

# Pipeline Quarterly

Published by the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities  
Volume 1, Issue 1

Fall 2007

Inaugural Issue



Director  
John L. Martin  
Welcomes You

As Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (ODMRDD), I welcome you to the inaugural issue of *Pipeline Quarterly*. When our regular twice-monthly *Pipeline* electronic newsletter debuted in February 2007, our goal was to provide a more frequent and consistent flow of information from us to you, and back again.

I believe we have been successful in moving toward that goal, and this new *Pipeline Quarterly* (PQ) publication is a natural progression. Published four times annually, it will highlight topics of interest in the MRDD arena, focus on people served, and reinforce the core concepts and general philosophy of this administration.

We also will bring you policy-related features with clear links to how those policies affect the lives of the people we serve. One of the more striking differences we hope you immediately notice in this news-magazine format is our focus on people and creative programs and services. We plan to maintain this focus through more frequent staff visits to your communities and through listening to what you tell us is important.

With your help, PQ will showcase a variety of unique people, places, and programs throughout Ohio's MRDD system. We look forward to hearing from you, and invite you to contact us via [feedback@odmrdd.state.oh.us](mailto:feedback@odmrdd.state.oh.us)

## Wright State Playwright Chris Mitchell Has Arrived



"So Stuart, what do you think of this dialogue?" Chris Mitchell (left) and Dr. Stuart McDowell collaborate in the Department of Theater Arts at Wright State University in Dayton.

In the theater world, you 'have arrived' when you have achieved success in your craft. Clearly then, Chris Mitchell has already arrived although his play, *Hard Court*, has not yet debuted on-stage.

According to Chris, he has been thinking about and writing *Hard Court* since high school. Now, nearly 11 years later, it has become a theatrical case study of the transition of the main character, Robert Reynolds, from able-bodied to physically challenged, and an examination of the social challenges that stem from that.

He smiles enthusiastically as he warms to the subject, and leans forward in his chair. "One of my goals is to define physical differences as *cultural differences*. It is unhealthy for a person in a wheelchair to deny their disability," he says. "In fact, cerebral palsy and other disabilities yield unique experiences that shape character no differently than does religion or gender. Such value should be recognized for what it is." *cont. on page 2 >*

### In this Issue of PQ

... Plays are written ... Books are discussed  
... Doors are opened ... Creativity is  
flourishing ... and much more.

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## Playwright *(continued from cover)*

Chris also is quick to point out that *Hard Court* is a dual-meaning title for the play, which deals with Robert's difficulties in courting a girl's attention, as well as dealing with issues on the basketball court since his accident. Chris says, "People in (wheel)chairs -- no one's speaking about this. I have my parents to thank for how I am able to do so much and have this point of view. It's a cultural thing more than a medical one. *Hard Court* specifically deals with dating."

A Political Science major, Chris has some interesting ideas on a broad range of subjects, including "The First Lady Standard" (see box below) and has developed an excellent working relationship with Dr. McDowell and other staff at Wright State's Theater Arts Dept.

"We applied for and got an Ohio Arts grant as well as some support from Wright State, and have been working together now for six years to complete this musical and get it produced," says Dr. McDowell. "A musical is very difficult to put together, and Chris has done all the hard work of writing the script and the lyrics, and knowing what's in his head, musically. Now we are composing, arranging and 'workshopping' the musical numbers and that's a lot of work."

The play is designed to be staged on a basketball court, and Chris says he has no preference whether or not the actors who play people with disabilities have a disability or not. He explains, "It's because one of the first things I learned when I took my *Intro to Theater* course here at Wright State -- an elective that got me back on track with



*Dr. Stuart McDowell, Chair of Wright State's Dept. of Theater Arts says, "I have learned so much from Chris! He is a very cool and amazing young man."*

this idea I had from high school -- was that people attending a theater production allow themselves the mandatory suspension of disbelief, so they can get into the play. So it's not a literal thing, and if the characters are acted well it will be believable."

