

The Arclight Online

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Welcome to the first edition of *The Arclight* online.

After decades in print, we have moved to the digital age—a positive change and a sign of the times—as are the stories at your fingertips. People of all abilities are involved in every aspect of community life. We are active, mobile, interested and interesting. Not long ago, we would have asked that you turn the pages of a print publication to learn what we have been doing and the direction in which we are headed. Today, we encourage you scroll, click and read.

—Carmine Marchionda

Hub Highlights

Small groups of individuals with similar interests begin and end each weekday at one of The Arc Rockland's community hubs situated in Congers, Orangetburg, Pearl River, Nyack and Suffern.

"The hubs serve as headquarters from which the groups branch out to engage in a range of activities and experiences throughout the County and surrounding communities," explains Director of Day Habilitation Jodi Taylor-Getz. This might include time spent volunteering at one of more than 100 not-for-profit organizations in Rockland and surrounding areas, visiting sites of educational or recreational interest, pursuing fitness classes at area gyms and Ys, working, taking music lessons or art classes or spending time on the river with the **Rockland Rowing Club** (www.RocklandRowing.org).

The opportunity for people to, quite literally, test the waters helps to foster inclusion. Since her introduction to the Rowing Club, Kieran Dunn has become an enthusiastic proponent of the sport. "My favorite part about rowing is working as a team," she says. "I like the feeling of going across the water together, appreciating nature. I never thought I'd be doing this. It's fun."

"The exposure to new experiences has had a positive impact on the people we support," says Ms. Taylor-Getz. "Because we have a presence within so many towns and villages, people have really gotten to know us. Being part of the broader community has given the people we support the confidence to try something new."

A case in point was a recent lunch at the **Fancy Buffet** in Haverstraw (www.fancybuffet.com). During one group's weekly planning meeting, someone suggested lunch at this Haverstraw restaurant. "Some of the other people were hesitant at first," says Ms. Taylor-Getz. "But they all agreed to give the restaurant a try, and they loved it. The fact that many ideas

for destinations come from the individuals is a clear sign of the success of our community hubs."

Vision Sports Club in Pearl River, (www.visionsportsclub.com) is home base for several of The Arc groups. A number of the participants at this hub have been friends since their high school days. In addition to other activities in Rockland, these men and women particularly enjoy fitness and nutrition classes run by Vision staff members. Members of the group take classes and regularly use the treadmills, bikes, weights and other exercise equipment at Vision.

The emphasis on community interaction throughout the day is a worthy goal, but it is not without challenges. Although most of the groups eat in restaurants on occasion, for the most part, "We bring lunches," says Team Leader Dorann Latarski. It is easier in the summer months, when parks and picnic grounds are open to the public. Finding a suitable indoor luncheon site where we can bring our lunches is more difficult in late autumn and winter. "The Blue Hill Office building has a beautiful cafeteria," notes Ms. Latarski. "Sometimes we eat lunch there. Following a stint of fitness walking at the RCC fieldhouse, we might eat lunch along with college students in the RCC café.

"One of the things we really do well is to put the ownership of what they will be doing during the week on the participants," comments Ms. Latarski. "Each group researches upcoming events and activities, and then, they work together to decide what they want to do and where they want to go. With the support of the staff, they build their own schedules and make their own choices. It's really neat, when one group finds something interesting to do and word spreads to another group."

Among the more unique destinations is the **Mitsuwa Marketplace, in Edgewater, New Jersey** (www.Mitsuwa.com). "This is a Japanese marketplace with a book shop, a gift shop, a grocery store and food court. It's right on the water with a view of the city," explains Ms. Latarski. "A staff member from The Arc found the place and introduced it to a group. Now other groups love going there. One individual tries a new food each time he goes back."

Volunteers at The ReStore operated by the **Bergen County Habitat for Humanity** (www.BergenRestore.org) help to ticket and shelve items.

Through a recommendation from **The Office for the Aging**, (Rocklandgov.com/departments/aging), a Rockland couple contacted The Arc to arrange for volunteer grocery shoppers from The Arc. The shoppers and the couple have built a warm and lasting relationship with benefits to all.

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necessitated a focus on practical matters, including money management and budgeting. "These skills are important when people want to purchase food or products," explains Ms. Latarski. "The application of practical skills occurs throughout the day."

Matthew Von Dollen and his ever-present companion Delilah, a Golden Retriever service dog, like the diversity of activities. "I like the people and my friends," says Mr. Von Dollen.

A more formal focus on education takes place at various sites which comprise the Successful Learning Center.

