired by Uncle to Enhance Greenhouse Gardens

Opengate residents who love working in our greenhouse now have more space for planting, growing and harvesting vegetables thanks to a community service project completed by Eagle Scout Chris Tuosto of Somers.

The 17-year-old presented a proposal to remodel and add space to the vegetable garden behind the Gray residence with raised planters protected by deer fencing.

“This project allowed me to give back to Opengate that has provided a home for my uncle, and others like him, for many years.”



The Opengate plantings taking root.

Chris raised money for lumber, soil, seeds, plants, fencing and stakes by hosting a Spaghetti Dinner. Over the course of several weeks, he led a group of Scouts, friends and family who finished the extended vegetable garden.

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EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR: Earl Marcelle

Earl Marcelle is a very wise man. Selected as Opengate’s 2015 Employee of the Year, he shrugs off the accolades and, instead, points to what his job as a Direct Service Provider *has given him* over the past six years.



Earl Marcelle

“I love my job,” says Earl. “To work in this field, you have to love the consumers and your co-workers, come to work every day with a positive mindset and be prepared to give one hundred percent.”

As Earl describes, Opengate consumers look at their caregivers as family and, thus, should be treated as such: “The consumers really look at you as an extension of their family,” he says. “It doesn’t matter how I might feel on any given day, when I go to work my job includes making sure that I make at least one consumer smile and laugh.”

“It’s all about building relationships”

In addition, Earl is clearly dedicated to Personal Outcome Measures (POMS) and recounts a story where he set a six-month goal for one individual to be able to serve himself and eat dinner independently. “That was huge,” he says, “and it makes me feel great.”

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CEO's Message

Dear Friends of Opengate:

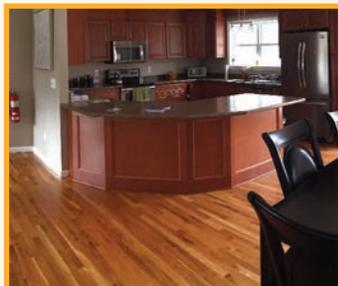
It is a never a dull moment for us! In March, we opened a new, three bedroom house on a quiet, residential street in Mohegan Lake. This four bed Individual Residential Alternative, or IRA, is now home to two of our former Intermediate Care Facility residents plus a new resident who aged out of his residential school. The fourth occupant is yet to be determined but, as of this printing, may have already moved in.

The Florida Road house is run by one of our seasoned residential managers. It is a brand new construction and the site was found after searching more than 40 different locations. Some renovations were accomplished to bring the home into compliance with our fire safety requirements and we included a finished basement for recreation.

The Town of Yorktown and its residents posed no obstacles or objections as we applied for and progressed through construction and move in. *Quite a refreshing change!*

The home is equipped with a large kitchen with a beautiful layout, a lovely deck off of the dining room, a sprinkler system, and the latest technology. We expect to host many summer gatherings outdoors with the Opengate community.

The residents are settling in nicely and are enjoying their new home. While it was chilly weather when they first moved in, the individuals and staff at Florida Road hope to plant a garden in coming weeks. The yard gets a great deal of sun and is perfect for a vegetable and flower garden.



The new Florida Road kitchen

Sincerely,

Brian A. Hulten, LCSW
Chief Executive Officer

Earl Marcelle, *continued from page 1*

The Yonkers, New York native feels his award should be shared with those he works with since they are “a team.” Speaking of teams, Earl is an avid European soccer fan. His favorite professional team, as everyone around him knows, is Chelsea in England.



“Earl is an exemplary role model for us all,” says Deborah Mayo, Director of Programs. “He is patient beyond compare, compassionate beyond understanding and has a peaceful balance that he brings to each shift he works.”

“It’s all about building relationships,” says Earl. 🐾

Spring Returns with Annual Events



It’s always a celebration on Saint Patrick’s Day at Opengate when the performance of *Will the Real St. Patrick Please Stand Up* is held. Draped in green, “Saint Patrick” (all 10 of him) defended his title and why his legacy has remained so important throughout the world today.

On February 17, the Annual Opengate Art Exhibit was held. The classroom participants created reproductions of vases with paper and paint. They were inspired by photographs from around the world. Additionally there were landscapes, paintings of birds, flowers and abstract images. 🐾

Change Is in the Air for ICFs

The New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) embarked on a mission in 2014 to convert most if not all of the State’s Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) as part of its Transformation Agreement with the Federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Because CMS considers all ICFs, even those that are operated as community residences and not campuses, institutional in nature, the transformation must take place. It is important to note, however, that Opengate operates a 34 bed ICF which is broken up into three separate homes and an apartment. However, none of Opengate’s ICFs deliver services in an institutional manner.