Dr. McDowell notes, "For whatever reason, I have really connected with Chris, and I have the resources to help him get this project done. It's a wonderful opportunity for everyone involved to get this play produced and see it come to life." Chris' plan is to stage the show first at Wright State (hoping for 2008) and then tour area junior and senior high schools with the play. Then he will have arrived, again.

**" ... Disabilities yield unique experiences that shape character no differently than does religion or gender."**  
- Chris Mitchell

*For more information, contact Sherry Steinman at [sherry.steinman@dmr.state.oh.us](mailto:sherry.steinman@dmr.state.oh.us)*

### **Chris Mitchell's "First Lady Standard"**

When President Buchanan -- our only bachelor U. S. President -- had to attend official functions, he secured the company of a female relative to act in place of a First Lady, as a suitable social companion. This allowed for a comfort zone in social settings between himself and his constituents. Chris contends that the "First Lady Standard" also is used by people with disabilities to allow for smoother interpersonal relationships between themselves and people without disabilities. Chris adds that while this is useful, it is better for the person with the disability to proceed with an intellectual strategy about relationships while pursuing social integration. *Hard Court* carries his suggestion along these lines.

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## Everyone on the Same Page? Next Chapter Book Club

Hitting the road to Marion County in search of a good story, Pipeline Quarterly found a bunch of people reading in a coffee shop and getting pretty animated about the book, *Tom Sawyer*. It was



*"Get on the right page!" Sabrina guides a friend in the Marion County Next Chapter Book Club, as they read Tom Sawyer at Cafe Anzas. (at right, Jeffery)*

immediately clear that reading the book was an experience enjoyed differently depending on many variables. Level of reading skill, while one of those variables, was not the most important. What was? Well, it turned out that Marion County's *Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC)* was in its formative stage, and everyone was learning something new.

Five years ago in Columbus, *The Ohio State University Nisonger Center* spearheaded efforts to build a club to foster opportunities for people with disabilities to read and socialize with friends -- and because reading is basically the understanding of a story, it did not matter if everyone in the group could read, or not.

According to Jillian Ober, the NCBC Program Coordinator with the Nisonger Center who trained the Marion County group facilitators, "While the Book Club is about people with disabilities reading and learning to read, it is just as much about making friends, sharing ideas, and enjoying a fun community gathering place on a regular basis.



NCBC photos by Michael Schurch

*Patty has mastered the art of hanging out at the local coffee shop with a great deal of style. Participation in the community certainly agrees with her, and is a natural element of the Book Club.*

Currently there are more than 70 NCBC's nationwide, and even one in Germany! All this has grown from two Clubs in Columbus, started in 2002."

Derek Janson, Program Manager at the Marion County Board of MRDD and chief NCBC facilitator for the local group, notes that the Book Clubs generally meet weekly for an hour in bookstores or cafes to read aloud and discuss a book of their choosing. They read mostly adapted classics, but will consider any reasonable choice the group makes. "Plus, anyone can

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*Next Chapter Book Clubs meet in community settings such as bookstores and cafes.*

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## Next Chapter Book Club

(cont. from p. 3)

join the NCBC no matter what their reading level, and each group usually includes readers and non-readers," he says. "I have so many people coming up to me asking to be a part of the new Book Club, that I am considering only the most persistent for the first group!"

Jillian Ober notes, "Most Clubs have five to ten members, but I think six or seven is perfect, plus two facilitators. The training we provide is important because there are certain techniques to use that keep everyone interested and 'on the same page' most of the time. It's not easy!"

*For more information, contact Derek Janson at [djanson@marioncbmrdd.com](mailto:djanson@marioncbmrdd.com), or Jillian Ober at [ober.7@osu.edu](mailto:ober.7@osu.edu)*

To an observer of any NCBC group it is clear that the look, the feel, and the smell of a book is part of the fun of NCBC's. "We provide everyone their own copy of the same book," says Ober. "Books spark discussions and make you think about your life! What can be more exciting than that?" And that excitement, it turns out -- rather than the reading -- is the most important thing about the Next Chapter Book Clubs.