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"Says Ms. Latarski, "I think because there are more people with developmental disabilities out there, the general public has become more accepting."

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Nice job, guys!

They also help the SLC students use the college library, cafeteria or student center. At the conclusion of the SLC semester, students receive Certificates of Completion during awards ceremonies at each SLC site.

Says Tara Lynch of her SLC experience, "College classes are awesome, I like my college teachers. They make me laugh, and I like to see the college students."

Beginning in 2018, a unique program at Pace University added a new dimension to the SLC experience. Approximately 12 SLC students participate in a spring semester course offered through the Dyson Scholars in Residence Program on the University's Pleasantville campus. Dr. Jane Collins, Associate Professor in the department of English heads this initiative.

Pace students enrolled in the year-long Dyson Scholars Program live together in a

residence hall, attend seminars together and develop a community service project for the spring semester.

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The University students mentor the SLC students as they work side by side in the weekly Monday evening class. The 2018 class focused on poetry. The 2019 class utilizes improvisation and acting in the creation of short plays.

"The course has been an amazingly positive experience," says Dr. Collins. "There was

a point on a recent Monday night when I had organized everyone into groups and set them to their task. There were thirty people all together in the room and everybody was

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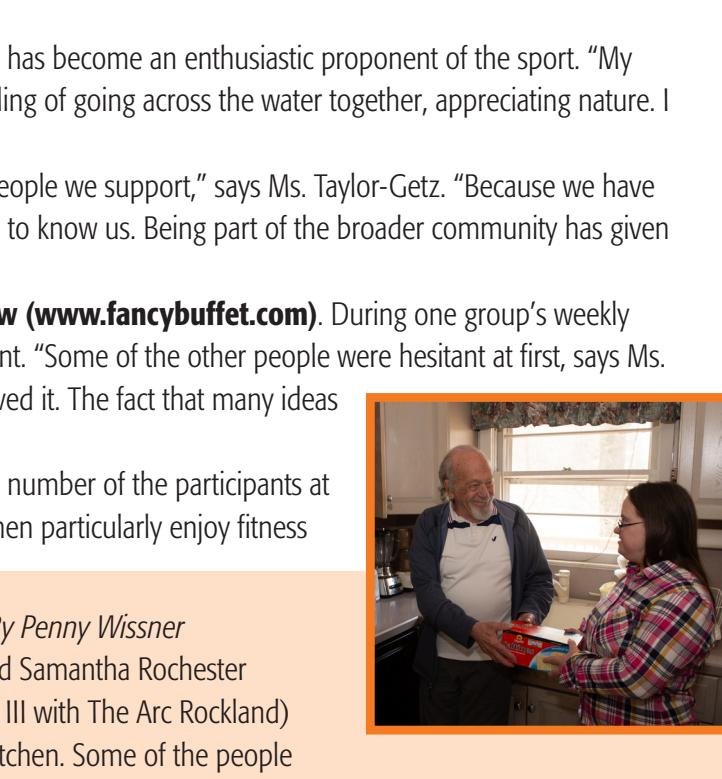
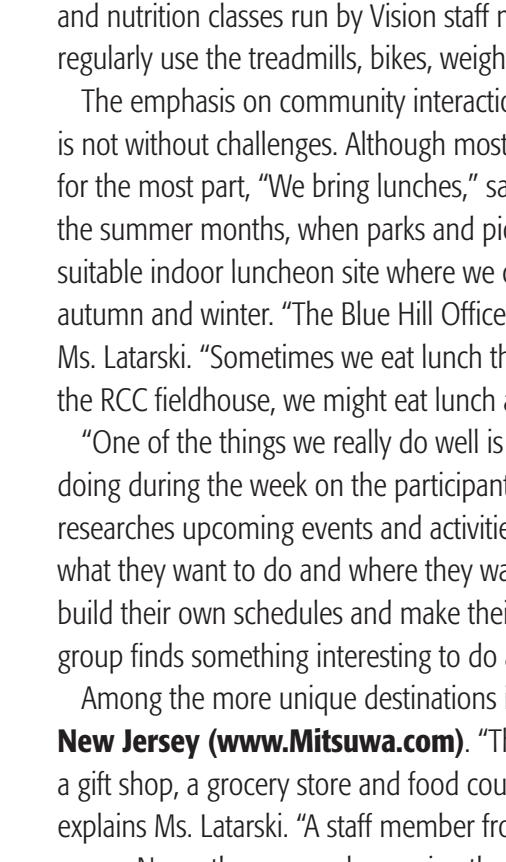
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