



County Hosts 7th Annual 'Think Jobs' Round Table Forum

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ThinkDIFFERENTLY conference recognizes employment of residents of all abilities, honors local businesses that participate in the effort

Poughkeepsie, NY ... Today, Dutchess County gathered dozens of local businesses, civic groups and individuals for the County's seventh annual "Think Jobs" round table discussion, which highlighted the advantages of local businesses hiring residents of all abilities and honored community partners which employ those of every ability. The event, which aligns with the County's popular "ThinkDIFFERENTLY" initiative, held in coordination with the County's Department of Community and Family Services, the Dutchess County Workforce Investment Board (DCWIB) and the Dutchess One Stop Career Center, was hosted at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park.

County Executive William F.X. O'Neil said, "At a time when so many businesses have open positions and are looking to hire, it is important to spread the message that many residents of all abilities are searching for employment and may be a great fit for these organizations. This round table event is an opportunity for businesses to learn about hiring neurodiverse employees and hear success stories from businesses who have already done so. We are thrilled to celebrate the success of businesses, and the employees they hire."

The event also includes the presentation of the annual "Think Jobs" awards. ThinkDIFFERENTLY and neurodiversity advocates Paul Austin of IBM and Mark McFadden of SUNY New Paltz presented the awards, recognizing the "ThinkDIFFERENTLY" spirit embodied by local employers and employees.

Those chosen to be inclusive and Think Differently were:

- **"Think Jobs" Business Award** recognizes local businesses which have opened their hiring practices to provide vocational training and/or employment opportunities for people of all abilities. The award was presented to Adams Fairacre Farms due to its standing commitment to hiring people of all abilities and giving them the opportunity to be successful employees. Adams has built relationships with agencies throughout the Hudson Valley to identify potential employees and enable them to succeed. One of these employees has worked for Adams for over 13 years and has grown to take on additional responsibilities over time. Adams has worked with numerous participants in the "School to Work" program and invested time and energy to find the right place for the employee to succeed and the business to benefit. Adams has also supported community events to include people of all abilities.
- **"Think Jobs" Spotlight Award** celebrates the success of residents with disabilities who embody the spirit of "ThinkDIFFERENTLY" and the successes of "Think Jobs" through their employment. This award was presented to four individuals following their participation in the "School to Work Program" and include:

o **Richard Fishwick** started working at Adams Fairacres Farm as a dishwasher and was promoted several times within Adams' kitchen, where he continues to work today. Richie is proud of his work at Adams, where he has not only continued to grow and advance as an employee, but also to build friendships and be a contributor to the community. Richie survived a battle with cancer while working at Adams and was praised by his manager for his courage and the example he set for everyone as he faced this challenge.

o **Tristen Truitt**, a Red Hook Central School District employee, has not just shown commitment and capability in her job but also her maturity and independence in securing a position. Kristen is a graduate of the "Think Ahead" program, a collaboration between Dutchess County Government and Dutchess Community College, which led to her current position. She was offered a position in food services, where she performs a variety of tasks preparing and serving food as part of the cafeteria staff. She has won praise and support from her management on her professionalism and diligence in her work.

o **Christina Gagliardo**, a Doyle Security Systems employee, secured her first position with MTM Pharmacy creating customized blister packs, but that company soon relocated and she lost her job. She did not get discouraged, quickly obtaining a new part-time position doing a similar job for Baby Vision. Soon after this, Christina decided to take another position with then-CIA Security and was invited to stay on when the company became Doyle Security, and she now works on customer data entry, regularly uploading and updating data in customer account files. Between both jobs, she works 40 hours per week and has blossomed, continuing to grow in her various work environments.

DCWIB Executive Director Dr. Louise McLoughlin led today's attendees in a roundtable discussion, which allowed for open dialogue between businesses, service providers and individuals with disabilities. Ms. McLoughlin and Mr. Austin discussed the creation of the Hudson Valley Neurodiverse Hub, a website expected to be online by year's end as a quality resource for both businesses open to hiring people with disabilities and those seeking employment.

The conference included speakers who offered attendees the different perspectives in hiring those of all abilities. Among the speakers included:

- **Kelly Caldwell** of Visions Humans Resources Services, who shared the Human Resources perspective when hiring individuals with disabilities and how it rarely differs from traditional hiring practices.
- **Dana Jones**, President and CEO of accessibility mobile application Accessadoor, who discussed reasonable accommodations in public spaces and how her app can help those with disabilities stay informed.
- **Paul Austin** gave the perspective of the neurodiverse job candidate, what these individuals can offer and ways to interpret neurodiverse individuals when interviewing for a position.
- **Frank Falatyn**, President of FALA Technology, discussed the benefits of hiring people of all abilities and the positive effects on businesses.

Established in 2015, the ThinkDIFFERENTLY initiative seeks to change the way individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities relate to individuals with disabilities.

Local businesses seeking more information about the County's "Think Jobs" efforts, including the benefits of hiring disabled individuals and other resources, can contact Tashena Dixon at the Dutchess One Stop Career Center at tashena@dutchessonestop.org or (845) 249-4653.



2023 Think Jobs "Spotlight Award" Recipients.
From left, Richard Fishwick of Adams, Red Hook School District Director of Food Service Larry Anthony and employee Tristen Truitt and Employee Christina Gagliardo, her mother Irene, and Bryan Marquardt from Doyle Security



2023 Think Jobs Business Award Winner
Adams Fairacre Farms representatives
HR Director Sarah MacKay and employee Richard Fishwick

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