**" Books spark discussions and  
make you think about your life ... "**  
- Jillian Ober



## New Location Consolidates Functions, Accents Accessibility for Hamilton County Board of MRDD



***It's a great building, but the people in it are even better!***  
*The new consolidated office space has lots of other ways to enter the building besides the stairs you see here. Accessibility is quite good, as Brian Welty (right) will attest. He's shown here visiting with HCBMRDD Superintendent, Cheryl Phipps. She managed to injure her hand shortly before the Open House, but it is mending nicely.*



The new support center for The Hamilton County Board of MRDD hosted its Open House on Tuesday, July 17, 2007. The 1520 Madison Road location in Cincinnati (East Walnut Hills) houses administrative functions for the agency, supporting 18 other locations around Hamilton County. It also features a 'drop-in center,' complete with computers, that provides opportunities for individuals to socialize in a welcoming environment.

Cheryl Phipps, HCBMRDD Superintendent, notes, "This building is more centrally located (functions were previously located in Blue Ash) and accessible to the more than 5,600 individuals with disabilities and dozens of contracted community partners with whom we work. We are pleased to be part of the East Walnut Hills neighborhood. They have made us feel very welcome in the community."

In addition to the location and accessibility aspects of the new building, the consolidation of functions is an additional effort to fulfill a stipulation from the Board's Tax Levy Review Committee in 2004.

*For more information about this event or the agency, visit [www.hamiltonmrdd.org](http://www.hamiltonmrdd.org) or contact Jenny Dexter at 513-559-6649.*

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## New Provider to Open Doors in Belmont County

TOMORROW'S CORNER, LLC, has purchased 3.1 acres at the Fox Commerce Park in Richland Township and plans to construct a 12,000 sq. ft. building for its headquarters and service center, according to an announcement by Eva Lunder, director of the Belmont County Community Improvement Corp., Department of Development. *Tomorrow's Corner, will provide new adult day support services in Belmont County, and, according to Lunder, the project will create 21 new jobs. It is scheduled to open in January 2008.*

Lisa Kazmirski, a Belmont County resident and founder of the company, said Tomorrow's Corner will offer assessment, personal care, skill reinforcement and training in self-determination, as well as providing recreational and leisure opportunities for 125 individuals with developmental disabilities.

"I want to provide state-of-the-art personalized day services to people with with disabilities who are not best suited for working in the community or in sheltered workshops. I hope to expand services in the future to individuals needing adult day care who are currently traveling out of the county for care." Kazmirski said.

The company will create 21 full-time positions at the outset, and a total of 55 full-time employees after two expansion phases. The jobs are newly-created and not transferred positions. Salaries will range from \$7.25 per hour for entry-level positions

up to \$22 per hour for professional and senior-level positions. Employees will be offered health insurance benefits, paid training, and the required annual certification, as well as profit-sharing.

Although Tomorrow's Corner immediately will serve Belmont County clients, the company plans to expand regionally. Belmont County residents desiring adult day care services for their family members often need to utilize services only offered outside the county, or even outside the state. However, once Tomorrow's Corner opens in January 2008, Ohio's Medicaid reimbursement dollars will stay in Ohio and more importantly, in Belmont County.



**"The addition of another service provider in Belmont County is good news for people with developmental disabilities, and we are especially pleased about the opportunities Tomorrow's Corner will offer," said Belmont County Board (BCBDD) Superintendent, Monty Kerr. "People now will have another option as they exercise their right to choose who provides them with the supports they need."**

**He added, "We have known Lisa for many years and know she is committed to excellence. The services she intends to provide will certainly make a difference in people's lives."**

**– Monty Kerr, Superintendent, BCBDD**



*The information in this article was originally published in the Martin's Ferry Times Leader, July 4, 2007. The provision of Adult Day Services throughout Ohio is a subject Pipeline Quarterly will explore further in future issues.*