“OPWDD is concerned that services provided by ICFs are ‘all inclusive’ with little opportunity for individuals to benefit from Person Centered Planning. This is, on its face, contrary to the underlying premise that individuals in our care respond uniquely to goals tailored to their needs and desires,” explains Ira Rothenstein, Opengate’s Director of Business Operations.

“Although there will be programmatic changes, the individuals being served will continue to receive the supports and services that best meet their needs.”

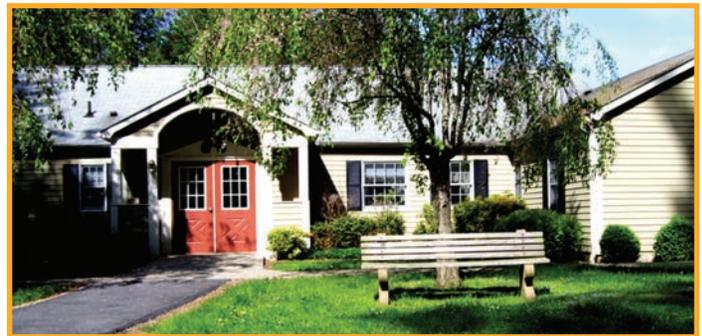
– Ira Rothenstein, Director of Business Operations

Opengate executives are in on-going discussions with the Developmental Disabilities Regional Office (DDRO) on the conversion process with its plans for its under 15 bed ICFs to Individual Residential Alternatives (IRAs). “We are converting both our ICF West home that serves six individuals and our Frankel

home that serves 12,” says Rothenstein. “Although there will be programmatic changes, the individuals being served will continue to receive the supports and services that best meet their needs,” says Rothenstein.

The conversion is already underway and began with a letter submitted to DDRO outlining Opengate’s intent. Opengate also submitted Certificate of Need applications to OPWDD to change the certifications of the ICFs to IRAs. Families that have children in these two homes have been notified of the changes and have been given an opportunity to meet with Opengate staff regarding the conversion process. Individuals residing in the ICFs will be processed through DDRO’s Front Door to assure that person centered planning, HCBS waiver enrollment, and Medicaid Service Coordination have been put in place.

To that end, each person will be able to choose a Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC) who will help him/her plan for individualized services. Planning will be directed by the individual and will include the ICF provider staff, the involved family members, advocates, other service providers and the MSC. For more information, contact Ira Rothenstein at (914) 277-5350; x1117 or irar@opengateinc.org.



Frankel House

Each month Opengate plans improvements, additions, or modifications to our infrastructure as well as purchases items for our individuals’ use, such as computers, greenhouse tools, etc.

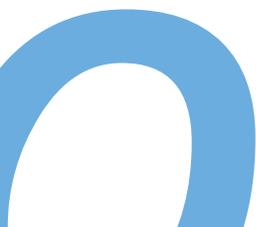
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Yes, we are Computer Savvy... ...and we need your help!



Opengate is seeking donations of tablet computers, either new or used, any brand. Our consumers who already own and use tablets continually improve their skill sets. We are looking for businesses, corporations or individuals who would like to help us offer tablets to those whose families are unable to purchase them.

"Tablets allow our staff to more efficiently assist clients with math skills, language skills, hand eye coordination and fine motor skills," says Randi Rios-Castro, Chief Operating Officer. "Staff can also assign tasks for individuals through apps, building a sense of independence and responsibility to those who complete them," she adds. "Plus, they can be just plain learning fun."

Small and easy to use, tablets are lightweight and have the capability to function as a mini computer, and have quickly become one of the most popular ways to access the internet. To donate a new or used tablet or funds to help Opengate purchase them for its consumers, contact Randi Rios-Castro at randir@opengate.inc. 🐼

Eagle Scout, continued from page 1

"My Eagle project was designed to provide increased opportunity for physical activity and enhance the residents' lives," said Chris. "Not only do the gardens provide them with a learning experience about how plants grow and where our food comes from, it offers a way for them to learn responsibility and achieve a sense of satisfaction and pride in their accomplishments by producing food they will eat."

According to Chief Operating Officer Randi Rios-Castro, residents begin growing vegetables from seed in the greenhouse and then transfer the plants outside. "They monitor the gardens regularly by watering and weeding and, when the vegetables are ready, they harvest." 🐼