



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Occupations Foundation, Inc. Celebrates the Outstanding Achievements of Individuals in Our Communities**

**September 9, 2009, ORANGE COUNTY, NY** – Occupations Foundation, Inc. is celebrating the outstanding achievements of individuals in our communities with a special brunch and awards ceremony on **Sunday, October 4, 2009**, at Anthony's Pier 9 in New Windsor, from 12 noon to 3 p.m. Among those being honored for outstanding achievements by the Occupations Foundation, Inc. are Harvey Rosenthal, Executive Director of New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc. and Donna Ponessa, Nurse Evaluator for Westchester Independent Living Center's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Program.

**Harvey Rosenthal** has over 35 years of experience working to provide or promote public mental health services and social policies that promote the recovery, rehabilitation and rights of people with psychiatric disabilities. For almost 20 years, he served in a variety of community mental health service settings, including inpatient and outpatient treatment, case management, residential, forensic, emergency and rehabilitation settings. He is a former President of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS) and, since 1993, has been its first Executive Director. In this role, Mr. Rosenthal has helped lead numerous successful advocacy coalitions in achieving the passage of Medicaid Buy-In legislation, the MTA Half-Fare Fairness Act, the Community Reinvestment Act, Timothy's Law, Mental Health Alternatives to Solitary Confinement legislation and Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council legislation, as well as increases or restorations of funding for numerous services and entitlements for New Yorkers with psychiatric and related disabilities. Mr. Rosenthal has also worked tirelessly to promote the expansion of recovery centered services, peer support and employment initiatives and to expand informed choice protections and open access to a broad range of mental health, health and a variety of public services. Mr. Rosenthal's interest in promoting mental health recovery is also personal, dating back to his own hospitalization at age 19.

**Donna Ponessa** has over 25 years in the nursing profession and has been a strong advocate for people with disabilities, working passionately to assist them in achieving a quality of life on their own terms. Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis as a junior in college, Ms. Ponessa has overcome many barriers in her personal and professional life and is a firm believer that disability is not a transgression and that those who have a disability don't have to spend the rest of their lives working to overcome it. Ms. Ponessa has served on the Governor's Committee on Accessible transportation, was awarded the Frank G. Masterson Public Service Award, received achievement awards from the Rockland Independent

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Living Center and the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. In 2003 she received the NYS Senate Achiever's Award, and in 2007, she was honored by the Independent Living Center with the Spirit of Independence Award. Currently working as a nurse evaluator for the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Waiver Program at Westchester Independent Living Center, Ms. Ponessa continues to motivate people with disabilities so they, like her, can't wait until morning to open their eyes, get out of bed and start a new day.

"I am delighted to serve for my fourth year as the Chairman of the Occupations Foundation's fundraising event. I am very excited about the celebration we are planning for such deserving honorees who have made outstanding achievements in their lives both through personal experience and in supporting and advocating for people with disabilities. Occupations, Inc. is an organization that I support and truly believe in." commented James W. Taylor, Jr., President of Taylor Recycling, who is the Brunch Chair of this fundraising effort. Graham M. Skea, Occupations Foundation board of trustees secretary and chairperson of Family Empowerment Council's board of directors is the event's honorary chairperson.

Presenting the awards are Orange County's Commissioner of Mental Health, Chris Ashman; and Hudson Valley Developmental Disabilities Services Office's Deputy Director of Support Services, Jacklyn E. Spring.

The funds raised through this special event enable the Foundation to further support Occupations Foundation's capital project for renovation plans for 21 and 23 Grand Street in the City of Newburgh. This capital project clearly supports the services which are essential to addressing the mental health and child welfare needs of the children, families and adults of this high need community.

Occupations Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization established to raise funds in support of the programs and services of Occupations, Inc. For more than 45 years, the Occupations, Inc., System of Services, a not-for-profit agency, has provided outpatient mental health services, case management, child welfare, emergency services, residential services, and employment opportunities to people with developmental disabilities and individuals recovering from mental illness. Its affiliate, Family Empowerment Council, Inc, provides services to people with disabilities, including service coordination and case management, mental health family support, early intervention, educational advocacy, consumer-directed personal care, residential habilitation and respite services. New Dynamics Corporation, a not-for-profit sister corporation of Occupations, Inc., is a leader in providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. All of Occupations, Inc.'s, services can be accessed 24-hours a day, seven-days-a-week, through one toll-free call to the Service Access Center at 1-888-750-2266.