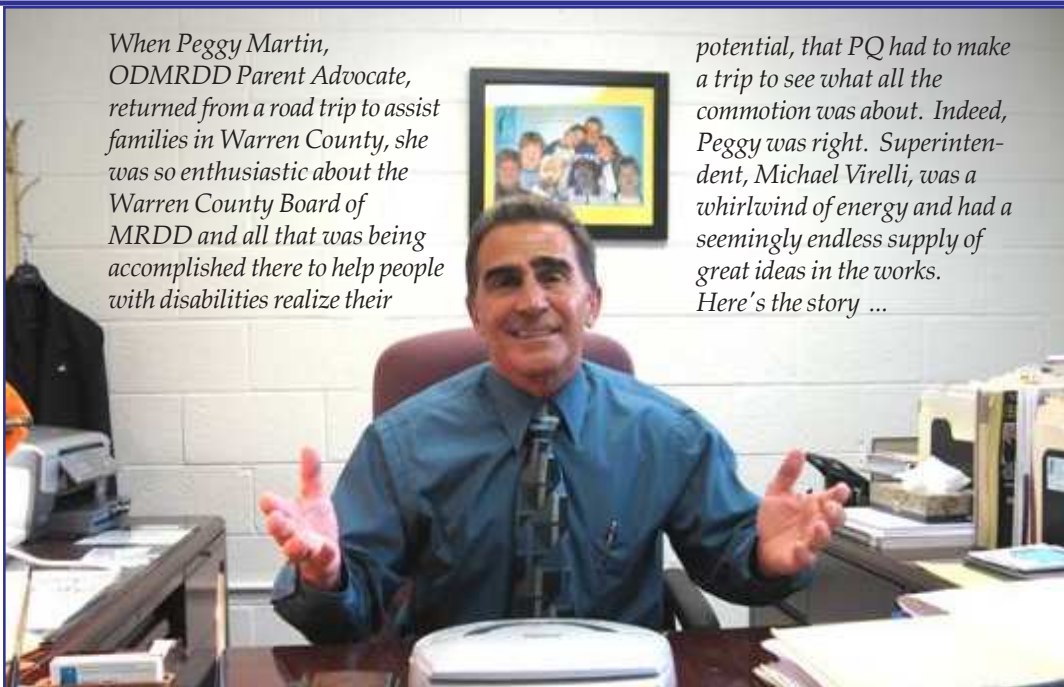
*For more information about Adult Day Services, see the ODMRDD website at <http://odmrdd.state.oh.us/adults/activities.htm>. For more information about the Belmont County Board of DD visit their website at <http://www.bcbdd.org>*

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Warren County Board of MRDD is



*When Peggy Martin, ODMRDD Parent Advocate, returned from a road trip to assist families in Warren County, she was so enthusiastic about the Warren County Board of MRDD and all that was being accomplished there to help people with disabilities realize their*

*potential, that PQ had to make a trip to see what all the commotion was about. Indeed, Peggy was right. Superintendent, Michael Virelli, was a whirlwind of energy and had a seemingly endless supply of great ideas in the works. Here's the story ...*

Thinking Outside the Box

## "It's All About the Team"

Superintendent Michael Virelli is in constant motion and moves with purpose through well-maintained facilities at the Warren County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (WCBMRDD) in Lebanon, OH. When he enters an area, program participants quickly smother his athletic frame with hugs, and he returns the affection with warm personal greetings and a handshake.

There's a kind of rock-star feel to his reception. "I believe you need to know the people you are working for — and they need to know you — if you want to build relationships and programs that are meaningful," Virelli states.

When he joined WCBMRDD seven years ago, the County Board had several issues which resulted in state and federal citations. Staff morale had been weakened by the Board's chaotic environment. Today, the organization is fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) and

recently was awarded the highest level of accreditation issued by the ODMRDD for meeting "Areas of Excellence" standards in Board operations.

### It's All about Creativity

Virelli credits his staff for the successful turnaround, but it is clear where the motivation comes from. "I always try to remind my employees that we are a team and we need to work hard for the people we serve. If our program participants aren't happy, then we shouldn't be happy. So I challenge my staff every day to think outside the box."

Joyce Ping did. The Coordinator of Early Intervention Services developed a home-like setting at a Board site for early intervention services and parent training. The modular home sits on a gym floor and was built to-scale to anticipate the needs of infants and toddlers.

"The purpose of our center-based program is to optimize the delivery of services to our early intervention participants and their respective

**" If our program participants aren't happy, then we shouldn't be happy. So I challenge my staff every day to think outside the box." -Michael Virelli**

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families. Our year-around program allows for a holistic approach to delivering services weekly to each child. In addition to offering the center-based program, the County Board offers home visits to any child determined to be medically fragile."



*The team of Ping and Virelli stand on the porch of the scale-model home built for services to children and their families.*

Virelli points to another example of creative thinking. As a new superintendent, he realized there was a county history of probating sex offenders with mental illness into the MRDD system. Now a lesser issue, the Board remains responsible for those who were previously probated, and for those who are legitimate MRDD offenders.

"These individuals had not fared well in the community," Virelli said. "So we designed a secure house and enclave to serve them." The board then developed some unique and effective programs based on a tiered reward system. The Board also contracts with a forensic psychologist to work with these individuals. "The staff have done a fabulous job establishing treatment programs to assist these individuals in controlling behaviors and making clinical progress. We are now able to provide support needed to protect the community and provide the care these individuals need," Virelli adds.

Contact Michael Virelli at [viremc@co.warren.oh.us](mailto:viremc@co.warren.oh.us) or visit WCBMRDD at <http://www.co.warren.oh.us/mrdd/>

**" I believe you need to know the people you are working for – and they need to know you – if you want to build relationships and programs that are meaningful." -Michael Virelli**

## It's All About Choices

WCBMRDD remains true to its mission of 'Supporting people with disabilities and their families in achieving what is important to them.' "It really is all about choices," said Virelli.

"We are providing services uniquely designed to enhance the lives of the people we serve and that meet the needs of our community."

If you think the Board's progress may be slowing, you are mistaken. Several projects are in the works that will keep pushing the envelope of creativity ...

**Sports Program ...** WCBMRDD is acquiring a 20,000 sq. ft. facility to house its Sports Program. It will be a venue for participants to learn how our national sports originated, and gain an understanding of how they should be played. The day program also will provide the opportunity for field trips and other connections with local and professional sports teams. In addition, the new facility will include a day habilitation unit for medically-fragile individuals.

**Animal Therapy ...** The WCBMRDD is developing a site to include an Animal Day Care Program that provides daily pet care services for county residents.

**Farming ...** The WCBMRDD will develop a seven-acre tract of land, some of which will provide a place for participants and families to plant gardens for personal use or for sale.

## It's All About Physics

The study of physics tells us that when an object is in motion, it possesses a quality called momentum, which means the object tends to keep moving unless acted upon by an outside force. Guided by an energetic and creative leader, WCBMRDD is moving fast and there are no signs of slowing.

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## News Briefs



### Utilitarian Art

Several of *United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Central Ohio's* participants and staff designed and painted 15 wooden benches for display at the recent Westerville Music and Arts Festival. The benches were displayed throughout the weekend and were a popular resting place for children and adults. All 15 benches were sold, with 50% of the profits benefiting programs and services offered by UCP of Central Ohio.

The project began with plain wooden benches donated by Craters and Freighters. At *UCP's Art Bridge Studio* most of the benches were created to look like colorful fish, while some were designed with specific themes in mind. The benches serve a variety of functions, from brightening up a child's playroom to gracing a flower garden. For more information, contact Gina Ginn at 614-279-0109, or visit the website at [www.ucpofcentralohio.org](http://www.ucpofcentralohio.org)



### Accessible Hotels

In a recent issue of *Angeline Newslines*, the newsletter of the *Wyandot County Board of MRDD*, we learned that *WhenWeTravel* has compiled a list of 37,000 accessible hotels from around the world. Go to [www.whenwetravel.com](http://www.whenwetravel.com), click 'hotel search', and then click on 'wheelchair-accessible hotels'. It is always good to be pro-active when traveling, especially when using a wheelchair, in order to not have any unexpected surprises in terms of mobility issues.

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